

# READER GUIDE: ANDREW FORBES'S WHAT YOU NEED

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Hi, Readers,

First off, I'm grateful that you've chosen to spend some time with *What You Need*, to consider and discuss it. I hope it provides fuel for some lively conversations.

Without wishing to prejudice your discussion too heavily, I think it's safe to say that there are a few recurrent themes that pop up throughout the stories. The big three for me are a longing for the past which in all likelihood wasn't as great as the characters remember it to have been, the ravages visited on people when they remain passive participants in their own lives, and (and maybe this is the big one) a critical assessment of accepted notions of masculinity. There are outliers, of course, stories that don't really visit any of those three themes, and there are other themes that show up here and there. I'd be interested in hearing any of those you might identify.

In addition to those ideas, place and setting were big preoccupations of mine while I wrote these stories (and remain so now). The characters find themselves in Florida, rural Illinois, the Canadian prairies, the Rocky Mountain foothills of Alberta and, mostly, Ontario. In each case these are places I've visited and which left some sort of impression on me that I felt compelled to work out in writing. You might want to talk about how these settings affect the stories' characters and their actions.

If things had gone a little differently, I might have been a musician. As it is, I can't play a note. I envy musicians and songwriters for their ability to evoke in sound and lyric what it takes me thousands of words to get around to saying. Music is a big influence. You might spot some of the musical influences sprinkled throughout the book. Some are obvious, others less so.

There's more to say, but if you let me get going I won't likely stop, so maybe it's best to leave the rest to arise organically among you. Let me just say again that I'm very happy you've chosen to read my book and to give it some careful consideration. Such attention is a precious and increasingly rare thing, and I don't for a moment take it for granted.

All best,  
Andrew Forbes