

Reading Guide

Finding Noel Richard Paul Evans

Synopsis

"When I was young, my mother told me that everyone comes into our lives for a reason."

On a snowy November evening in Salt Lake City, Mark Smart, sitting in a broken down car, has hit rock bottom. He's lost his college scholarship, been dumped by his girlfriend back home, and most shattering of all, just learned of his mother's sudden death. But at the moment that he feels most hopeless, he meets Macy Wood, a kind and lovely stranger who is haunted by tragedies of her own.

Mark grows closer to Macy, learning the sad details of her past -- a neglectful father, an abusive adoptive family, and a lost sister, Noel. Guided by the message on an old glass ornament, Macy begins a journey to reconnect with her sister. As Mark helps Macy's search, he examines his own life, finding love, forgiveness, and the true meanings of family and Christmas.

Reading Guide

1. *Finding Noel* opens with an opinion, the narrator questioning an inspirational thought. Does this immediately create an impression of the narrator? Does Mark's skepticism make him more human and accessible? How does his questioning help draw you into his story?

2. In Mark's first encounter with Macy, she says, "We always tell our deepest secrets to strangers." (Pg. 12) Do you agree with her reasoning for this? How does Mark's initial honesty create a foundation for his relationship with Macy? In what ways does this contrast with the other relationships in his life? Why do you think Mark believes people will use his secrets against him?

3. In *Finding Noel*, many first encounters are described using specific physical descriptions of people or places. How do these details inform your first impressions of characters? Compare some of the setting descriptions, such as the Hummel household (pg. 28), Jolene's apartment (pg. 51), and the Thorup home (pg. 97). How do the settings reflect their inhabitants? In what ways are they deceptive?

4. Mark's past is summarized quickly in the first few pages of *Finding Noel*, whereas Macy's unfolds in pieces as the story progresses. Does your sympathy for Mark evolve as you learn about Macy? Does the difference in narrative pace indicate differences in the two characters' perspectives? How does Macy's reaction to her father contrast with Mark's resentment?

5. Does the revelation of his childhood battle with polio alter your opinion of Macy's father? Does this excuse his abandonment of his daughters to any degree? He says that "the greatest hurts of our lives come from running from the smaller hurts." In what way does this statement pertain to Mark's situation at the beginning of the book? How does his revelation help to set up Mark's father's later revelation?

6. When Mark and Joette spend time together on Thanksgiving, she compares parenting to *The Wizard of Oz*. How does this discussion affect Mark's outlook when he returns to Alabama?

7. Why did Macy react so negatively to Mark's proposal? Was it inappropriate for him to propose after so short a time? Was Macy's anger at Mark's running from his past justified, or was it an easy defense mechanism? How could Macy's past affect her present relationships?

8. How does Tennys's personality contrast with Macy's? What do you think Mark got out of his relationship with Tennys? Mark describes Tennys as a "sure thing." What makes her less of a challenge than Macy? How have Mark's strong emotions for Macy complicated his relationship with her, in addition to validating it? What sort of life do you imagine Mark would have with Tennys?

9. *Finding Noel* depicts very different examples of families and homes. What, ultimately, is the meaning of home? Was the Hummel household ever home to Macy? What makes Mark feel finally at home in Alabama? Do Macy and Mark need to find their own senses of family before they can form one together?

10. In Macy's Christmas poem (pg. 73), she describes the responsibility of Christmas as being "called, to leave our troubled lives of care,/To set aside our burdened minds, with God and man our hearts to share." In what ways is the gift of Christmas also a responsibility? How does Mark step up to the challenge in this novel? In what ways is this a Christmas story?

Reading Group Tips

Is it near the holidays? Why not have a crafts day and make holiday ornaments together? For do-it-yourself ideas, visit this website:

http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/dc_occasions_december/0,1792,HGTV_3472,00.html To make it more personal, you could include a message to someone special, just like in *Finding Noel*.

Visit www.richardpaulevans.com, where he discusses the inspiration for his books, and keeps us updated on upcoming novels.

Have a discussion about fate. Do you believe in it? Have fun sharing stories about times you feel that someone has come into your life for a reason.