

Anxious People Discussion Questions

by Fredrik Backman

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & website)

Fredrik Backman is a Swedish blogger and columnist. *A Man Called Ove*, his first novel, has sold more than 500,000 copies in its native country and has been published in more than twenty-five languages all over the world. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two children.



Characters:

- **Anonymous Man** – Man on the bridge railing. Committed suicide by jumping off bridge. As a teenager, Jack tried to talk him into not jumping and failed.
- **Anna-Lena** – Older woman. Hostage. Married to Roger. Retired.
- **Bank Robber** – (39) – Has a pistol. Takes the people in an apartment viewing across the street hostage.
- **Estelle** – (87) – Oldest woman. Hostage. Husband Knut. Says she is looking at apartment for her daughter.
- **Jack** – (20s) – Younger police officer. Has a bump on his head and blood on his shoes. As a teenager he tried to talk a jumper off a bridge. His father is Jim, the older police officer.
- **Jim** – Older police officer. Jack's father. Is widowed. Has a daughter with substance abuse issues.
- **Julia** – Pregnant woman. Hostage. Married to Ro.
- **Lennart** – Man dressed in a rabbit costume. Knows Anna-Lena. Out-of-work actor.
- **London** – (20) – Temporary bank worker. Wants to be a bartender.
- **Nadia** – Teenage girl on the bridge railing. Jack saves her. She eventually becomes a psychologist.
- **Real estate agent** – (40s) – Female. House Tricks Real Estate Agency.
- **Ro** – Hostage. Married to Julia. Owns birds.
- **Roger** – Middle aged. Hostage. Married to Anna-Lena. Retired.
- **Zara** – (50s) – Woman hostage. Well dressed and very calm. Runs a bank. Seeing a psychologist.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. What genre do you think **Anxious People** can be characterized as? Is it a mystery? A thriller? A contemporary novel? Social commentary? Why?
3. Is there a main character in this story? Is there a group of protagonists? If yes, who do you think this story centers on? Why?
4. The book is written through flashbacks and time jumps. What did you think of this narrative style? Did it work?
5. Why do you think it took the author so long to tell us the characters' names? (No names until chapter 13).
6. The book starts off with Fredrik writing that this is a book about idiots. And that, while it's easy to declare that other people are idiots, it's also true how difficult being a human is. When you see the word 'idiot' what's the first thing that comes to mind? Is this truly a book about idiots?
7. How do you think you would have reacted if you were one of the hostages?
8. As the title indicates, many of these characters are dealing with anxieties. Who has dealt with their anxiety by hiding or covering them up? How do the events in this book bring them to light and force them to face them? Do you relate to those anxieties?
9. The man on the bridge tells the boy, "Do you know what the worst thing about being a parent is? That you're always judged by your worst moments... Parents are defined by their mistakes." Do you think this statement is true? Does social media make it more likely to be the case these days? Is the bank robber a bad parent?
10. Jack tried to save the man from jumping off the bridge, but the man still jumped. He did end up saving a girl – who we meet much later as the psychologist Nadia. Let's talk about how the bridge impacted Jack's life and career choices going forward. What did you think about the scene where Jack and Nadia meet again?
11. Nadia (the psychologist), James (the police officer), Zara, and Estelle all have stories tied in some way to the bridge. What does the bridge represent to each of them?
12. Anna-Lena compares her and Roger's marriage to a shark that can't breathe unless it is moving the whole time: "People need a project . . . if we didn't keep moving, our marriage wouldn't get any oxygen." Why does Anna-Lena think that a project is the one thing keeping their marriage from falling apart? What surprised you about their history as individuals and as a couple? How have they underestimated each other, despite having been together for so many years?
13. Were you surprised when it turns out the bank robber is a woman? Were your assumptions challenged? How does the author manage to keep this a surprise?

14. Zara appears to be very cold and distant to other people. Is Zara's attitude toward people a defense mechanism? Do you agree with the psychologist that Zara isn't depressed, just lonely? What is it that Zara can't forgive herself for?
15. While on the apartment balcony, Zara starts to open up to Lennart. Why is he the person whom she is able to open up to?
16. Estelle says her book-swapping moments with her neighbor were "an affair." Do you agree? What counts as an affair if there's no physical relationship involved? What book would you give as a present to a crush?
17. Jim and Jack, the father and son policemen, have a difficult relationship that is made worse by their working so closely together. What annoys them about each other?
18. What did you make of Jim's role in resolving the bank robber's predicament? Should he have told Jack what he was doing sooner? Why didn't he?
19. Throughout the novel, we learn about Jack's mother who passed away and his sister who is addicted to drugs. How did that factor into why Jim let the bank robber go free? Were you surprised when Jack ended up agreeing with his father in the end and letting her be?
20. Which character storyline were you the most engaged with in this story?
21. At the end of the story, Fredrik writes that this story is about many different things but most of all about idiots. And how we're doing the best we can. What do you think are some of the key takeaways from the story?
22. Fredrik Backman has written other books. Will you read them?

References:

- Book Club Chat – <https://bookclubchat.com/books/book-club-questions-for-anxious-people-by-fredrik-backman/>
- Fredrick Backman website – <https://fredrikbackmanbooks.com/>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/b/fredrik-backman/>
- Libromaniacs – <https://libromaniacs.com/anxious-people-book-club-questions/>
- Novelist – <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=4&sid=c0334c9e-99b5-4ad6-9043-c1e4d54fb516%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10910269&db=neh>

Fredrik Backman's Books

Series:

Beartown

1. Beartown (2017) aka The Scandal
2. Us Against You (2018)
3. The Winners (2022)

Stand Alone Novels:

- A Man Called Ove (2014)
 - My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She's Sorry (2015)
 - Britt Marie Was Here (2016)
 - Anxious People (2020)
-

If you liked Anxious People, try...

- The Summer Guests – Mary Alice Monroe
 - Our Country Friends – Gary Shteyngart
 - Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting – Clare Pooley
 - The 100-year-old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared – Jonas Jonasson
 - Nine Perfect Strangers – Liane Moriarty
-

Capricciosa Pizza

<https://www.sugarlovespices.com/capricciosa-pizza-italian-classic-pizza-capricciosa/>

Capricciosa Pizza is a classic Italian pizza. The "*Capricciosa*", as everybody calls it, is on every pizzeria's menu, usually under the list of traditional pizzas. Its staple ingredients are tomato puree, mozzarella, cremini mushrooms, artichoke hearts, black olives, and *prosciutto cotto* (Italian cooked ham).