

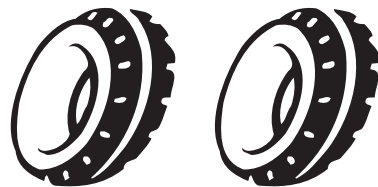
# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*Britt-Marie Was Here*

by Fredrik Backman

BOOK GROUP

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

*Reprinted from publisher.*

Fredrik Backman, Swedish author, journalist, and blogger, was voted Sweden's most successful author in 2013. Backman grew up in Helsingborg, studied comparative religion but dropped out and became a truck driver instead. When the free newspaper *Xtra* was launched in 2006, the owner reached out to Backman, then still a truck driver, to write for the paper. After a test article, he continued to write columns for *Xtra*.

In spring 2007, he began writing for *Moore Magazine* in Stockholm, a year-and-a-half later he began freelancing, and in 2012 he became a writer for the *Metro*. About his move to writing, Backman said...

*I write things. Before I did that I had a real job, but then I happened to come across some information saying there were people out there willing to pay people just to write things about other people, and I thought "surely this must be better than working." And it was, it really was. Not to mention the fact that I can sit down for a living now, which has been great for my major interest in cheese-eating.*  
(From his literary agent's website.)

Backman married in 2009 and became a father the following year. He blogged about preparations for his wedding in "The Wedding Blog" and about becoming a father on "Someone's Dad" blog. During the 2010 Winter Olympics, he wrote the Olympic blog for the Magazine Cafe website and has continued as a permanent blogger for the site.

In 2012, Backman debuted as an author, publishing two books on the same day: a novel, *A Man Called Ove* (U.S. release in 2014), and a work of nonfiction, *Things My Son Needs to Know About the World*. His second novel, *My Grandmother Sent Me to Tell You She's Sorry*, came out in 2013 (U.S. release in 2015).

## BOOK SUMMARY

Britt-Marie can't stand mess. A disorganized cutlery drawer ranks high on her list of unforgivable sins.

She is not one to judge others—no matter how ill-mannered, unkempt, or morally suspect they might be. It's just that sometimes people interpret her helpful suggestions as criticisms, which is certainly not her intention.

But hidden inside the socially awkward, fussy busybody is a woman who has more imagination, bigger dreams, and a warmer heart that anyone around her realizes.

When Britt-Marie walks out on her cheating husband and has to fend for herself in the miserable backwater town of Borg—of which the kindest thing one can say is that it has a road going through it—she finds work as the caretaker of a soon-to-be demolished recreation center.

The fastidious Britt-Marie soon finds herself being drawn into the daily doings of her fellow citizens, an odd assortment of miscreants, drunkards, layabouts. Most alarming of all, she's given the impossible task of leading the supremely untalented children's soccer team to victory. In this small town of misfits, can Britt-Marie find a place where she truly belongs?

Funny and moving, sweet and inspiring, *Britt-Marie Was Here* celebrates the importance of community and connection in a world that can feel isolating.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. How is Britt-Marie's character revealed by her interactions with the people in Borg? In what ways do Borg's citizens change Britt-Marie? Use specific examples to demonstrate your point.
2. Think about the children on Borg's soccer team: to what extent are they responsible for Britt-Marie's growth, and how? Does one particular child have greater influence on Britt-Marie than the others? If so, who, and why?
3. Describe the book's narrative style. How would you characterize it? How does it play into your perception of Britt-Marie, or influence your understanding of events?
4. "She has difficulties remembering the last time she said anything at all, until one day she left him without a word. Because of this it always feels like the whole thing was her fault" (page 151). Communication plays an important role in any relationship, and Britt-Marie's reflection on her own silence raises a curious point; to what extent do you think Britt-Marie contributed to the unraveling of her and Kent's relationship with her silence? How much blame, if any, can fall on the shoulders of only one person in these cases?
5. Britt-Marie is a curious combination of strength and assertiveness mixed with anxiety and shyness. How are these seemingly opposing qualities related to each other in Britt-Marie, like two sides of the same coin?
6. How have Britt-Marie's experiences as a girl and a young woman made her into the woman she is at the start of the novel? Did learning about her childhood change the way you felt about her as a character? Is there a larger message here about forming judgments of people we encounter without knowing their full story?
7. When we first meet her, Britt-Marie seems to be a fairly traditional, conservative person, yet in the course of the novel she is exposed to many issues and situations that previously didn't enter her life as Kent's wife. Consider her reaction to Ben's date with another boy, or her visit to a prison, or her encounter with a masked gunman. How do these moments affect Britt-Marie? What can they tell us about who she is and about the community she's joined in Borg?
8. Despite its often humorous tone, this book touches on complicated real-world situations and issues like the economic downturn, social class, the state of the modern family, and children's rights. What impact has the economic downturn had on Borg? Did the novel cause you to think differently about the power of individuals to have a positive impact on their communities?
9. Consider the role of soccer in this story. What does soccer represent to the citizens of Borg, particularly to the children? In a world marked by instability and uncertainty, why is this sport so important to them?
10. Throughout the book, the team that an individual supports plays a role in the way that person is perceived by others and often tells a lot about him or her. Can you think of analogous scenarios in your own life where you have made certain assumptions about a person because of something he or she is passionate about?

11. Why do you think Britt-Marie decides to call the girl from the unemployment office to tell her that one of the children on the soccer team hit what he was aiming for? What does this moment signify for Britt-Marie?
12. “What is love if it’s not loving our lovers even when they don’t deserve it” (page 283). Do you agree with this statement, or does love without limits tend to lead to a relationship like Britt-Marie and Kent’s at the start of the novel?
13. Why do you think that Kent decides to fight for Britt-Marie’s soccer pitch? Do you believe he’s really a changed man?
14. Why do you think Britt-Marie ultimately makes the choice she does at the end of the story? What was the deciding moment, the impetus for her choice?
15. Do you think Britt-Marie will ever come back to Borg?

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