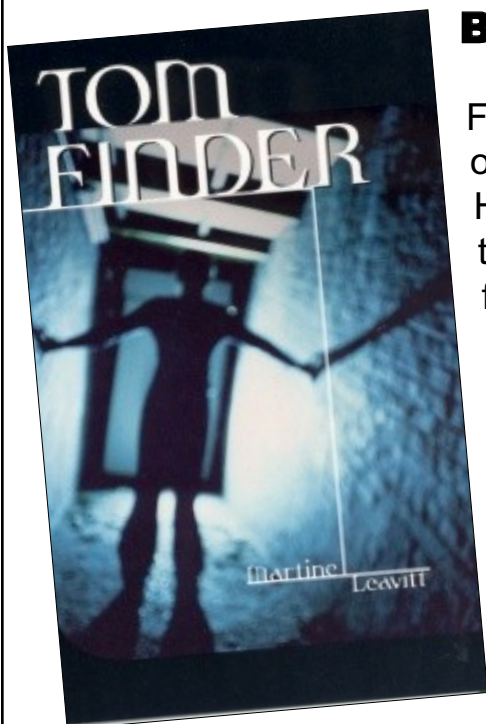


Tom Finder

by Martine Leavitt



BOOK SUMMARY:

From the outset of this riveting story, fifteen-year-old Tom is a kid on the streets living by his wits. He finds that he is on a quest to find another lost teenager whose First Nations father is desperate for news of his son. In the process, Tom learns to survive and begins to get a sense of his inner strengths. Although Tom doesn't know why, in his former life, Mozart's *The Magic Flute* has been crucially important to him. When he finally attends a performance of the opera, the past explodes his consciousness. Who will he be now? Will he be the Tom of the past? Or will he be the new Tom, the person he has built out of his street experiences and emerging convictions?

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

Born in 1953 into a military family, Martine grew up in various towns and cities across Canada. She moved to Calgary in 1974, where she married soon after, and had six children over eleven years.

In 1990, as a single parent, she attended the University of Calgary and studied Honours English. One year before graduation, she married Greg Leavitt. Martine graduated in 1996 with First Class Honours. After working for one year, she left this job to have her seventh child.

Martine confesses that she writes during lunch hours at work. She is presently working as a copy editor for SMART Technologies Inc.

Pre-Reading Questions

1. The main characters in *Tom Finder* are homeless and living on the streets. Make a list of some of the problems and issues that might be common in the lives of homeless people.
2. Memory loss is an important idea in *Tom Finder*. Imagine you can't remember anything that happened before you walked into the room you're in right now. What would you know about yourself?
3. In *Tom Finder*, an opera called *The Magic Flute* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is mentioned. An opera is made up of both words and music that tell a dramatic story. At the start of every chapter in *Tom Finder*, the author Martine Leavitt, uses a quotation from the story of *The Magic Flute*. The story in an opera is called the libretto, which means "little book" in Italian. Use the following web links to find out more about Mozart and the libretto of *The Magic Flute*.

Island of Freedom – Biography of Mozart

<http://www.island-of-freedom.com/MOZART.HTM>
A simple biography of Mozart.

Classical Music Pages-Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

<http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/mozart.html>
A detailed biography with links to more information about Mozart's musical works.

The Magic Flute Synopsis

From The New York City Opera: Learning Centre:
Synopsis
http://www.nycopera.com/learning/resource/synopses/the_magic_flute.asp

Discussion Questions**Chapter 1**

1. What clues help you guess Tom's age? How old do you think he is?
2. What do you think might have happened to Tom to make him forget everything but his first name?
3. Why does Tom begin to think he is invisible?

Chapter 2

4. Tom finds notes about Mozart written in his notebook. Which words in the notes are spelled incorrectly?
5. What is "the Core"?
6. Samuel Wolflegs tells Tom to sleep by the river and he will remain safe. When Tom watches the river on page 26, he thinks that rivers can flow through you and wash your heart and head from the inside. What do you think Tom means?

