

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Matt Haig is an author for children and adults. His memoir *Reasons to Stay Alive* was a number one bestseller, staying in the Sunday Time's top ten for 49 weeks. His children's book *A Boy Called Christmas* was a runaway hit and is translated in over 40 languages. It is being made into a film starring Maggie Smith, Sally Hawkins and Jim Broadbent and The Guardian called it an 'instant classic'. His novels for adults include the award-winning *How to Stop Time*, *The Radleys*, *The Humans*, and the number one bestseller *The Midnight Library*.

He has sold over three million books worldwide.

Matthaig.com

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group?
2. The Midnight Library is different for each person who enters it. Nora experienced it as a library because of the meaningful relationship she had with Mrs. Elm, her childhood school librarian. Later, we learn that Hugo experienced it as a video store, with a cherished uncle instead of a librarian. What do you think your Midnight Library would be? And who would be there?
3. Nora experiences a number of alternate lives in which she achieves a great deal of success in one area of her life at the expense of all the rest, be it in music, swimming, or polar exploration. Do you think it's possible to reach fame and fortune in a single field and still maintain balance with other areas of your life?
4. In the library, Nora learns that the life she gave her cat was one of the best he could have experienced. Are there any parts of your life that you feel could not be improved by living it differently?
5. In her life before she finds herself in the Midnight Library, Nora gave up many of the pursuits that brought her joy because she didn't feel like she could be the best at them. Do you think it's understandable that she would have given these things up? Do you think that wanting to be the best at something can inhibit us from enjoying it?

6. Mrs. Elm showed Nora the Book of Regrets when she first entered the library, and Nora was overwhelmed by it when she first looked in. But as she experienced more and more lives, her list of regrets began to shrink. Do you think by considering the ways in which our lives might have turned out differently our regrets truly go away, or do we simply learn to live with them?
7. In the world of the Midnight Library, the books take on the role of portals into alternate realities. Do you think the role books played in the Midnight Library is similar to the role they play in your own life?
8. As the story progresses, Nora finds herself in lives that she could be more satisfied with than others that proved more difficult. Do you think you would be able to live as an alternate version of yourself? Would you want to?
9. Over the course of the book, Nora lives a whole spectrum of lives, some for minutes and some for months, but only at the end does time actually pass, and by the time she wakes up in her root life it is one minute and twenty-seven seconds past midnight and her outlook on life has changed entirely. What do you think this says about the speed at which we decide things about our lives and ourselves? Does it take a lifetime or a just few seconds?
10. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it? Is anything left unresolved or ambiguous? How do you picture the characters' lives after the end of the story?

penguinrandomhouse.com

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Nora Seed believes her life is made up of wrong choices. She didn't become an Olympic swimmer; she quit her brother's band; she left her fiancé two days before the wedding. Living with crippling disappointment and situational depression, Nora decides that the only right choice for her is to end her existence. But "between life and death there is a midnight library," a library that contains multiple volumes of the lives she could have had if she had made different choices. With the help of the friendly librarian Mrs. Elm, Nora tries on these lives in hopes of finding one where she will truly be happy. In the process, Nora finds that life is made of choices of both little and big consequence, and sometimes the choice to believe in oneself is both the biggest and smallest decision a person can make. Haig's latest (after the nonfiction collection *Notes on a Nervous Planet*, 2019) is a stunning contemporary story that explores the choices that make up a life, and the regrets that can stifle it. A compelling novel that will resonate with readers. -- LynnDee Wathen (Reviewed 8/1/2020) (Booklist, vol 116, number 22, p22)

Publisher's Weekly

Haig (*How to Stop Time*) draws on quantum wave theory in this charming if sometimes laborious account of the many possible lives of a depressed woman. Nora, in her mid-30s and living in the small English town of Bedford, suffers from "situational depression"—though, as she wryly observes, "It's just that I keep on having new... situations." After she gets fired from her job and her cat dies, she attempts suicide, only to wake up in a book-lined liminal zone, where she is guided by a librarian: "Between life and death there is a library ... Every book provides a chance to try another life you could have lived." There, Nora discovers what would have happened had she not abandoned her promising swimming career, called off her engagement, or left the rock band she started with her

brother. Each time an alternate life disappoints or doesn't feel quite right, Nora exits, reappearing in the library to continue browsing for the perfect story. While the formula grows repetitive, the set changes provide novelty, as Haig whisks Nora from Australian beaches to a South American rock concert tour to an Arctic encounter with a polar bear. Haig's agreeable narrative voice and imagination will reward readers who take this book off the shelf. (Sept.) --Staff (Reviewed 07/27/2020) (Publishers Weekly, vol 267, issue 30, p)

