

## Further Reading

### **Ask Again, Yes (May 2019)**

**by Mary Beth Keane**

A profoundly moving novel about two neighboring families in a suburban town, the friendship between their children, a tragedy that reverberates over four decades, and the power of forgiveness.



### **The Story of Arthur Truluv (Jul 2017)**

**by Elizabeth Berg**

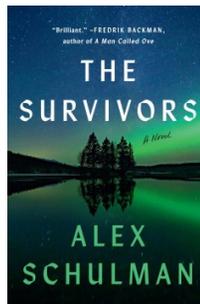
Making daily visits to the grave of his beloved late wife, Arthur forges unexpected relationships with a nosy neighbor and a troubled teen who dubs him "Truluv" before the trio discovers healing and family together.



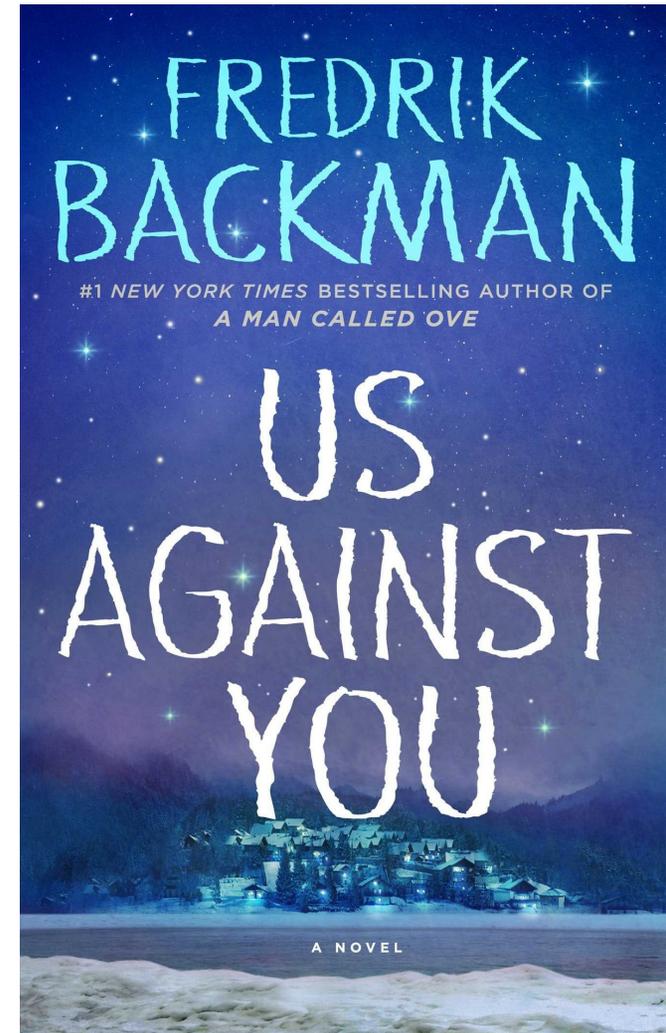
### **The survivors (Oct 2021)**

**by Alex Schulman**

The award-winning author of White Teeth presents a first collection of 10 original short stories and selections from her most-lauded pieces as first published in The New Yorker and other prestigious literary magazines.



# BOOK DISCUSSION



## Discussion Questions

1. Backman describes the struggle between Beartown and Hed as one between the Bear and the Bull. What does this metaphor represent besides two fearsome animals fighting each other? What do these symbols say about the character of each town?

2. Early in the book, Maya and Ana retreat to a special place far from the rest of Beartown. Read Maya's song, "The Island" on pp. 59–60. What do you think this little piece of land means to both of them?

3. Kira makes sacrifices so that Peter can be manager of Beartown hockey. Does Peter make sacrifices for his family, too? Discuss the way their relationship changes over the course of the book.

4. Peter tells Ann-Katrin: "I'm afraid the club might demand more from your sons than it can give back to them." (page 155). Bobo, Benji, and Amat must take their place in the world of men when they join the A-team. How does this change force them to grow up? In what ways does it expose their immaturities?

5. People from Hed burn a Beartown Jersey in their town square. This event doesn't hurt anyone physically, but would you still consider it an act of violence? How does this small symbolic act become amplified and have the power to do so much relational damage?

6. What special challenges do Maya and Ana face as they near adulthood? Do you think two such different girls will be able to maintain their friendship as they head down separate paths?

7. "When we describe how the violence between these two towns started, most of us will no longer remember what came first" (page 46). What do you think the tipping point was? What do you think the novel says about human beings' innate tendency toward violence?

8. A theme in *Us Against You* is tribalism versus community. Both dynamics are grounded in a sense of loyalty formed around a shared identity, but what makes them different? How can a strong community become insular and intolerant?

9. Two outsiders come to town, Elisabeth Zackell and Richard Theo. How does each person understand the culture in Beartown, and how do they use that understanding to their individual advantage?

10. "People's reactions to leadership are always the same: if your decisions benefit me, you're fair, and if the same decision harms me, you're a tyrant." (page 197). Are there any characters in Beartown who act against their own self-interest? What do you think are their reasons for doing so?

11. When Ana breaks Benji's trust and reveals his secret, do you understand her action? Is what she does to Benji made more forgivable because of the circumstances?

12. Retaliation is a constant theme throughout the book. Are there any characters who try to break this cycle of violence? What do you think it takes for this pattern to be broken?

13. Richard Theo says to Peter: "They rule with the help of violence. A democracy can't allow that. Anyone who becomes powerful because they've physically fought their way to the top needs to be opposed." (page 271) Do you agree with Theo? Does Theo rule with the help of violence?

14. Sports has the power to divide and the power to unite. On balance, do you think Beartown would be better off with or without its hockey club?

15. "We will say 'things like this are no one's fault,' but of course they are. Deep down we will know the truth. It's plenty of people's fault. Ours." (page 293) Do you agree with this statement, or are their forces outside of the Beartown citizens' control that are, in part, responsible for the violence?

Courtesy of <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Us-Against-You/Fredrik-Backman/9781501160806>