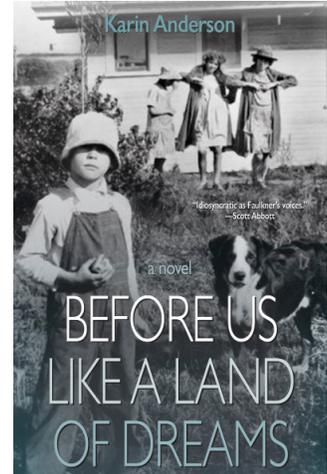




VOICES FOR THE LAND  
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## Reading Group Guide

# BEFORE US LIKE A LAND OF DREAMS BY KARIN ANDERSON



### INTRODUCTION

A disheartened Utah mother travels an evocative route through the sites of her arid Western ancestry. Along the way, the dead speak their stories: a ragged Mormon boy yearns after a Shoshone family; a hoarder's queer son demolishes the artifacts of his lonely Idaho childhood; descendants of British squatters sustain family delusions until a devastating suicide shatters their royal dreams. The dead yield no answers, but they conjure vivid mortal moments set in iconic—and diminishing—American places.

“A narrative extravaganza that ponders the bristled roots of ancestry, unbroken by time or place, and the muddled truths and fallacies of family history that inform who we believe we are. This masterwork flouts expectations.” —*FOREWORD REVIEWS* (starred review)

“Anderson’s fictionalized journey through time was prompted by her mother’s declining health, her son’s hospitalization, rampant wildfires plaguing the region, and a beloved country severely divided. A work of universal appeal.” —*LIBRARY JOURNAL* (starred review)

“Bravely wrestles underrepresented histories onto the page . . . a veritable index of abandoned history, almost like the second telling of what should have been included with the first.” —*15 BYTES*

### A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I wrote these stories for readers in the colonized American West who are at least uncomfortable with pat frontier stories. I hope the book appeals to a collective Western nostalgia even while disrupting it. I wrote it for readers attentive to depictions of natural place and environment, and uneasy about the futures of their native places.

Some people I envision as ideal readers for this book are precisely the people who will never read it. Even so, I wrote it for them—partly as a way to reassert my inextricable Mormon kinship beyond apostasy; even more to insist that the wayward, queer, intellectual, artistic, evolutionary and post-humanist children of the Mormon migration are as much made by their ancestry as their compliant siblings. I wrote many of the characters in this to call to highly specific people in the unheimlich backroads of cultural memory.



KARIN ANDERSON is a gardener, writer, mother, wanderer, heretic, and English professor at Utah Valley University. She hails from the Great Basin of Utah.

Anderson is available to discuss *Before Us Like a Land of Dreams* with reading groups in person or virtually.

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Read more at [karinandersonauthor.com](http://karinandersonauthor.com).

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. From the first page, the Storyteller is haunted by the ghosts of deceased family members and the stories they have to tell. During a low point in her life, she actively seeks out these ghosts and their stories. Why do you think the Storyteller looks to the past when struggling with her present?
2. This story takes place largely in the American West and the people who helped settle it. Did you have any preconceptions about this land or the people who lived on it before starting this book? How did those preconceptions change upon reading the story?
3. In each of these stories, the families we view are tied to the land around them in one way or another. In fact, the land itself often seems to play a role in shaping their stories. Do you view your family with any connections to the land?
4. Near the end of his story, Olaf Larson gets rid of his father's old things. Some are merely thrown out, while others are given a proper burial. Why do you think these objects played a part in his grief?
5. Throughout the story we are shown multiple perspectives and voices, each of them with their own intentions and opinions. Are there any voices that stood out to you as more believable or compelling than others? Any less believable or compelling? Why?
6. Due to the timeframe of each of the narratives, we are shown pieces of the West at times that were different from today, both in landscape and demographics. Do you feel this picture of the American West from the past reflects what it is today, or is your image of the West different?
7. Between each section, the Storyteller is told she must find a guide as she travels through the pasts of her family. Do you think it would be necessary to have a guide when traveling through the pasts of your family? Why or why not? What would your guide be like?
8. One thing all the stories in *Before Us Like a Land of Dreams* have in common is that they led to the birth and life of the Storyteller. You might say she is the product or culmination of all these stories. Do you feel you may be a culmination of the stories that have come before you? Why or why not? To what degree do you think we are shaped by those who have come before us?



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Torrey House Press publishes books at the intersection of the literary arts and environmental advocacy. THP authors explore the diversity of human experiences with place and engage community in conversations about landscape, literature, and the future of our ever-changing planet, inspiring action toward a more just world. We believe that lively, contemporary literature is at the cutting edge of social change. We seek to inform, expand, and reshape the dialogue on environmental justice and stewardship for the natural world by elevating literary excellence from diverse voices.

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