Chapter 3

7. Tom thinks of Samuel Wolflegs as a medicine man. What reasons does Samuel give for why his son, Daniel, takes drugs?
8. What is Tom saving his money for? Why? Do you think his planned purchase is a good idea?
9. When Tom listens to the beginning of the opera, *The Magic Flute*, he is very upset. He says he feels "gravity" in the music. This is how he describes gravity on page 38: "This is what gravity could do to you if it decided to pick on you: it made you too heavy to get up and look for a job; it made your heart so heavy inside that you could feel it beating where your stomach should be, and how could you care about anything with your heart half-eaten-up like that? It made breathing take all your energy. Sitting up deserved applause; making yourself clean deserved a hero's medal." List some other words for what Tom means by gravity.

Chapter 4

10. Why does the man in suit and tie sit on the bench in the park every day?
11. On page 54, Pepsi says he can't be hurt because he's already "dead" and he describes "Forget." What do you think Pepsi is talking about?

Chapter 5

12. Janice tells Tom about Pam's new boyfriend named Cupid. What does she mean on page 65 when she says Cupid is "not a real boyfriend. He's a player, a seller"?
13. Tom finally goes into the police station. Why do you think that his parents aren't looking for him?

Chapter 6

14. When Tom, Janice and Pam are looking at the fancy window display and talking about people who wear diamonds, Janice asks: "How can they have fun, knowing there's us?" How would you answer Janice's question?

Chapter 7

15. What does Jeans mean on page 88 when he calls some of his friends "girl fish" on the hook? What is your opinion about how the "girl fish" make money?
16. Why is Pam having trouble staying in school? What does Tom think might happen to her if she stays with Cupid and hangs out with her girl friends on the street?

Chapter 8

17. Tom has followed lots of clues to find Daniel Wolflegs, but he hasn't found him. Why do you think he keeps trying?
18. Janice tells Tom she has postpartum psychosis. Look up these words in a dictionary. What challenges face homeless people who need health care?
19. Tom listens to other street kids in the Spaghetti Factory tell stories about their families and why they live on the street. What does Tom believe about his own parents? Do you think it's true?

Chapter 10

20. When Tom goes to the opera and hears *The Magic Flute*, it helps him remember his past. What happened that made Tom lose his memory? What was his life like at home?
21. When Tom's memory comes back, he remembers himself on page 126 as a "stupid, worthless, bad speller." On page 131, Tom feels good about himself and realises "he could decide from now on what was true about himself, his good-speller, good-swimmer, gravity-defying self that had been

there all along." What did Tom do that made him feel better about himself? Why do you think it made him feel better?

22. Tom runs back to his mom's apartment, but doesn't stop and go inside. Why do you think he decides not to go in?
23. Part One: Writers sometimes mention famous books, people, or music in their own books. These references are called allusions. An allusion can be a brief mention or it can be woven through a whole story. In *Tom Finder*, Martine Leavitt weaves allusions to Mozart's *The Magic Flute* through the whole novel. At the opera, Tom remembers the story from *The Magic Flute* and writes it in his notebook. Read Tom's version of the story on page 122. What are similarities between *The Magic Flute* and the events in Tom's life?

Part Two: Now read this description of *The Magic Flute* written by an opera fan and art critic: "There is a large cast of characters including the Queen of the Night, and her daughter, the beautiful and courageous Pamina. There is the handsome hero, Tamino, on a road trip, and his friend, the bird seller, Papageno. Papageno ultimately finds his Papagena, Tamino ultimately wins Pamina." (Adapted from a quote by Arthur Lazere: <http://www.culturevulture.net/Opera/Magic-Flute.html>) Write down these names of characters in *The Magic Flute*: Pamina, Tamino, the bird seller Papageno, and Papagina. Look closely at the names and try to match them to characters in *Tom Finder*.

