

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*A Man Called Ove*  
by Fredrik Backman

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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

## **BOOK SUMMARY**

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In this bestselling and delightfully quirky debut novel from Sweden, a grumpy yet loveable man finds his solitary world turned on its head when a boisterous young family moves in next door.

Meet Ove. He's a curmudgeon—the kind of man who points at people he dislikes as if they were burglars caught outside his bedroom window. He has staunch principles, strict routines, and a short fuse. People call him "the bitter neighbor from hell." But must Ove be bitter just because he doesn't walk around with a smile plastered to his face all the time?

Behind the cranky exterior there is a story and a sadness. So when one November morning a chatty young couple with two chatty young daughters move in next door and accidentally flatten Ove's mailbox, it is the lead-in to a comical and heartwarming tale of unkempt cats, unexpected friendship, and the ancient art of backing up a U-Haul. All of which will change one cranky old man and a local residents' association to their very foundations.

A feel-good story in the spirit of *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* and *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*, Fredrik Backman's novel about the angry old man next door is a thoughtful and charming exploration of the profound impact one life has on countless others.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the opening scene, in which Ove attempts to purchase a computer, succinctly express the main points of Ove's ongoing battle with the stupidities of the modern world?
2. Ove loves things that have a purpose, that are useful. How does this worldview fail him when he believes himself to be useless? How is he convinced that he can still be useful?
3. As readers, we get to know Ove slowly, with his past only being revealed piece by piece. What surprised you about Ove's past? Why do you think the author revealed Ove's past the way that he did?
4. We all know our own grumpy old men. How do Ove's core values lead him to appear as such a cranky old coot, when he is in fact nothing of the sort? Which of these values do you agree or disagree with?
5. Although Ove has some major "disagreements" with the way the world turned out, there are some undeniable advantages to the modernization he finds so hollow. How do these advantages improve Ove's life, even if he can't admit it?
6. Parvaneh's perspective on life, as radically different from Ove's as it is, eventually succeeds in breaking Ove out of his shell, even if she can't change his feelings about Saabs. How does her brash, extroverted attitude manage to somehow be both rude and helpful?
7. Ove strives to be "as little unlike his father as possible." Although this emulation provides much of the strength that helps Ove persevere through a difficult life, it also has some disadvantages. What are some of the ways that Ove grows into a new way of thinking over the course of the book?
8. Ove is a believer in the value of routine—how can following a routine be both comforting and stultifying? How can we balance routine and spontaneity? Should we? Or is there sense in eating sausage and potatoes your whole life?
9. The truism "it takes a village to raise a child" has some resonance with *A Man Called Ove*. How does the eclectic cast of posers, suits, deadbeats, and teens each help Ove in their own way?
10. Although we all identify with Ove to some extent, especially by the end of the story, we certainly also have our differences with him. Which of the supporting cast (Parvaneh, Jimmy, the Lanky One, Anita) did you find yourself identifying with most?
11. What did you make of Ove's ongoing battle with the bureaucracies that persist in getting in his way? Is Ove's true fight with the various ruling bodies, or are they stand-ins, scapegoats, for something else?
12. On page 113, after a younger Ove punches Tom, the author reflects: "A time like that comes for all men, when they choose what sort of men they want to be." Do you agree with this sentiment, especially in this context? How does the book deal with varying ideas of masculinity?
13. On page 246, the author muses that when people don't share sorrow, it can drive them apart. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

14. What do you think of Ove's relationship with the mangy cat he adopts? What does the cat allow him to express that he couldn't otherwise say?
15. On Ove and Sonja's trip to Spain, Ove spends his time helping the locals and fixing things. How does Ove the "hero" compare and contrast to his behavior in the rest of the book? Is that Ove's true personality?
16. Ove and Sonja's love story is one of the most affecting, tender parts of the book. What is the key to their romance? Why do they fit so well together?
17. Saab? Volvo? BMW? Scania?

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