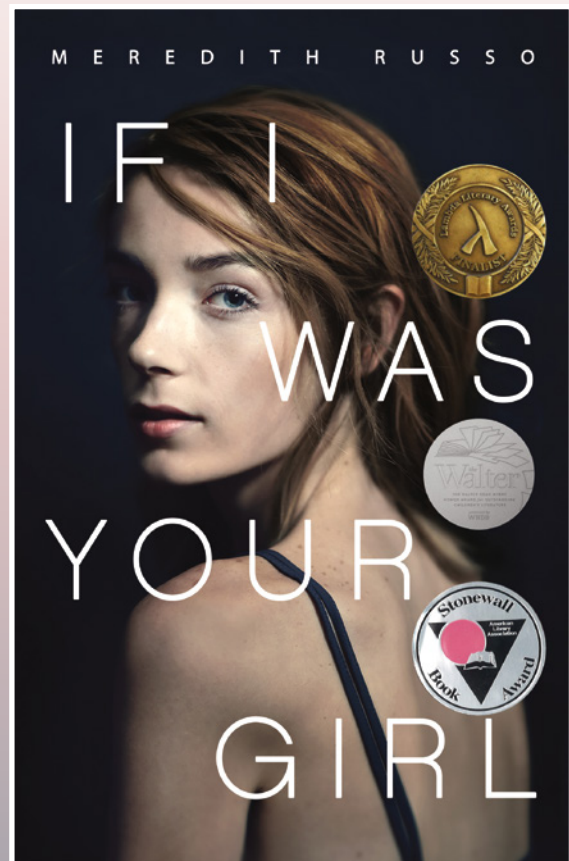


READ AND DISCUSS **IF I WAS YOUR GIRL**
AND **BIRTHDAY** BY MEREDITH RUSSO



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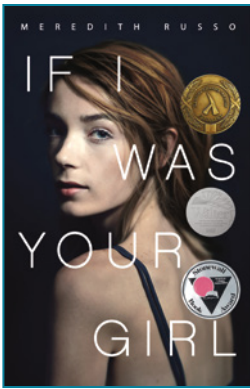
Meredith Russo was born and raised and now lives in Tennessee. She started living as her true self in late 2013 and never looked back. Her debut, *If I Was Your Girl*, was partially inspired by her experiences as a trans woman. Meredith is a gigantic nerd who spends a lot of her time obsessing over video games and Star Wars.



Discussion Questions for **BIRTHDAY**

Two best friends. A shared birthday. Six years. The stars align when Morgan and Eric are born on the same day in the same hospital in their small Tennessee town, setting into motion a friendship that will shape the rest of their lives. As they grow up, they come together, drift apart, kiss, fall in love, and discover who they're meant to be—and if they're meant to be together. Told in snapshots from six of Morgan and Eric's shared birthdays, Meredith Russo's second novel is a heart-wrenching and universal story of identity, first love, and fate.

1. *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 their game have in Morgan's journey of coming out of the closet? Why start here?
2. We have a window into Morgan's and Eric's minds. In what ways do we feel this closeness and feel how their relationship has always been more than just a friendship?
3. Early on, both Morgan and Eric wrestle with the idea of being 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.
4. Peyton uses slurs and targets both Morgan and Eric for their relationship and identities, but then we see a change in his character. Discuss the underlying emotions and environments that caused him to lash out. Can a person really change and redeem themselves?
5. In Morgan's mom's first tape to Morgan, she says, "You were such a wonderful child." It seems Morgan's mom always sees who she really is despite not living to see Morgan grown up. How does this openness and the reoccurring birthday notes help Morgan? What role do her parents play in the development of Morgan's identity, insecurities, and final confidence?
6. Football runs throughout the story, from Morgan's relationship with her dad to her relationship with Eric to her relationship with herself. Why is football so important? How does football serve as a symbol of gender and tradition when Morgan is growing and breaking out of stereotypes?
7. When Eric kisses Morgan, she thinks, "This is how a kiss is supposed to make you feel." Jasmine kisses Morgan the same night. 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. Do you think Eric kissed Morgan in part because he was jealous of Jasmine?
8. After Morgan puts makeup on, she thinks, "And there she is." Talk about this statement. What about this moment is so significant for Morgan? How is finally seeing who she is reflected in the mirror both the climax of her life thus far and what causes her to spiral into one of her darker moments?
9. 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?
10. "My body is a machine, and I'm in control." Discuss the intense turnaround we see in Morgan's personality and behavior. 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 they play in Morgan's life when she joins the football team.
11. 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?
12. 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? Discuss how unconditional love is significant both in interpersonal relationships and in our relationship to ourselves.
13. How are birthdays an important symbol of friendship, love, and coming-of-age? How do Eric's and Morgan's journeys to find their authentic selves and be comfortable in their own skin 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?



