

Everything You Want Me to Be

Mindy Mejia

A Reading Group Guide

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. Mindy Mejia grew up in Minnesota and knows its landscape well. How do her descriptions of the natural world and the change of seasons reflect the internal states of the characters?
2. Although the “curse of *Macbeth*” didn’t kill Hattie, as her classmate suggests early on, the play’s themes, such as the price of unchecked ambition and the difference between appearance and reality, do run throughout Mindy Mejia’s novel. How do the play’s themes resonate in the book?
3. *Macbeth* isn’t the only famous work woven into *Everything You Want Me to Be*. Hattie and Peter originally bond over *Jane Eyre*, which is similarly focused on hidden identities, deception, and unconventional women. How is Hattie similar to Jane? Do you think she has anything in common with Bertha Mason?
4. In what ways does Hattie move from an affinity with Jane at the beginning of the book to an affinity with Lady Macbeth at the end?
5. One of the book’s themes is identity and self-actualization. Compare and contrast Hattie and Mary in terms of the evolution of their identities and ambitions.
6. A taboo is something that is banned for reasons of morality or taste, or that which constitutes an unacceptable level of risk. One of the most significant relationships in the book is a taboo relationship. Discuss the typical reasons this type of relationship is considered transgressive and whether those reasons hold true here.
7. Hattie thinks of herself as more mature and sophisticated than her peers (and most adults in her hometown), but when and how is her naiveté revealed?
8. How is obsession portrayed throughout the novel? In particular, discuss the obsessions of the three narrators, Hattie, Peter, and Del.
9. Our three main characters each hold a certain kind of power, whether formally recognized, such as Del’s job, or simply understood, like Hattie’s popularity. Analyze what types of power each of them wields and where the power comes from. How do they use their power and influence in positive ways? In negative ways?
10. Describe each member of the Hoffman family. How are they similar? In what ways do their personalities diverge? How have Hattie’s conflicting personas, the good daughter and the rebel, been shaped by her family?
11. Discuss Mary and Peter’s relationship. How have their personalities, and not just their circumstances, led them to this rupture in their marriage?
12. Toward the end of the novel, Del meditates on the justice of Hattie’s case. “There was no time to think it through. No time to wonder about the morality of a man’s actions, whether he owed

more to a friend or to the law and the country that depended on that law, no time to sift through the dozens of questions that would haunt me in the middle of the night for years to come . . . feeling like I had no right to wear a badge, that I had failed the institution I'd given my life to and not even knowing what that meant.” (321.) What roles do loyalty and duty play in *Everything You Want Me to Be*? How do they positively and negatively affect the characters?

13. If Hattie hadn't been killed, what do you think her future would have been?

14. There are several suspects in Hattie's murder, with a significant twist at the end. Were you shocked by who actually killed her and how it happened?

15. There are many sacrifices made in the name of love, whether familial love, romantic love, or love for an idea or goal. Which of the sacrifices do you think are truly made in the spirit of love, and which do the characters simply *think* are made in its name? Of the latter, what do you think the real motivating force is?

16. When Peter asks Hattie why she's dating Tommy, she tells him it's "just acting" (173). He recounts, "I took a step closer to myself, compelling beyond reason toward this girl who kept shedding masks like a matryoshka doll, each one more audacious than the last, a psychological striptease that racked me with the need to tear her apart until I found out who or what she was inside" (173). While most teenagers' personalities fluctuate frequently, Hattie's personas are more extreme, and certainly more destructive. Consider the title: did Hattie live up to its promise? Do you think anyone fully knew Hattie?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Consider watching a live or filmed production of *Macbeth* with your book club. Discuss what parallels you see between the book's main characters and the play's. How does your viewing of the play enrich your understanding of the novel?

2. Read another mystery set in the Midwest, such as William Kent Krueger's *Iron Lake*, and discuss how the personality of the Midwest is depicted in these novels. What about the people, landscape, and traditions seem to most intrigue Mindy Mejia and the other author who you've chosen?

3. To learn more about Mindy Mejia, read more about her other writings, and connect with her online, visit her official website at mindymejia.com.