

READERS' GUIDE

Lost Dogs by Lucie Pagé

INTRODUCING *Lost Dogs*

What begins as a search for a lost dog propels a group of unconnected characters into a difficult journey of self-discovery.

Sessional English prof and aspiring writer, Brent, looks for his missing pit bull. His girlfriend, Katherine, an aspiring actress, refuses to help. Their relationship may not survive.

Triggered by Brent's lost dog posters, fourteen-year-old Becca clamours for help. Her mother, Caroline, is too caught up with herself to notice her daughter is coming apart at the seams. To punish Becca for her attention-seeking behaviour, Caroline inadvertently thrusts her daughter into harm's way.

Pagé weaves together narratives that speak of people lost in a toxic mix of ambitions and desires in a novel that echoes the works of Iris Murdoch and Cordelia Strube.

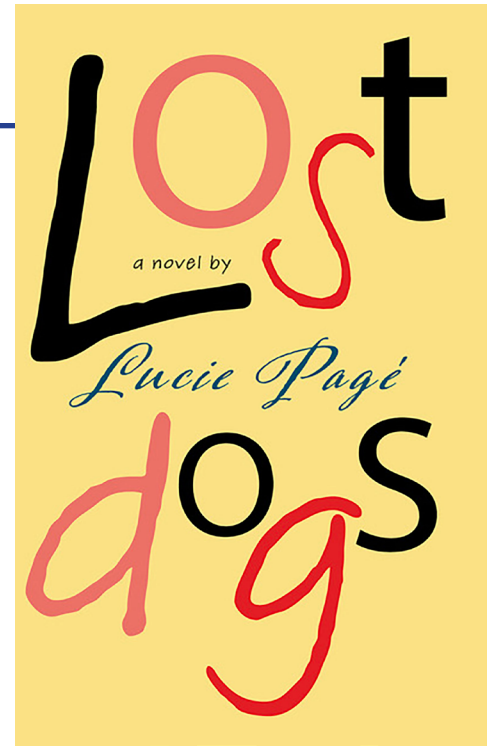
IMPORTANT THEMES

Identity/Belonging: The guiding theme of *Lost Dogs* is found in each characters' attempts to belong in their own life. After Brent's dog goes missing their stories become intertwined, forcing each of them to confront their own feelings of being lost and travel down roads of self-discovery. Whether it is Brent's insecurities about securing tenure at his university, Becca's struggles to fit in at home and in school, or Katherine's pursuit of finding her calling in life, each character in the book grapples with their own insecurities about their identity and where they belong.

Relationships: The interconnected nature of the lives of the main characters is a major driving force behind the novel. Characters are influenced by one another throughout the book, whether or not they are aware of it. Becca is triggered by Brent's lost dog poster. Brent experiences a frustrating phone call with Karl. Karl interacts with several other characters in the book based on chance encounters. In addition to the unconscious influence these characters have on one another, *Lost Dogs* also explores more intimate relationships in various forms, such as Brent and Katherine's partnership, and Caroline and Becca's mother-daughter relationship.

Mental Health/Addiction: Many of the characters in *Lost Dogs* navigate mental health and addiction issues. Becca struggles with depression and suicidal ideation, seeking out therapy as a means to cope; Brent experiences anxiety about his career, while Katherine navigates evolving and drastic personality shifts; and Karl struggles with addiction issues throughout the book. Mental health issues propel the characters forward as they attempt to navigate and cope with the stressors of their day-to-day lives.

Communication: Much of the misunderstanding, turmoil, and tension in *Lost Dogs* arises as a result of communication between the characters — or more accurately, a lack thereof. Throughout the book the characters struggle to have their true intentions heard and understood by those closest to them. Caroline is often ignorant towards Becca's struggles, Katherine and Brent continuously misunderstand one another as they attempt to navigate their relationship, and Karl's job demands a willing disregard of the issues his customers are facing. Miscommunication drives each facet of the story forward as the characters clamber to survive.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is your perception of Katherine at the end of chapter 2? How does this change throughout the book? What is your final impression of her character?
2. What do you learn about the relationship between Becca and Caroline by the end of chapter 5? Is it a healthy relationship?
3. How do Karl, Saurav, and Jackson talk about women (chapter 8)? What does this tell you about each of these men?
4. Throughout the book, Brent experiences self-doubt and anxiety about getting a tenured position at his university. How does this compare to the way Katherine approaches her goals and aspirations.
5. What is Karl's initial impression of Nicole's looks (chapter 18)? Do you think that Nicole's appearance impacts how Karl interacts with her?
6. What does Becca wish happened to her at the motel? How does her experience at the motel inform her decision making throughout the rest of the book?
7. What does Caroline's blender symbolize for Becca? Does the destruction of the blender represent something in the development of Becca's character?
8. After spending time in the bush, Becca reflects that "no one would ever know how little she needed to feel safe" (p. 151). Do you relate to Becca? Why or why not? What do you need to feel safe?
9. What did you think of the dinner scene with Katherine's family? How can the family dynamics help you make sense of Katherine's character?
10. How does Caroline's relationship to men inform how Becca perceives and interacts with Dylan?
11. Katherine reflects that Brent reduced her personal journey to "rich-girl privilege" (p.186). Based on their fight at the end of chapter 34, do you believe this is how Brent sees Katherine? How do you think Katherine has been impacted by her family's money?
12. What is starting to happen in the relationship between Katherine and Nurse Reeves? How is this relationship beginning to impact Katherine?
13. Throughout the book, Becca is continuously failed by the adults in her life. In chapter 49, Becca seeks



ABOUT LUCIE

Lucie Pagé is a French-Canadian writer and screenwriter (*Another Life*, *Slasher*, *Les Champs de Boue*) whose fiction has been published in *Carte Blanche*, *Robot Butt*, and *This Magazine*. She's received several awards for her original screenplays, won the Great Canadian Literary Hunt for fiction, and the O'Neill-Karsh award for her first full-length play. Lucie divides her time between Toronto and Vancouver Island.

- help from Mrs. Greeley. How could Greeley have handled this interaction differently? If Becca came to you with this same predicament, how would you respond?
14. Becca reflects that when she had "first started thinking about dying, death had very little to do with it" (p.269). What does she mean by this? Do you think Caroline's influence on Becca impacts these feelings about death and beauty?
 15. At the end of chapter 63 Brent tells the woman at the theatre about his lost dog. How does her response differ from the other responses he's received from those around him throughout the book?
 16. What do you think of Becca and Caroline's breakthrough in chapter 64? What will they have to do for their relationship to mend? Do you think they can recover from their rocky relationship?
 17. What do you think happened to Nurse Reeves and Karl after the book's ending?