



Candy Everybody Wants

By Josh Kilmer-Purcell
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Introduction

One boy's hilarious and touching quest for fame and freedom, traveling from humble Midwestern roots to 1980s New York City and beyond. Set over the course of one year, the precociously endearing Jayson (he added the 'y' for "flair" in kindergarten) Blocher chaotically bounces from a small Wisconsin town to an escort agency for Broadway chorus boys, to an abandoned Soho warehouse, to a Hollywood sitcom set. His bumpy journey from worshipping pop culture to becoming a part of it is played out against a backdrop of first love, strange coincidences, and the mysterious disappearance of his childhood friend. Accompanied by a revolving door of quirky extended family members, Jayson learns that becoming America's Sweetheart can leave a very bitter aftertaste.

Questions for Discussion

[Author Josh Kilmer-Purcell has created the following list of provocative and playful questions for your reading group to address.]

1. The media, and specifically television, seem to have disproportionately impacted Jayson's view of the world. In what ways has pop culture affected your life decisions? Do you think pop culture has increased its influence on society, or been diluted?
2. Jayson was very nonchalant about his sexuality around his family and friends, but secretive when it came to his public personality. What if Jayson had grown up just a couple of years later, during the height of the AIDS crisis? Have questions of sexuality become irrelevant to a public figure's success?
3. A major theme in this novel is finding a place to belong, with each character taking a unique path to his version of home. What common elements are found in the characters' attempts to belong? How does each character pursue this goal?
4. Jayson struggles to maintain his newfound celebrity identity at the same time that he pursues a stable relationship with the no-longer-famous Devlin. If you had to choose between public success and love, which would you choose? In what ways do you identify with Jayson's behavior in this tricky situation?
5. Terri Wernermeier takes an unusual approach to child-rearing, but her love for Jayson and Willie is undeniable. In what ways do you think her freeform style of parenting has benefited her children?
6. Trey plays a major role in Jayson's early romantic development, but then is absent for the majority of the novel. In what ways do you think Jayson's relationship with Trey affected his overall decision-making throughout the novel? How would Jayson's life be different if Trey had never disappeared?
7. The traditional definition of family takes a major hit in this novel, but there is a broader interpretation of the family unit that becomes more significant. Who are the important members of Jayson's family unit? How does this wider interpretation of family serve Jayson and the rest of the characters?
8. The novel's plot hinges on several lucky (and unlucky) coincidences. Has a coincidence ever altered your fate?
9. The characters in the novel seem to separate into two groups: those with intense, but unreachable desires, and those with more laissez faire outlooks on life. Who belongs to which? Does Jayson fit into either of these groups?
10. The novel moves from Wisconsin to New York to Hollywood, and then back to Wisconsin. How does each location reflect a different stage in Jayson's quest?
11. Why don't you buy several more of these books to give to your friends? In what way would that make you a better person? In what way would that make me a better person?

About the Author

Josh Kilmer-Purcell is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *I Am Not Myself These Days: A Memoir* (Harper Perennial 2006) and the novel *Candy Everybody Wants* (Harper Perennial 2008). In addition, Kilmer-Purcell writes a monthly column for *OUT* magazine, and contributes to NPR and numerous other publications. He and his partner divide their time between Manhattan and their goat farm in upstate New York.