

Girlhood

Melissa Febos

The following questions are intended to enhance your discussion of Melissa Febos's *Girlhood*.

About This Book

A fierce and breathtaking set of meditations on female sexuality for the #MeToo generation.

In her dazzling new collection, Melissa Febos captures the ordeals, achievements, and setbacks women face from girlhood into adulthood. Febos was eleven when her body began to change, and almost overnight, the way people spoke to, looked at, and treated her changed with it. As she grew, she defined herself based on these perceptions and by the romantic relationships she threw herself into headlong.

A quarter century later, in her midthirties, Febos decided to confront and change some of the behaviors and beliefs that she'd been carrying since adolescence—about the female body, what love was, and what it meant to care for herself. Her rise to self-revelation paralleled the country's, as the #MeToo movement began the process of reckoning with what it means to grow up female in a patriarchal culture.

In visceral, fearless essays that combine memoir, lyricism, investigative reporting, and scholarship, Febos draws a portrait of the forces that shaped her, and of an America where women are rarely free to define themselves. *Girlhood* is an anthem for women, a powerful exploration of the forces that seek to confine them, and a searing study of the transitions into and away from girlhood on a lifelong journey of discovery.

For discussion

1. *Girlhood*'s prologue is in the form of a list. What else is different about it? How does this unconventional prologue set up our expectations for what the collection will be?
2. Describe what was happening between Alex and Febos in "Kettle Holes." How did it make you feel? Is this experience familiar to you?
3. Because Febos's body developed before her peers', she became a target of male advances. Why was this both powerful and dangerous?
4. In Febos's interview with women who went through the same experience, what did she learn? How does this frame her own experience?
5. Why did the young Febos have such a tortured relationship with her body as she hit puberty? Why did girls her age treat Febos differently when they ostensibly wanted what Febos had?
6. What, according to Febos, are "events"? Why does she call them thus?
7. In "Wild America," Febos writes about her relationship with her hands and how it changed. What made her realize the power and beauty of her hands?

8. In “Intrusions,” Febos confronts her own Peeping Tom. How did the man react? What can we conclude about this reaction?
9. The same essay also recounts various pieces of pop culture that figure a woman falling in love with her stalker. Why is this trope harmful?
10. What kind of relationship can we surmise Febos has with her mother, after reading “Thesmophoria”? What does this piece suggest about the relationship between girlhood and motherhood?
11. How did Febos finally tell her mother about her life? Why didn’t she feel like she could share things with her mother?
12. What is the main issue that Febos tackles in “Thank You for Taking Care of Yourself”? What are some of the ways that she approaches the issue?
13. What, in Febos scholarship and her essay, is lacking in the current conversation about consent?
14. The final essay in *Girlhood* deals with two separate trips to France. Aside from geographic location, what else do these trips have in common? How do these two events strengthen the argument of the essay?
15. Febos’s essay collection spans her childhood up to her thirties, yet it is titled *Girlhood*. Why is this so?

Books similar to *Girlhood*

1. Amia Srinivasan—*The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*
2. Rebecca Solnit—*Recollections of My Nonexistence*
3. T Kira Madden—*Long Live the Tribe of Fatherless Girls*
4. Rafia Zakaria—*Against White Feminism: Notes on Disruption*