Discussion Questions for **IF I WAS YOUR GIRL**

The award-winning, bighearted novel about being seen for who you really are, and a love story you can't help rooting for. Amanda Hardy is the new girl in school. Like anyone else, all she wants is to make friends and fit in. But Amanda is keeping a secret, and she's determined not to get too close to anyone. But when she meets sweet, easygoing Grant, Amanda can't help starting to let him into her life. As they spend more time together, she realizes just how much she is losing by guarding her heart. She's terrified that once she tells him the truth, he won't be able to see past it.

1. When Grant first introduces himself to Amanda, she wonders “if a boy like him could ever understand what it was like to be me. To know what it was like to view high school as something you needed to survive.” Do you think every high schooler feels that way at some point? Does the book ultimately agree with Amanda or not?
2. There are many ways to describe Amanda—she's young, Southern, transgender. Despite these specific facts, in what ways is her story universal?
3. When young Amanda gives her dad the story she wrote in class, he tells her, “Son, I want you to have a good life. Boys who really think the things in your story are confused. They don't have good lives. So you're not one of those boys.” It becomes clear that Amanda's father was always worried about her safety, even as he tried to hide who she really was. Do you think his actions are at all justified?
4. Amanda wrestles with religion and her faith, thinking, “It was hard to place too much hope in a God so many people said hated me,” and yet she also feels connected and reassured in church. For queer readers who are religious, how do you grapple with traditional religious texts and beliefs?
5. When Amanda goes to the football game, she observes that “too many dads seemed interested in us as we passed, and for just a moment I missed the near-invisibility of life as a boy.” In what ways is she still learning what it means to be a woman, even though she's been one on the inside her whole life?
6. Amanda feels that her dad was always trying to push “boy” activities, such as hunting and sports, on her. Why are activities still gendered? Is it harder for young boys to get away from those expectations than it is for young girls?
7. When Bee takes photos of Amanda, she says, “Why a pretty girl like you doesn't want to be seen is a mystery to me.” How does the book show the way outward appearances reflect our true selves? Or how they don't?
8. When Amanda's mother says she misses her son, she tells Amanda, “You look different, you sound different, your hands feel different, when I touch 'em. Hell, you even smell different,” even as Amanda points out that she's still the same person. What is it that makes us who we are?
9. Did you anticipate Bee's big homecoming reveal? Was it building over the course of the book as different characters both withheld and revealed their own secrets or was it a surprise? Do you agree with Amanda when she concludes that maybe everyone had something they were lying to themselves about, or something they were hiding”?
10. When Amanda plays catch with her father, she tells him, “I'm not brave. Bravery implies I had a choice. I'm just me, you know?” Discuss the ways Amanda is brave or if you agree with her that she isn't.
11. When Amanda returns to Lambertville, Anna tells her she “thinks it's a sin,” but “just 'cause I'm grappling with the meta-physics doesn't mean I don't still love you.” Is it possible to be friends with someone who has views that completely contradict your own?
12. Grant tells Amanda, “Just because you have a past doesn't mean you can't have a future.” How does Amanda leave her past behind? How does her past shape her into the character we come to know?
13. *If I Was Your Girl* explores a point of view and personal history that many readers might not have encountered before. Do you think that reading fiction makes us more empathetic?



Advance praise for **BIRTHDAY**

“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*

“BOTH HEARTBREAKING AND HEARTWARMING, this book is a celebration of friendship, life, and enduring love between two teens.”

—MASON DEEVER, AUTHOR OF *I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST*

“Stonewall Award winner Russo captures the intense longing of two teens who feel trapped in their small town. . . . **THE SLOW-BURN ROMANCE IS AFFIRMING AND WORTH THE WAIT.** An emotional, winning touchdown.”

—KIRKUS REVIEWS

Praise for **IF I WAS YOUR GIRL**

STONEWALL BOOK AWARD WINNER • WALTER DEAN MYERS HONOR BOOK FOR OUTSTANDING CHILDREN’S LITERATURE
A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR (*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, KIRKUS REVIEWS, AMAZON, IBOOKS, BARNES & NOBLE, ALA, YALSA, AND ABA*)

“This new novel for teens breaks new ground. . . . **POWERFUL.**”

—O, *THE OPRAH MAGAZINE*

“A BEAUTIFULLY RENDERED YA NOVEL . . . The first written by a transgender woman about the transgender teen experience.”

—SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

“A VIVID, COMPASSIONATE PORTRAIT of a teen finding her place.”

—THE WASHINGTON POST

“POIGNANT AND RARE. *If I Was Your Girl* is the type of book you read and want to immediately share, because it’s too important to keep to yourself.”

—JULIE MURPHY, AUTHOR OF *DUMPLIN’*

“IMPORTANT AND NECESSARY AND BRAVE, and deeply, electrically inspiring. Read this wonderful book. Just read it.”

—JENNIFER NIVEN, AUTHOR OF *ALL THE BRIGHT PLACES*



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