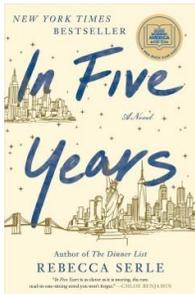
Library Journal

If you could live your life over again, would you make the same choices? Nora Seed is depressed: Her best friend has ghosted her from the other side of the world; she is estranged from her brother; she just got fired; and her cat died. Suicide seems to be the answer, but instead of dying, she awakens in a library of infinite books, all about the lives she could have lived. There she meets her school librarian, who guides her first to her "Book of Regrets," where she sees every choice she made, while the rest of the books take her on journeys to visit her potential lives. What if, instead of quitting the band, she became a rock star? Or instead of leaving school, she became a world-renowned glaciologist? Nora gets to live these alternative lives, the goal being to find the life that will make her happy. But happiness, even in this fantasy, still proves elusive; perhaps that wasn't the goal after all. VERDICT Haig (*How to Stop Time*) takes readers on a journey of quantum physics that will have them feeling that they actually understand the theory. Most reminiscent of Ken Grimwood's *Replay*. --Stacy Alesi (Reviewed 10/01/2020) (Library Journal, vol 145, issue 10, p69)

Kirkus Reviews

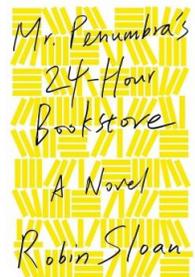
An unhappy woman who tries to commit suicide finds herself in a mysterious library that allows her to explore new lives. How far would you go to address every regret you ever had? That's the question at the heart of Haig's latest novel, which imagines the plane between life and death as a vast library filled with books detailing every existence a person could have. Thrust into this mysterious way station is Nora Seed, a depressed and desperate woman estranged from her family and friends. Nora has just lost her job, and her cat is dead. Believing she has no reason to go on, she writes a farewell note and takes an overdose of antidepressants. But instead of waking up in heaven, hell, or eternal nothingness, she finds herself in a library filled with books that offer her a chance to experience an infinite number of new lives. Guided by Mrs. Elm, her former school librarian, she can pull a book from the shelf and enter a new existence—as a country pub owner with her ex-boyfriend, as a researcher on an Arctic island, as a rock star singing in stadiums full of screaming fans. But how will she know which life will make her happy? This book isn't heavy on hows; you won't need an advanced degree in quantum physics or string theory to follow its simple yet fantastical logic. Predicting the path Nora will ultimately choose isn't difficult, either. Haig treats the subject of suicide with a light touch, and the book's playful tone will be welcome to readers who like their fantasies sweet if a little too forgettable. A whimsical fantasy about learning what's important in life. (Kirkus Reviews, August 1, 2020)

READALIKES



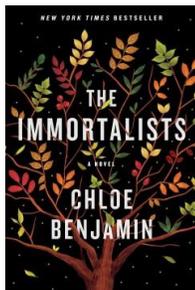
***In Five Years* by Rebecca Serle**

An ambitious young lawyer on the brink of having it all disregards a vivid dream about how different her life will be in five years, before meeting the man in her vision nearly five years later.



***Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore* by Robin Sloan**

The Great Recession has shuffled Clay Jannon out of his life as a San Francisco web-design drone and landed him a new gig working the night shift at Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore. But after just a few days on the job, Clay begins to realize that this store is even more curious than the name suggests. There are only a few customers, but they come in repeatedly and never seem to actually buy anything. Soon he embarks on a complex analysis of the customers' behaviour and ropes his friends into helping him figure out just what's going on.



***The Immortalists* by Chloe Benjamin**

Sneaking out to get readings from a traveling psychic reputed to be able to tell customers when they will die, four adolescent siblings from New York City's 1969 Lower East Side hide what they learn from each other before embarking on five decades of respective experiences shaped by their determination to control fate.