



MEREDITH RUSSO

Bestselling author of *If I Was Your Girl*

BIRTHDAY

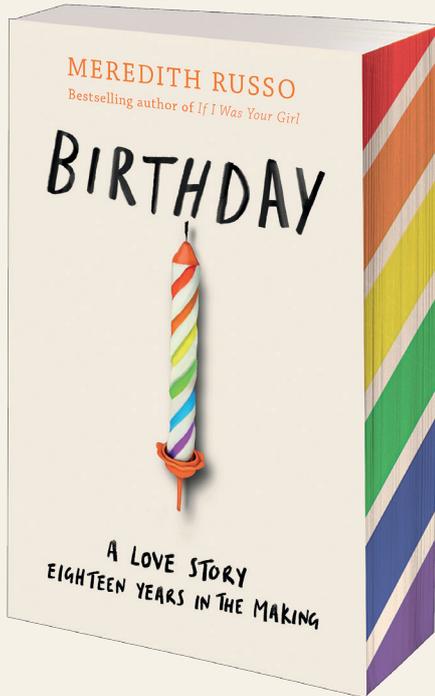


BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION PACK

BIRTHDAY



MEREDITH RUSSO



MEET ERIC AND MORGAN

Born on the same day, at the same time, in the same place. They've always shared this one day together, but as they grow up they begin to grow apart. Everyone expects Eric to get a football scholarship, but no one knows he's having second thoughts. Former quarterback Morgan feels utterly alone, as she wrestles with the difficult choice to live as her true self. Both of them are struggling to be the person they know they are. Who better to help than your best friend?

PRAISE FOR BIRTHDAY

"An emotional, winning touchdown."

Kirkus Reviews

"I couldn't put this book down, I fell so in love with Eric and Morgan. Birthday broke my heart and made me tear up, but it was also so triumphant. This book will save lives."

Camryn Garrett, author of Full Disclosure

"There is so much hope and light and love here"

Rachael, Waterstones Bookseller

"Birthday is a luminous and profoundly moving coming-of-age story of love, family, friendship, destiny, and the struggle to live as one's truest self. It will break your heart, piece it back together even stronger, and do it again and again until the last page."

Jeff Zentner, author of The Serpent King

MEET MEREDITH RUSSO



Author photo © Anthony Travis



Meredith Russo is a bestselling, award-winning YA author writing from her own experience growing up as a transgender teenager in a Southern, conservative neighbourhood in Tennessee. With few role models or inclusive places to go to for help, Meredith suppressed her own feelings and continued to live as a man well into adulthood, until 2013 when she started living as her true self and never looked back. She hopes *Birthday* will help guide young people in similar situations, and will create a safe and inclusive space for everyone who reads it. Meredith's heart-warming debut, *If I Was Your Girl*, won the Stonewall Book Award in 2017 and has sold over 30,000 copies in the UK!

"A WONDERFUL, WARM HEARTED NOVEL ABOUT REALISING WHO YOU REALLY ARE AND KNOWING YOU DESERVE TO BE LOVED FOR IT"

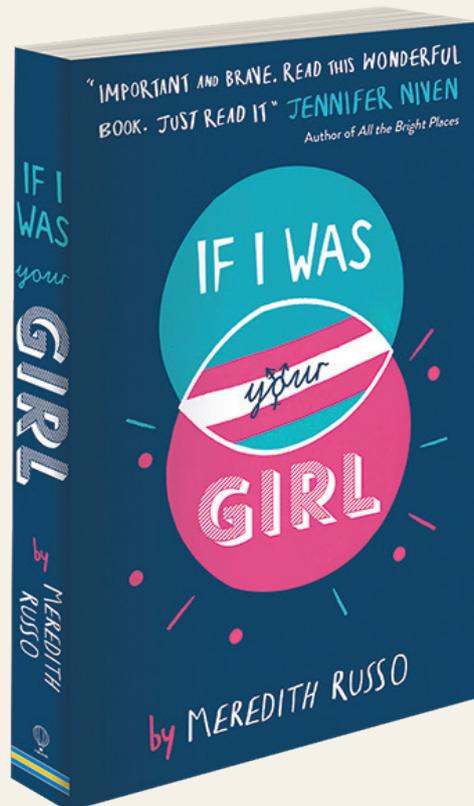
Inis Reading Guide

"THIS BOOK WILL CHANGE MINDS AND OPEN HEARTS"

Nina Lacour, author of *Everything Leads to You*

"MEREDITH RUSSO'S DEBUT IS POIGNANT AND RARE... THE TYPE OF BOOK YOU READ AND WANT TO IMMEDIATELY SHARE, BECAUSE ITS TOO IMPORTANT TO KEEP TO YOURSELF"

Julie Murphy, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Dumplin'*



"REAL AND RAW AND LAYERED AND WONDERFUL"

Alex Gino, author of *George*

"DEEPLY ELECTRICALLY INSPIRING"

Jennifer Niven, author of *All the Bright Places*

"A COMING-OF-AGE WITH REAL WORLD GRAVITAS AND A LOVE STORY WITH HEART. WILL NOT ONLY KEEP READERS HOOKED, IT WILL MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER, MORE EMPATHETIC PLACE"

Adi Alsaid, author of *Let's Get Lost*

"POWERFUL AND POIGNANT"

Zoe Sugg (Zoella)

"AN ILLUMINATING DEBUT GUIDED BY HOPE AND OVERWHELMING KINDNESS"

Publishers Weekly

A Q&A WITH MEREDITH RUSSO



WHEN DID YOU HAVE YOUR FIRST FRANK CONVERSATION ABOUT BEING TRANSGENDER?

