

## How to Be Famous

Harper Perennial

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### Introduction

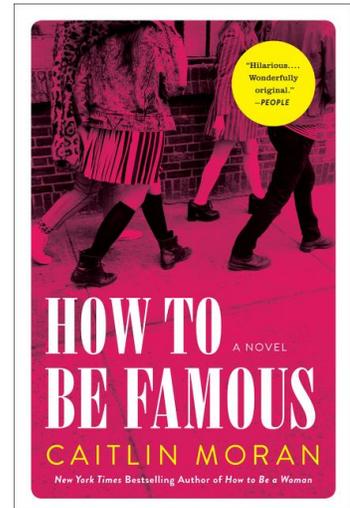
Johanna Morrigan (aka Dolly Wilde) has it all: she is nineteen, lives in her own flat in London, and writes for the coolest music magazine in Britain. Her star is rising, just not quickly enough for her liking.

Then John Kite, Johanna's unrequited love, has an album go to number one. Suddenly John exists on another plane of reality: that of the Famouses, a world of rabid fans and VIP access. Johanna lacks the traditional trappings of fame (famous parents, mind-scorching hotness, exotic scandals, etc.), so she does the only thing a self-respecting Lady Sex Adventurer can do. She starts a magazine column critiquing the lives and follies of the Famouses around her. But as Johanna skyrockets to fame herself, she begins to realize that with celebrity comes sacrifice, and hers may mean giving up the one person she was determined to keep.

For anyone who has been a girl or known one, who has admired fame or judged it, *How to Be Famous* is a big-hearted, hilarious tale of fame and fortune—and all that they entail.

### Questions for Discussion

1. The novel begins with Johanna recalling when she “formally resigned from the family dream.” What does this mean? What does she value, want, and need in her life? What does she mean when she says that she “wanted—with utmost urgency—to happen”?
2. What is important about London for Johanna? How is it that, “you don't live in London...you play London”?
3. In what ways is Johanna's professional persona, Dolly Wilde, similar or different from her creator?
4. What is Johanna's relationship with each of her parents like? How do the parent/child roles seem to invert?
5. What does Johanna initially find attractive about Jerry Sharp? What's the psychology behind a man who is into “making girls feel small”?
6. How is John Kite different from other men for Johanna?



7. Why does Johanna have to quit working for D&ME? Why has rock music and criticism largely existed for and been performed by men?
8. What revolutionary ideas does Suzanne want to ignite? What does Johanna mean when she observes that everything in her apartment “has weight...everything means something”?
9. Why does Suzanne want to hide her true age and privileged upbringing from the public? What about her experience evokes Johanna’s sympathy?
10. What is the nature of fame? How is it powerful to be known of by a lot of people?
11. What does John Kite’s experience of fame reveal about the ways it can be harmful? Why is Suzanne so desirous of it and certain of its value?
12. Johanna decides that “so long as [women] keep being sassy, and wisecracking, [men] will respect” them. In what ways do you think this is true or not?
13. After John Kite confronts a man making sexually harassing comments to Johanna, she tells him “the world is full of evenings like this.” Why is such harassment so common and normalized? What can, and should men do to help eradicate it?
14. Why does Johanna feel “a load of bad vibes” after offering “some friendly advice to a potential sexual victim”? What will it take for such an act to be thought—as Zee suggests—reasonable?
15. What’s strong and healthy (or not) about Johanna’s relationship to her own body? What does she mean that “a body is something that should never be described” but “a thing that should do”?
16. Suzanne celebrates when Johanna finally “gets angry for the first time.” What’s important about anger for Johanna and other women? What healthy forms might it take?
17. In her letter to John, what is Johanna’s argument for the value of teenage girls? What does it mean to “be on the side of girls”?
18. Johanna leaves her blissful trip to America with John because she “will not accept being rescued.” What does she mean? What’s the difference between accepting help and being overly dependent?
19. In what ways is Johanna’s act of making her sex tape public and narrating it an effective response to Jerry Sharp’s hateful and abusive treatment?
20. What are the many and varied ways that writing and language can be used to continue to create equality and safety for girls and women?