

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Chloe Benjamin is the author of *The Immortalists*, a *New York Times* bestseller, and *The Anatomy of Dreams*.

A Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, LibraryReads favorite, and #1 Indie Next pick, *The Immortalists* was named a best book of 2018 by NPR, *The Washington Post*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and others.

The Anatomy of Dreams received the Edna Ferber Fiction Book Award and was long listed for the 2014 Center for Fiction First Novel Prize.

Originally from San Francisco, CA, Chloe is a graduate of Vassar College and the M.F.A. in fiction at the University of Wisconsin. Her work has been translated into over thirty languages. She lives with her husband in Madison, WI.

- [Author's website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you enjoy the writing choices that the author made in reference to the narration? Did you enjoy the story being told by the different siblings? If you had to choose one sibling to tell the story, who would it be and why?
2. Which sibling did you identify with the most? How did their story connect with your own? Would you have made the same choices as them, or do you think they should have done some things differently?
3. The power of belief—whether it be magic, religious faith or storytelling—is an important theme in the novel. How does belief affect each of the siblings? What is different or similar about the stories they tell themselves?
4. Do you believe the siblings' fate was predestined? What makes you believe it was or was not?
5. The novel takes place in very different settings: 1960s New York City, the San Francisco dance scene, glitzy Las Vegas hotels. In what ways do these locations affect the characters? Why do you think all four of the siblings moved away from New York City?

6. At the end of the novel, Gertie tells Varya about the beauty and freedom in uncertainty, questioning why her children believed the fortune teller. Did you believe the fortune teller? What gives the fortune teller her power? What freedoms does uncertainty bring?
7. If you were given the opportunity to know the date of your death, would you want to hear it? How would you live your life differently if you knew how and when you were going to die?
8. What is the significance of Eddie O'Donoghue? He was such a minor character and yet, he was a common thread in all four of the siblings' stories.
9. Do you think the story would have been different if it had featured a Christian or Muslim family?
10. What do you think happened to Ruby in the end?
11. Do you think Varya dies on her assigned day or changed her destiny?
12. Three of the siblings had significant others, yet only one character has sex scenes on the page of the novel. What is the importance of the sex or lack thereof for each character?
13. *The Immortalists* explores the degree to which we shape our own destinies. Do you believe that the siblings' fate was preordained? Why or why not?
14. The novel is narrated by the four siblings in separate sections. What was your reading experience when you switched sections? Did you identify more closely with certain siblings?
15. At its heart, *The Immortalists* is a family love story, exploring both past and future generations of the Gold family. In what ways does family history shape us? What kind of legacies do the four siblings leave behind?
16. How do magic and reality blur in the novel? Were there any particular moments that seemed to defy logic? Why are certain characters drawn to magic and the unknowable more than others?
17. Discuss the siblings' significant others: Raj, Mira and Robert. How are their lives affected by the prophecy? How do romantic and familial relationships interact and contrast in *The Immortalists*?

<https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-immortalists/guide> and
<https://www.beyondthebookends.com/2018/03/16/book-club-for-the-immortalists/>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Restless during the seismic summer of 1969 on New York's Lower East Side, the four Gold siblings, descendants of Jews who fled violent persecution overseas, sneak off to see a fortune-teller, who tells them each, separately, the date of his or her death. So begins Benjamin's bewitching and provocative second novel (following *The Anatomy of Dreams*, 2014). Each character's story is saturated with paradox in this delving family saga laced with history and science and a heart-pounding inquiry into self, inheritance, fate, and the mind-body connection. At 16, Simon runs away to San Francisco, comes out as gay, and discovers his gift for dance just as AIDS begins its shattering assault. Magician Klara calls herself the Immortalist. Daniel is a military doctor; scientist Varya is conducting a longevity study with rhesus monkeys. All are afflicted by the poison of prophecy. Aligned in her artistic command, imagination, and deep curiosity about the human condition with Nicole Krauss, Dara Horn, and Stacey D'Erasmus, Benjamin asks what we want out of life. Duration? Success? Meaning? Who do we live for? Do our genes determine our path? How does trauma alter us? Benjamin has created mesmerizing characters and richly suspenseful predicaments in this profound and glimmering novel of death's ever-shocking inevitability and life's wondrously persistent whirl of chance and destiny. -- Seaman, Donna (Reviewed 12/15/2017) (Booklist, vol 114, number 8, p87)