“The first time I ever talked to my parents about transgender issues, which was the first time I’d ever seriously discussed it with anyone, they reacted with confusion and trepidation. But now that I’m an adult and they have watched me and researched trans issues on their own, my family bursts with love and support. The thing is, they’re the same people now as they were then, so I can’t help imagining: what if seventeen years ago, we’d all had access to the community resources and books we have now? Even my two books could make a serious difference! With luck, they’ll do just that for young trans people and their families now.”

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO WRITE ERIC AND MORGAN’S STORY?

“My hope is that readers will understand that Morgan loves Eric the way a girl loves a boy, and Eric loves Morgan the way a boy loves a girl. With any luck they’ll also learn that love is so wonderful and important that people who find it should be considered blessed, and other people’s prejudices don’t matter.”

HOW CAN WE HAVE MORE POSITIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE ISSUES RAISED IN *BIRTHDAY*?

“I think the most important thing about these conversations is that we need to have them openly, honestly, and gently with one another where young people can see and hear. All it would have taken was exposure to a trans role model or to have a trusted adult mention in passing that being transgender was okay and it would have made a difference in my life.”

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG TRANS READERS?

“Do your best not to have these conversations with random people online. Do your best not to have these conversations with complete strangers. Do your best not to fall back on simple dogmatic expressions like, ‘trans people are the gender we say we are!’ Expose your humanity. Remind those who love you that you’re still a person who experiences loneliness, nicks their finger while chopping veggies, and just in general is human. Show people your full, vulnerable humanity and if they aren’t complete garbage then, in my experience, they’ll have a hard time ignoring you.”



DISCUSSION NOTES

Birthday opens with Morgan and Eric at the water park, playing a game to see how long they can each hold their breath. This is also the first moment Morgan decides to tell Eric about her identity. What significance might the water park and holding your breath have in Morgan's journey to coming out of the closet? Why start here?



We have a window into Morgan's and Eric's minds and how incredibly close their friendship is. In what ways do we feel this closeness and how their relationship has always been more than just a friendship?



Early on, both Morgan and Eric wrestle with the possibility they might be gay. How are gender and sexuality different? Discuss how over the course of the novel their notions of gender and sexuality evolve as two very separate parts of an individual's identity.



Early in the book, Peyton uses slurs and targets both Morgan and Eric for their relationship and identities. However, towards the end we see a change in his character. Discuss the underlying emotions and environment that caused him to lash out. Can a person really change and redeem themselves?



In Morgan's mom's first tape to Morgan, she says, "You were such a wonderful child." How do the recurring birthday notes help Morgan see herself for who she truly is? What role do the parents in the story play in the development of Morgan's identity, insecurities and final confidence?





Football plays a key role throughout the story, whether it concerns Morgan's relationship with her dad, her relationship with Eric, or her relationship with herself.

Why is football so important in all of these instances? How does football serve as a symbol of gender and tradition when Morgan is growing and breaking out of stereotypes?



When Eric kisses Morgan, she thinks, "This is how a kiss is supposed to make you feel." Jasmine kisses Morgan the same night that Eric kisses Morgan. Discuss the difference between these two moments and how each one uncovers something new about Morgan and Eric and how they relate to each other.



After Morgan puts make-up on, she thinks, "And there she is." Talk about this statement. What about this moment is so significant to Morgan? How is finally seeing who she is reflected in the mirror both the climax of her life thus far and what spurs her to spiral into one of her darker moments?



When Eric cuts his hair, Susan says, "You look so much better." What role does Susan play in Eric's character development? In what ways are Susan and Morgan different? How do these differences make Morgan a better match for Eric?



"My body is a machine, and I'm in control." Discuss the intense turnaround we see in Morgan's personality and behaviour. How does this mirror the anger and violence we originally saw in Peyton? Why does Morgan want her body to be a machine? Can we ever really be totally in control? Discuss the difference between internal and external validation and what role these two things play in Morgan's life when she joins the football team.





At different times throughout the book, both Morgan and Eric refer to Morgan as “sick” or “wrong”. What do you think of this? How is Morgan’s “sickness” more representative of her refusal to be who she is rather than her underlying identity being inherently wrong?



Eric always has a sixth sense when it comes to Morgan, and he gets there just in time to save Morgan from committing suicide. Where do you think this sense comes from?



We revisit both characters on their birthday, and the novel is titled *Birthday*. How is this an important symbol of their friendship, love, and coming of age?



In the end, it’s not just Morgan who finally gets to be herself. How do Eric’s and Morgan’s journeys to find their authentic selves mimic each other? How do they both find peace and learn to accept all the complexities of their own identities? What can we learn from them about ourselves?



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#BirthdayBook



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BIRTHDAY



BOOK CLUB EVENT

Date:.....

Time:.....