Chapter 12

24. What does Tom decide is the most important thing he has found? Why is it the most important?
25. At the end of the book, Tom doesn't mention going back to live with his mom and her boyfriend. Do you think the book ends with hope for Tom's future or not? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Tom writes things in his notebook that are true about himself. He writes things he is sure of and things he would like to be true. Make a list of things that are true about you. Make another list of the things you would like to be true.

GUIDELINES FOR ANSWERS TO PRE-READING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

There are no right and wrong answers to these questions. These guidelines are meant to provide more context for how each question was intended and to offer ideas about how group discussion might develop.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Safety, Shelter and warmth, Food, Keeping clean, Health care, Addictions, Illegal ways to make money like selling drugs, prostitution, etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

1. Clue: mentions talking to girls that you like
Clue: mentions spelling test
Guess at age: 12 – 14
2. Tom is in pain. Maybe he had been beaten up.
3. No one acknowledges him or looks at him as he passes.

Chapter 2

4. Composer, magician
5. Downtown
6. This question is an opportunity to talk about the healing power of nature and the First Nations spiritual beliefs of Samuel Wolflegs.

Chapter 3

7. Samuel discusses his belief on page 30 “Bad medicine. Demons . . . he wouldn’t use the good magic I had to give him.”
8. A billboard to contact his parents.
9. Hopelessness, fear, depression, etc.

Chapter 4

10. Osteoporosis
11. Pepsi talks about drug addiction and uses “Forget” to refer to drugs.

Chapter 5

12. Cupid is a pimp.
13. This is an opinion question. Reasons might include: maybe they’re dead or they don’t want him or they’re in another country, etc.

Chapter 6

14. An opportunity to discuss social attitudes about homelessness.

Chapter 7

15. The girl fish are prostitutes. The opinion portion of the question is an opportunity to talk about the realities and limited choices facing homeless women.
16. Page 89: Pam has been late, Cupid destroyed her textbook. Tom thinks Cupid will turn Pam to prostitution.

Chapter 8

17. See page 98 for one explanation: “How could he explain what he needed Daniel for? Because finding him would make true what he thought about himself. Because finding Daniel meant he could do anything in the world, and gravity didn’t win. Because finding Daniel meant he was a poet.” This question gives the opportunity to discuss Tom’s belief that what he writes in his notebook will come true.
18. This discussion could include many issues: no health insurance, no money to buy medication, no way to keep things clean all the time, poor diet, etc.
19. The passage on page 103 explains what Tom thinks of his parents: “Tom listened but couldn’t relate. He had great parents . . . get an education.”

Chapter 10

20. Tom remembers his past life and the beating from Bruce on pages 121 – 126.
21. Tom gives Jeans the money to fly to Jamaica. A discussion of why this makes him feel better might include ideas like Tom always feeling powerless, but making the decision makes him feel like he has power; that it feels good to help others; that Tom knows how to solve problems, etc.
22. This opinion question is an opportunity to talk about Tom’s desire to reinvent himself and not go back to an abusive situation. The group might also discuss Tom’s options: live on the street vs. live in abusive situation, etc.
23. Part One: Explain that the similarities are loose. The daughter of the Queen of the Night is both Daniel Wolflegs and Pam because Tom is looking for Daniel and he falls in love with Pam. The magic flute might be Tom’s pen because writing helps him through ordeals. The group can discuss different times when Tom has had to show courage (e.g. when his hand is slammed in the door)
Part Two: Pamina = Pam; Tamino = Tom, the bird

seller; Papageno = Jeans who is surrounded by feathers in his nest in the tree like a bird; Papagina = Gina, Jeans' girl friend in Jamaica.

Chapter 12

24. Page 141: "Even if he didn't find anything else, he'd found the most important thing: Tom."
25. An opinion question. The group might want to discuss what else Tom could do besides going back to his mom's apartment.