



Boy, 9, Missing

a novel

Nic Joseph

“This riveting debut had me hooked from page one.”

—Heather Gudenkauf, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *The Weight of Silence* and *Missing Pieces*

Reading Group Guide

1. *Boy, 9, Missing* follows an unconventional structure. How does Kira's memoir serve as a narrative device within the story?
2. What is the central motivation behind Francis's decision to search for Matthew? For Alex? Are these motivating factors the same?
3. Do you agree with Kira's statement that, regardless of what happened in 1992, ten-year-old Sam Farr should not have been held responsible? Did your feelings change after you found out what really happened that night?
4. How is Francis's relationship with his daughter similar to his relationship with his parents? How does it differ?
5. Why does Francis resent his parents? Do you feel that his resentment is justified? Likewise, why might his parents resent him?
6. How does Francis handle his claustrophobia and panic attacks? How does this parallel the way he handles the rest of his life?

7. How does Francis handle guilt at different stages of his life?
8. Why did Sam Farr lie in his story to Kira Jones? Why hasn't he told the truth about what his father did all those years ago?
9. Francis tries several times to tell Amy about his past but fails to do so. What excuses does he use to justify his avoidant behavior?
10. Why do you think some people were so quick to believe that Sam Farr was a murderer? Why were others so quick to defend him?
11. Francis and Amy go to visit Alex at the end of the novel. How do you think this meeting is going to turn out?

A Conversation with the Author

What was your inspiration for *Boy, 9, Missing*?

I have always been fascinated by the changing relationship between parents and children—what kids expect from their parents, and what parents expect as their children become adults. The inspiration for *Boy, 9, Missing* started there, around the question of what kinds of support and understanding parents and their adult children expect from one another, particularly during a time of crisis.

To which character do you feel closest?

Francis, for sure! He is, for lack of a more eloquent description, a hot mess. He's trying to do the right thing, but he doesn't really know why. Deep down, he hopes that showing up now will make up for the fact that he wasn't there in the past. What he knows for sure is that he doesn't want to be the guy who doesn't care anymore.

How did you decide on the narrative structure for *Boy, 9, Missing*?

I enjoy stories that showcase a variety of viewpoints around a single topic or event. The night of the accident was experienced by two families but felt by an entire town. Kira's story allowed me to

delve into one particular experience of the night—albeit through a rather shaky and unreliable account of it.

How long have you been writing?

I've written stories and poems since childhood. My father is a writer and artist and a mystery buff, and he instilled in me a deep love of suspense. Even now, when I go home to visit, we gobble up all of the old mysteries we can find. My very first story was titled "The Case of the Missing Ring." I illustrated it myself too. Let's be honest: it may have been cute, but it was not very good.

Are you an outliner?

To say I'm an outliner is an understatement. I handwrite a detailed outline for almost every scene of my novels. Then, I rewrite the outline adding in more details. Then, I do it again and again. I've filled notebooks with outlines, and my purse is filled with crumpled pieces of paper containing plot sketches, character profiles, etc. I don't start actually writing the book until most of the plot has been inked out several times. For some people, this stunts their creativity. But I like to think that the outlining stage is where I let my "soul glo." The writing part is where I put it all together into something coherent.

What do you love most about writing?

The control (should I not admit that?). There is very, very little in life that we have complete control over. In the initial stages, when I'm drafting a story on a blank page, every twist, every dot over every *i* is up to me. That's incredibly cool and incredibly scary.

Who is your favorite author, and why?

I own almost all of Ken Follett's books. He is such a masterful storyteller. I am always in awe of authors who are able to transport

you, quickly and completely, into their worlds. He has definitely inspired me as a writer.

What draws you to the mystery/suspense genre?

Mysteries provide the reader with a question that just *has* to be answered. They're fun, they're exciting, and you often can't look away. They draw you in and hopefully keep you there long enough for you to get to know and care about the character. Because at the end of the day, that's really what matters—the character. The mystery just opens the door for you to step into his or her world.

Do you ever get writer's block?

Sometimes! It usually happens when I try to force myself to write on an off day. On those days, it's best if I just step away and come back later. Forcing myself to reach a certain word count or complete a scene that doesn't want to be completed almost always ends in some quality time with the Delete key.

Do you have any writing rituals?

No real rituals, but I do have some pretty ingrained habits. I do most of my writing in my living room, curled up on my couch. I can write with the television on in the background, but not if there's music playing. I plot in my car; I have an hour-long commute to work, and I often spend that time talking through (yes, out loud) difficult plot points.

What do you do when you're not writing?

I like gardening, cooking huge meals for friends and family, and watching classic mysteries.