

## Reading Group Guide

*A Girl Called Sidney* by Courtney Yasmineh

### About *A Girl Called Sidney*

Set in the late '70s, *A Girl Called Sidney: The Coldest Place* by rock musician Courtney Yasmineh is a searing, nerve-rattling story of a mature 17-year-old whose family disintegrates in spectacular fashion in affluent suburban Chicago.

After first spiriting her mother away and then running away herself to the family's remote Northwoods cabin in Minnesota, Sidney challenges herself to survive alone and find her voice over the course of a brutal winter.

The narrative takes the reader on a dark and moody ride back and forth in both time and place, between Chicago and a tiny rural town. Getting inside Sidney's head as she tries to make sense of a cast of characters – family, hangers-on, and old and new friends – the novel examines the roots of their dysfunction while Sidney plots the future and works to make real her pursuit of music.

With appeal to readers of the recent rash of women rocker bios – and contemporary fiction of the heartland – the story looks with a fresh perspective back to a distinct time and the experiences of a young woman that will resonate with many adults.

*A Girl Called Sidney* by Courtney Yasmineh is published by Gibson House Press, 2017. 318 pages. Trade paperback ISBN-13: 9780986154126. Also available in ebook formats.

### Reviews

“As a fan of Courtney Yasmineh’s songwriting, I wasn’t at all surprised to see her gift for depicting the details of both human strengths and foibles on every page of her debut novel. Sidney breathes with the passion of a young woman finding her truest self in a world which seems dead-set against such discovery.”– *Peter Himmelman, Grammy and Emmy nominated songwriter, and author of Let Me Out (Unlock your creative mind and bring your ideas to life)*

“Courtney Yasmineh is a gutsy girl, so it’s no wonder that the subject of her debut novel is also a gutsy girl!”  
– *Larry Webman, Music Agent, Paradigm Talent Agency*

## About the author

COURTNEY YASMINEH is a rock musician and singer-songwriter with a rock chick's frankness, irony, and guts. She has several albums and thousands of road miles to her credit. *A Girl Called Sidney* is her first novel. She lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Follow her on Facebook: [facebook.com/CourtneyYasmineh](https://www.facebook.com/CourtneyYasmineh) or website [CourtneyYasmineh.com](http://CourtneyYasmineh.com).

## Discussion questions

1. The book title is “A Girl Called Sidney” and at that time in America (1960s-70s), the name Sidney was mostly used for a man’s name. What is the significance for Sidney to carry a name that was usually assigned to males only?
2. What relevance does the subtitle, “The Coldest Place,” have? How many meanings can that title take on for Sidney? Who utters those words in the story?
3. By the end of the story, Sidney is eighteen years old. At that point, does she understand or know her parents? As we read, are we able to glean a realistic view of either parent through Sidney’s telling of the story?
4. Is Preston, Sidney’s brother, a character to love or revile? As a reader, would you say that you and Sidney share the same feeling about him?
5. Are there moments in the story, for Sidney or for her mother, where being female is a drawback? In 1970s white suburban America, these two women were making difficult choices. What strikes you as different from how they could operate as women today?
6. Could a story like this take place in today’s America? How have things changed or not changed in almost fifty years, especially with respect to families in crisis, teen emancipation, or divorce?
7. How does Sidney feel about her family home in Chicago? How does she feel about the cabin? What do these places come to signify in the story?
8. Music is a strong thread throughout the story. What would Sidney’s life have been like without music?
9. What is your reaction to the statement that Sidney is betrayed in this story? Where are any obvious—and maybe more subtle—betrayals that unfold?
10. Does Sidney come out “smelling like a rose”? Who does she hurt? Who does she betray? Could she have changed the course of history for her family if she had conducted herself differently? What should she have done?