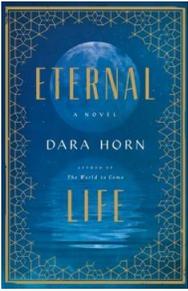
Library Journal

An Edna Ferber Prize winner for *The Anatomy of Dreams*, Benjamin opens her second novel with four children in 1969 New York daringly visiting a fortune-teller said to be able to predict the date of one's death. Elder siblings Daniel and Varya grow up to become an army doctor and a scientist, respectively, while rebellious Klara works as a magician in Las Vegas and the insouciant youngest, Simon, finds love and dance in San Francisco. Yet thinking they know when they will die powerfully shapes their lives, often to their detriment, and we see each sibling struggling with this burden in four distinct narratives. How differently would their lives have turned out had they not made that visit? Could Benjamin have told the story of four close and sometimes troubled siblings without recourse to this hint of magic? The answer to that last question is yes, as the narratives she offers are intriguingly intertwined and beautifully rendered. Yet the added dimension proves effective while feeling entirely natural, and readers can believe what they want of the fortune-teller's power. VERDICT Both thought-provoking and entertaining, this title is highly recommended for a wide range of readers. Barbara Hoffert, *Library Journal* --Barbara Hoffert (Reviewed 08/01/2017) (*Library Journal*, vol 142, issue 13, p76)

Publisher's Weekly

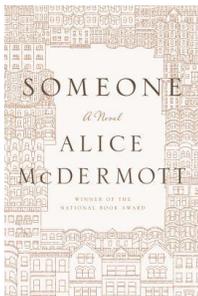
In her second novel, Benjamin (*The Anatomy of Dreams*) constructs an imaginative and satisfying family saga. In 1969, the four rambunctious Gold children, Simon, Klara, Daniel, and Varya, visit a psychic on Manhattan's Lower East Side who predicts the date each of them will die. The novel then follows how the siblings deal with news of their expiration dates. In the late '70s, Klara and Simon, the youngest, run off to San Francisco, where the closeted Simon becomes a dancer and Klara a magician and stage illusionist who believes she can commune with the spirits of dead relatives. In 2006, Daniel, a married army doctor based in Kingston, N.Y., learns that the psychic who foretold their fates is a con artist wanted by the FBI, and attempts to track her down. In 2010, Varya, the eldest Gold, is a longevity researcher who feels closest to the rhesus monkeys she uses for her experiments. But one day, a journalist named Luke interviews her and, in the process, changes the course of her life. The author has written a cleverly structured novel steeped in Jewish lore and the history of four decades of American life. The four Gold siblings are wonderful creations, and in Benjamin's expert hands their story becomes a moving meditation on fate, faith, and the family ties that alternately hurt and heal.

READALIKES



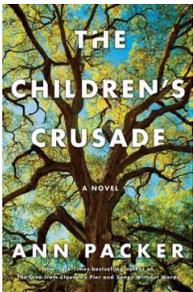
***Eternal Life* by Dara Horn**

Ever since she made a deal to save her son's life in Roman-occupied Jerusalem, Rachel has been doomed to live eternally having hundreds of children and being stalked by an obsessed man, but as her descendants develop new technologies for immortality, she realizes that, for them to live fully, she must die.



***Someone* by Alice McDermott**

The story of a Brooklyn-born woman's life - her family, her neighborhood, her daily trials and triumphs - from childhood to old age.



***The Children's Crusade* by Ann Packer**

When their younger sibling returns, the three oldest Blair children find their lives disrupted in ways they could have never imagined as they each tell their story that is interwoven with portraits of their family at crucial points in their history.