

## **Me Before You by Jojo Moyes**

### **Discussion Questions from the Tosa (Wisconsin) Book Lovers' Club**

1. From the title of the book, "Me Before You," who in this story is the "me" and who is the "you?" Does it change at various times of the story? Is this a sign of selfishness or selflessness?
2. Why was Lou able to break through to Will when no one else could? What attracted Will to Lou? When did you realize Will was falling for Lou?
3. If you were in Will's situation, would you make the choices he made at the end of the story? Were you surprised by his decision?
4. Discuss how Lou's incident in the Castle maze shaped her life and compare this to how Will's accident shaped his life. Discuss how each of them were able to help the other overcome their fears.
5. Discuss the reaction of Lou's mother, Josie, to Lou's decision to go to Switzerland. Do you feel she was justified in her reaction?
6. Mrs. Traynor is often depicted as cold, intimidating, and judgmental. Why does she portray herself this way to Lou and many others?
7. What do you think of Will's dad, Mr. Traynor? After hearing his side of the story, did your opinion of him change?
8. The story at the beginning is told from Lou's perspective and then there are a few chapters told from the perspective of other characters in the book, eg. Camilla, Treena, Nathan, and Mr. Traynor. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Did it help to understand the characters' perspectives better by changing the narration?
9. Discuss Lou's birthday party celebration at her parents' house. What did you think of Patrick's reaction to Will and Lou's relationship?
10. If Lou had never worked for the Traynors, where would her and Patrick's relationship have gone? Do you think he would have asked her to move in with him if he hadn't felt threatened by Will?
11. Discuss Lou and Treena's relationship and compare this to Will and his sister, Georgina.
12. What did you think of Lou's plan to change Will's mind? Did you think she would be successful?

## Jo Jo Moyes Biography

Jojo Moyes was born in 1969 and grew up in London. After a varied career including stints as a minicab controller, typer of braille statements for blind people for NatWest, and brochure writer for Club 18-30, she did a degree at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, London University. In 1992, she won a bursary financed by *The Independent* newspaper to attend the postgraduate newspaper journalism course at City University.

Jojo worked as a journalist for ten years, including a year at South China Morning Post in Hong Kong, and nine at *The Independent* where she worked variously as News Reporter, Assistant News Editor and Arts and Media Correspondent.

Jojo has been a full time novelist since 2002, when her first book, *Sheltering Rain* was published. Since then she has written a further eleven novels, all of which have been widely critically acclaimed.

Jojo has won the Romantic Novelist's Award twice, and *Me Before You* has been nominated for Book of the Year at the UK Galaxy Book Awards. *Me Before You* has since gone on to sell over 8 million copies worldwide.

The film adaptation of *Me Before You* starring Sam Claflin (The Hunger Games) and Emilia Clarke (Game of Thrones) was released in June 2016 and was a huge box-office success. The screenplay was written by Jojo.

Jojo lives (and writes!) on a farm in Essex, England with her husband, journalist Charles Arthur, and their three children.



## Jo Jo Moyes' Labor of Love

By Alexandra Wolfe

*Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 2016

Writer Jojo Moyes thinks that writing romantic fiction is becoming increasingly difficult. As the author of best-sellers including “Me Before You” and “One Plus One,” she doesn’t mean that it’s hard commercially. The problem, she finds, is that there aren’t enough obstacles to modern love. “There’s nothing holding you in a relationship where you might not be happy,” she says. “You have to introduce other moral complexities.”

That idea informed the plot of “Me Before You,” her 2012 novel about a young woman in love with a man who wants to die by assisted suicide after he is paralyzed in a motorcycle accident. Ms. Moyes, 46, also wrote the screenplay for the film version, which came out last month, starring Emilia Clarke (Daenerys Targaryen in “Game of Thrones”) and Sam Claflin (Finnick Odair in “The Hunger Games” movies). The film’s world-wide box office has brought in nearly \$160 million so far.

The movie has been criticized for promoting assisted suicide, but Ms. Moyes says that she doesn’t come down on either side of the debate. She just hopes that the story will prompt more discussion about the topic.

She says that she gets most of the ideas for her books—12 novels and a collection of short stories, coming out this fall—from news events. A story about a paralyzed man spurred her to come up with the idea for “Me Before You.” “The Girl You Left Behind” (2014) centers around the ownership of a portrait that may have been taken by German soldiers during World War I. It is based on the kind of restitution cases she once covered as an arts journalist for the Independent in Britain.

Born in London, the daughter of a painter and the owner of an art-storage facility, Ms. Moyes left school at age 17 to work odd jobs, including running the radio at a minicab company and typing text in Braille for blind people. After college, she joined the Independent as a reporter. She wrote her first novel, “Sheltering Rain,” in 2002 and subsequently left journalism to concentrate on fiction.

When coming up with her characters, Ms. Moyes spends anywhere from a few weeks to a few months researching their backgrounds. Before she wrote “The Ship of Brides” (2005), about a group of women from Australia who travel by aircraft carrier to join their servicemen spouses in Britain after World War II, she visited a real aircraft carrier to pick up military lingo.

“Nobody, as far as I know, is interested in human beings who get it right all the time,” she says. “It’s about what goes on psychologically...and about the way that we can be flawed human beings and yet still be capable of something utterly redemptive.”

Ms. Moyes tries to avoid creating characters that fit into any standard trope—as in “Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome who is going to come by and make everything OK,” she explains. “I think the thing that interests me is not men making everything OK, but the man who’s equally complex and somehow produces a better version of you.” When you fall in love, she thinks, “you suddenly feel like you’re the best possible version of yourself and that this is what this person sees in you.”

Filling out those personalities isn’t easy. “The times I’ve tripped up is when I don’t know enough about my characters, and you put them together, and it’s like a really disappointing blind date,” she says. “It’s always my own fault for not doing enough homework.”

Part of that process involves what she calls a “kick the dog” test, in which she imagines what a character might do if he or she saw someone kicking a dog. “Would they kick the dog too? Would they scream and run away?” she asks. “That test becomes a very useful moral indicator.”

She worries about creating something new in these days of entertainment overload. “In Victorian times or at the turn of the last century, we would be exposed to maybe two or three narratives a week,” such as a play or an installment of fiction in a newspaper. Now, she says, “the challenge to a novelist is to find something fresh for an audience that has become basically inured to narrative.”

When she isn’t writing, Ms. Moyes spends time with her husband and three children at their farm in Essex. She wakes up at 6 a.m., walks the dog and works with the horses before heading to her office for a few hours.

Next, Ms. Moyes plans to write her third and final book featuring Louisa Clark, the heroine of "Me Before You," and to finish a screenplay based on "One Plus One," her 2014 novel about a housekeeper's road trip with the tech millionaire whose home she cleans.