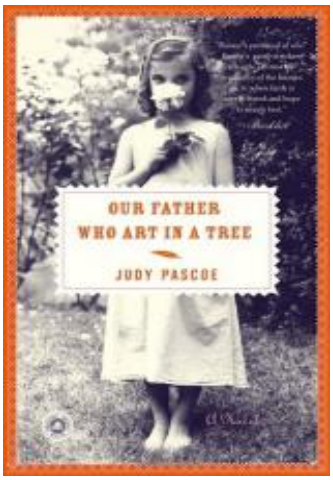
Our Father Who Art in a Tree

by Judy Pascoe



About the Book

Judy Pascoe's metaphorical, deeply affecting debut novel is about a family, and how loss and grief can be moved through and overcome.

In a voice reminiscent of that of Scout Finch, the narrator of **To Kill a Mockingbird**, Judy Pascoe's heroine, Simone, observes with candor and fresh insight the ways in which her mother, brothers, neighbors, and community deal with the death of her father. While her mother functions on only the most basic level, and her older brother buries himself in schoolwork, Simone conceives the idea that her father's spirit lives in the tree in the backyard. She can go out there, climb up and sit in the tree's branches, and talk to her father. It is only when Simone's mother takes on a suitor that a confrontation is forced between the power of the past and the hope of new life in the future.

Rich in understanding about the power of love, the spirit, and belief, imbued with unexpected truths about people's deep levels of connection and feeling, and written in prose that combines lyricism with rare humor and insight, **Our Father Who Art in a Tree** is a wonderful novel that deals, in a unique and profound way, with some of the eternal themes in fiction, and in life.

Discussion Guide

1. Our Father Who Art in a Tree is full of humor that lightens the novel and gives the reader the sense that there is levity in the grieving process. Do you think the author's background as a stand-up comedienne has allowed her to see the humor in even the most solemn situations? Explore ways in which you use humor in your own life to deal with difficult situations. Do you find Pascoe's method to be effective?

2. Although told from a child's perspective, **Our Father Who Art in a Tree** is a very mature look at several life changing processes, namely, coming-of-age and grieving. Did you find that you had to get in touch with your own

"inner-child" through Simone when reading this book? How does the simple observations of a child lend an added layer of wisdom to the story?

3. Our Father Who Art in a Tree is full of fantastical, mystical elements that are counterbalanced by the most ordinary aspects of real, daily life. Discuss where the author finds the appropriate balance between fantasy and reality in this book making it both accessible and believable?

4. Compare the different members of Simone's family and how they deal with the passing of her father? Why do you think her mother chooses to stare blankly into space and her brother throws himself into his school assignments? Do you think Simone's way of coping is healthier and more productive?

5. Why do you think Pascoe chooses a tree as the means through which Simone's father would speak to her? Why do you think Simone's mother initially wants to keep the secret of climbing high into the tree a secret?

6. After the toilet is filled with frogs, Simone notices that the house seems to be falling apart since her father has died. "They were just part of the constant stream of misdemeanors committed by a house against its occupants," she observes. So much of this book is about nature and the passage of time and how it confronts and overwhelms the living. Identify instances of this throughout the novel. Do you feel that this an apt metaphor for life? Why or why not? Do you think there is a constant struggle between people and the homes and land they inhabit?

7. What does it mean when Simone's mother decides to take charge and clean the house? What does the presence of the drain man do to precipitate this sudden change in her mother?

8. At the end of the novel when Simone is grown and her mother has finished raising her children, her mother decides to sell the house. Simone says that she and the other children hated her for that act, but that they knew it was time for their mother to move on. Why do you think the house meant so much to the family and their identity? How is leaving the house represent moving on? What other symbols and metaphors does Pascoe employ to convey the passage of time and life transitions?

9. So much of **Our Father Who Art in a Tree** is about identity and how our relationship to our family, spouses, friends, and neighbors define how we view ourselves? How does the death of the father affect the family's identity? How does Simone and her mother in particular come to view themselves after the death?

Author Bio

Judy Pascoe was born and educated in Australia. She worked for many years as an acrobat with Circus Oz, touring Australia and the world before becoming a stand-up comedienne on the U.K. comedy circuit. She lives in Gloucestershire, England.

Critical Praise

"In deceptively simple prose and through the eyes of a wise child, Judy Pascoe has captured in this wonderful novel the large mysteries of the depths of hope, in this deeply imagined portrait of grief and overcoming."

Our Father Who Art in a Tree

by Judy Pascoe

Publication Date: April 13, 2004
Paperback: 224 pages
Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0375759875
ISBN-13: 9780375759871