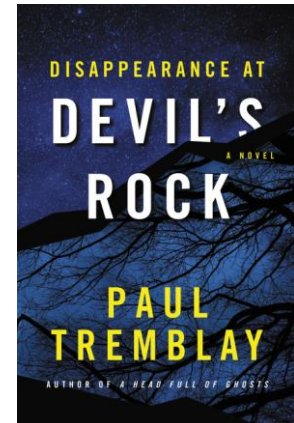


DISAPPEARANCE AT DEVIL'S ROCK

William Morrow

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Introduction

Late one summer night, Elizabeth Sanderson receives the devastating news that every mother fears: her thirteen-year-old son, Tommy, has vanished without a trace in the woods of a local park.

The search isn't yielding any answers, and Elizabeth and her young daughter, Kate, struggle to comprehend Tommy's disappearance. Feeling helpless and alone, their sorrow is compounded by anger and frustration: the local and state police have uncovered no leads. Josh and Luis, the friends who were the last to see Tommy before he vanished, may not be telling the whole truth about that night in Borderland State Park, when they were supposedly hanging out a landmark the local teens have renamed Devil's Rock.

As the search grows more desperate, and the implications of what happened become more haunting and sinister, no one is prepared for the shocking truth about that night and Tommy's disappearance at Devil's Rock.

Questions for Discussion

1. Elizabeth's and Kate's mother/daughter relationship is complex and put under tremendous strain over the course of the novel. How do they each deal with Tommy's disappearance? Discuss how it affects their relationship.
2. Discuss the power dynamic among the three friends—Luis, Josh, and Tommy. How did this dynamic change when Arnold befriended them?
3. Tommy and his friends felt alienated from the rest of their classmates. Discuss how that might've left them more vulnerable to Arnold's charm and manipulations. Were the boys as malleable as the hobo nickels? Or is the entwinement of nascent masculinity and violence in the book more commonplace than the boys would admit?
4. Elizabeth exerts considerable effort to prove or disprove that the shadow she saw in her bedroom was Tommy or some form of Tommy's spirit. What was the answer she was looking for?
5. Do you believe in ghosts? If you saw a ghost in your house would you attempt to gather evidence?

6. Stories and folktales of the devil are prevalent in New England. How do all the famous (and not so famous) folktales and New England's Puritan history inform the novel?
 7. The diary pages are the only parts of the novel from Tommy's point of view. Is the Tommy in those pages someone different than who his friends and family knew? Was Tommy being totally honest with himself in those diary pages? Have you ever kept a diary or continue to keep one? Is a diary, as Tommy put it, a dare for someone else to read it?
 8. The devil is sometimes referred to as "The Father of Lies." There are many lies told within the novel, with all of the major characters lying actively or lying by omission for a wide variety of reasons. How do the lies shape the story and the characters? Who or what was the true devil at Devil's Rock?
 9. The fight between Elizabeth and Kate, and then Kate admitting she had been leaving out the first set of diary pages, is an important and emotional scene in the book. How does that scene change each of the characters? Does it in any way reflect or foreshadow the revelations to come?
 10. Discuss the implications of Allison musing, "people always do things that their friends and loved ones never imagined they would do. Not only is everyone more than capable of making the worst decisions possible, those kinds of decisions are frighteningly commonplace and easy to make."
 11. The brutal, real-life horror of what the boys and Arnold did to his uncle, and subsequently what Arnold did to Tommy, is juxtaposed with the quieter, unsettling ambiguity of what Elizabeth may or may not have seen in her bedroom, and what Tommy may or may not have seen in the woods. What scares you more, the unknown or the everyday possibility of violence?
 12. What do you think Tommy saw in the woods on the night he disappeared?
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