



# Where'd You Go, Bernadette (2012)

By Maria Semple

(Winner, 2013 Alex Award)



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## Discussion questions taken from *LitLovers*

1. Where'd You Go, Bernadette is told from the point of view of a daughter trying to find her missing mother. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from Bee's perspective? What light does it shed on the bond between Bernadette and Bee?
2. What are your thoughts on Bernadette's character? Has she become unhinged or has she always been a little crazy? What, if anything, do you think sent her over the edge? Have you ever had a moment in your own life that utterly changed you, or made you call into question your own sanity?
3. When Bernadette relocates from Los Angeles to Seattle, she must cope with being a transplant in a new city. Have you ever moved, or even stayed put but switched jobs, and had to adjust to an entirely different culture? What was it like?
4. The idea of going to Antarctica becomes too much for an already frazzled Bernadette to bear, but the trip itself, surprisingly, turns out to be exactly what she needs to get back on track. How do other characters in the novel experience their own breakthroughs? Which character is most transformed?
5. How are Audrey Griffin and Bernadette Fox more alike than they realize?
6. Bernadette often behaves as if she is an outsider. Do you think she is? If so, do you think her feelings of being an outsider are self-imposed, or is she truly different from the other members of her community? Do you ever feel like an outsider?
7. The book has a very playful structure. Do you think it works? Why do you think the author chose it rather than a more straightforward, traditional structure? Think about other books with unusual structures and how their formats influenced your reading experience.
8. What do you think of Bernadette and Elgie's marriage? Is it dysfunctional? Is there real love there? How has their marriage changed over time? Think about romantic relationships you've been in that have evolved, positively or negatively, and why.
9. Where'd You Go, Bernadette is, at its core, a story about a woman who disappears, both literally and figuratively. Were you able to relate to the book? How and why? Do you feel Bernadette's disappearance was unique, or do all women, in a sense, disappear into motherhood?

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## Author Bio:



- Birth—June, 1964
- Where—Santa Monica, California, USA
- Education—B.A., Barnard College
- Currently—lives in Seattle, Washington

Maria Keogh Semple is an American novelist and screenwriter. She is the author of *This One is Mine*. Her television credits include *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Mad About You*, *Saturday Night Live*, *Arrested Development*, *Suddenly Susan* and *Ellen*.

**Early Life:** Semple was born in Santa Monica, California. Her family moved to Spain soon after she was born. There her father, the screenwriter Lorenzo Semple, Jr. wrote the pilot for the television series *Batman*. The family moved to Los Angeles and then to Aspen, Colorado. Semple attended boarding school at Choate Rosemary Hall, then received a BA in English from Barnard College in 1986.

**Career:** Her first screenwriting job was in 1992, for the television show *Beverly Hills, 90210*. She was nominated for a Primetime Emmy, Outstanding Television Series, in 1997 for *Mad About You*. In 2006 and 2007, she was nominated for a Writer's Guild of America award, for *Arrested Development*. *This One is Mine* was a finalist for the 2010 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award. She appeared in the 2004 David O. Russell film *I Heart Huckabees*. She is active in the Seattle literary community, a founding member of Seattle 7 Writers. Her writing has appeared in *The New Yorker Magazine*. She has also taught fiction writing at the Richard Hugo House.

**Novels:** Semple's novels are *This One is Mine* (2008) and *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* (2012), both published by Little, Brown and Company. *This One is Mine* is about a woman who has it all, a loving family and wealth, however her unhappiness leads her to make dangerous decisions in the pursuit of "more". Similarly, *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* is about a mother and wife who is suffering from a career loss in a city that deprives her. A string of events lead to her disappearance. The book is a collection of clues that can lead to Bernadette.

**Personal Life:** Semple is in a relationship with George Meyer and has one daughter with him, Poppy. They reside in Seattle. In 2007, a newly discovered species of moss frogs from Sri Lanka was named *Philautus poppiae* after their daughter, a tribute to Meyer's and Semple's dedication to the Global Amphibian Assessment. (Adapted from Wikipedia.)

## Read Alikes:

*The murder of Bindy Mackenzie* by Jaclyn Moriarty  
*The sweetness at the bottom of the pie* by C. Alan Bradley  
*The family Fang* by Kevin Wilson



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