

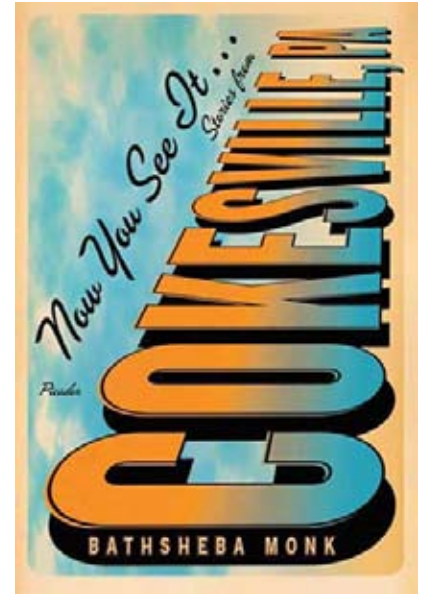


Reading Group Gold

Now You See It... Stories from Cokesville, PA by Bathsheba Monk

About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Now You See It...* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Now You See It...*



ISBN: 978-0-312-42610-1 | 2007

About the Book

A *Chicago Tribune* Best Book of the Year

Welcome to Cokesville, Pennsylvania. This is coal-and-steel country, the sort of place where an inch of soot on the windowsill means a regular paycheck--and two inches means a fat one. Where the only way to drown out the moaning of the cooling steel is to turn your radio up. And the best make-out spot in town is next to the burning slag heap. In seventeen captivating interlocking stories, Bathsheba Monk brings to life the fictional American town of Cokesville.

Praise for *Now You See It...*

"A sublime and deadpan debut that cocks an eyebrow and reminds us that it is never a light thing, this leaving home, though we all must try."—*Esquire*

"Bathsheba Monk is a writer I'll be talking about when I talk about brilliant new writers. *Now You See It . . .* is the work of an imaginative, funny, and electrically gifted storyteller."—Tim O'Brien, author of *The Things They Carried*

"The stories use deadpan humor to combat a sense of hopelessness and economic futility."—*The New Yorker*

"[A] sassy, hard-boiled book of stories, some of which will break your heart . . . Monk's Cokesville stories



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convincingly span more than forty years of coal dust and hard living. . . . All of the stories are touching, some profoundly so.”—*The Buffalo News*

About the Author

Bathsheba Monk was born to a family of Pennsylvania coal miners. After being discharged from the Army, she lived in Europe. She recently settled in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where she is writing her second book.

Discussion Questions

1. In “Small Fry,” Annie and Theresa are trying to find their professional wings. What real and/or imagined obstacles have kept them, so far, from realizing their place in the world? How does Theresa feel about the baby she is carrying?
2. Do you think Theodore, in “Hocus Pocus,” really intended to disappear in the magic act? Is money the real issue to Theodore? Felix loves Theodore, but does Theodore love Felix?
3. Discuss the motif of flying in “Flying Lesson.” Who manages to fly and who gets grounded?
4. The slam book that Annie is hiding in “Slam Book” is a way for teenagers to monitor and censor each others’ behavior. How does the book motivate the story’s young characters?
5. In “Congratulations, Goldie Katowitz,” Annie is a teenager trying to figure out what to do with her life, because it seems to her that the conventional options of job, college, and marriage, are either undesirable or out of her reach. What role does the sudden reappearance of her grandfather, Theodore, play in her life at this point?
6. What does Mrs. Szilborski discover about herself in “Little Yellow Dogs”? Should Mrs. Wojik have known better than to tell Mrs. Szilborski about Mr. Szilborski’s joke about being reincarnated as a dog? Does grief make you lose your inhibitions?
7. In “Annie Kusiak’s Meaning of Life,” does Annie discover the meaning of her life? Is Annie’s Babba wise or is she just crazy? Is Rabbi White right about life when he says: “I don’t have the answers. I only have the questions.”
8. What does Theresa Gojuk discover about herself in “Now You See It”? Based on his last act, did Bruno Gojik have a “Zen” personality?
9. Who rescues Mrs. Szewczak in “Mrs. Szewczak and the Rescue Dog”? What does she need saving



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from?

10. Discuss the implications of taking another person's life—whether illegally or legally—in “Do Not Revive.”
11. In “Last Call,” Margaret Gojuk is trying to find her place in a dying town with a dying mother who loves her sister more than she loves her. Why doesn't Margaret just leave?
12. In “Mrs. Herbinko's Birthday Party,” Mrs. Herbinko finds out she was praying for the wrong man. Was she fickle to get interested in the “new” Mr. Herbinko?
13. Milos Gojuk feels obsolete in “The Great Wall” when he has to interview his probable replacement. How does Ms. Mohandes feel about replacing him?
14. What does Annie Kusiak find out about her parents, her brother, and herself in “Writing Lesson”?
15. Do you think Monica's life, in “Pieces of Paper,” would have been better or worse if she had known her father? She fell in love with Jack when she was looking for her father. Do you think she would have fallen in love with him if she had met him under different circumstances?
16. In “Now You Don't,” do you think Annie will stay married to her Texas oilman now that she's realized what her purpose in life is? Do you think people are happier when they try to maintain a close physical tie to their past, or do you think they are happier when they create a new life for themselves?
17. In “Excellent Sperm,” do you see any similarities between Theodore Cheslock, the protagonist of “Hocus Pocus” and Nick Minarekov?