



The Giver of Stars

By Jojo Moyes

About the Author

Jojo Moyes is a British journalist and the author of 10 novels published from 2002 to the present. She studied at Royal Holloway, University of London and Bedford New College, London University.

In 1992 she won a bursary financed by The Independent newspaper to attend the postgraduate newspaper journalism course at City University, London. She subsequently worked for The Independent for the next 10 years (except for one year, when she worked in Hong Kong for the Sunday Morning Post) in various roles, becoming Assistant News Editor in 1988. In 2002 she became the newspaper's Arts and Media Correspondent.

Moyes became a full-time novelist in 2002, when her first book *Sheltering Rain* was published. She is most well known for her later novels, *The Last Letter From Your Lover* (2010), *Me Before You* (2012), and *The Girl You Left Behind* (2013), all of which were received with wide critical acclaim.

She is one of only a few authors to have won the Romantic Novelists' Association's Romantic Novel of the Year Award twice—in 2004 for *Foreign Fruit* and in 2011 for *The Last Letter From Your Lover*. She continues to write articles for The Daily Telegraph.

Moyes lives on a farm in Saffron Walden, Essex with her husband, journalist Charles Arthur, and their three children. (*Adapted from Wikipedia.*)

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About the Book

From the author of Me Before You, set in Depression-era America, a breathtaking story of five extraordinary women and their remarkable journey through the mountains of Kentucky and beyond.

Alice Wright marries handsome American Bennett Van Cleve hoping to escape her stifling life in England.

But small-town Kentucky quickly proves equally claustrophobic, especially living alongside her overbearing father-in-law. So when a call goes out for a team of women to deliver books as part of Eleanor Roosevelt's new traveling library, Alice signs on enthusiastically.

The leader, and soon Alice's greatest ally, is Margery, a smart-talking, self-sufficient woman who's never asked a man's permission for anything. They will be joined by three other singular women who become known as the Packhorse Librarians of Kentucky.

What happens to them—and to the men they love—becomes an unforgettable drama of loyalty, justice, humanity and passion.

These heroic women refuse to be cowed by men or by convention. And though they face all kinds of dangers in a landscape that is at times breathtakingly beautiful, at others brutal, they're committed to their job: bringing books to people who have never had any, arming them with facts that will change their lives.

Based on a true story rooted in America's past, *The Giver of Stars* is unparalleled in its scope and epic in its storytelling. Funny, heartbreaking, enthralling, it is destined to become a modern classic—a richly rewarding novel of women's friendship, of true love, and of what happens when we reach beyond our grasp for the great beyond. (*From the publisher.*)

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Discussion Questions

1. While writing and researching *The Giver of Stars*, author Jojo Moyes visited Kentucky several times, stayed in a tiny cabin on the side of a mountain, rode horses along the trails, and met the people of Kentucky. Did the characters and sense of place feel authentic to you?
2. Alice, a Brit, is an outsider, but eventually acclimates to her new home in Appalachia, and even falls in love with her new home. She grew up in a rarefied world in England, so the change to “unremarkable” Baileyville proved quite the shock to her system. Have you ever moved to a distinctly different location? What was that transition like? How did you adapt?
3. Literacy and censorship are significant issues in *The Giver of Stars*, issues that affect the women of the novel very differently from the men. Why do you think Moyes chose to focus on these topics?
4. Moyes has said she wanted to write a book about women who had agency and who actually did something worthwhile, rather than simply existing in a romantic or domestic plotline. Margery is the unofficial leader of the librarians and Alice eventually inherits that role when Margery is jailed. Yet throughout the book, most of the women do have their moments of agency. Which of these moments struck you most intensely? Did you ever wish a character had taken action when she hadn't? If so, when, and what could she have done different?
5. The novel features families from vastly different backgrounds, and one of the central issues in the book is that of class inequality. In which scenarios did you see these dynamics play out, and between which characters?
6. There are numerous ways in the book in which the acquisition of knowledge changes characters' lives: protecting their homes, educating their families, liberating themselves from marriages. Have you ever experienced such a shift—after gaining new knowledge—in your own life? How did it happen? If not, what held you back from making a change?

7. The relationships between men and women in this book vary greatly—from Margery and Sven’s loving, mutual respect and passion, to Bennett and Alice’s bewildered lack of understanding to the true love affair that blossoms between Alice and Fred. How did you come to understand the differences among these relationships? Did you relate to any of them in particular or to any of the problems these women faced in their romantic relationships?

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Author Interview

A Conversation with Jojo Moyes

Q. *The Giver of Stars* is based on the true story of the Packhorse Librarians of Kentucky. How did you discover this piece of history?

A. I was reading an edition of the Smithsonian magazine online and came across an extraordinary series of pictures of women on horseback. They were on rough, mountainous terrain, clutching parcels of books, gazing out proudly. I read the accompanying text, about the real-life horseback librarians of Kentucky, and knew immediately that I wanted to write a book about them.

Q. Fans who follow you on social media might have tracked your trip to Kentucky to research *The Giver of Stars*. What was your research process like?

A. Oh, I love research. I don't believe you can write effectively about a place without immersing yourself in it. I need the sights and smells and stories. I visited Kentucky three times between 2017 and 2019 and stayed in a tiny cabin on the side of a mountain, rode horses along the trails the women would have ridden, and talked to a lot of people to try and get not just the facts, but the rhythms of the language.

Q. Libraries play a key role in *The Giver of Stars*, and keen readers will notice you often include a library in your novels. Why are libraries so meaningful to you?

A. I was built in a library. My parents didn't have much money when I was growing up so the weekly visit to the local library was a key part of my education, and my love of reading. Libraries are one of the few resources where people can be sheltered, educated and entertained without having to pay, and it pains me that they are under such threat. Without knowledge, people have fewer opportunities to move upward.

Q. The protagonist in *The Giver of Stars*, Alice, is a British woman who moves to Kentucky after marrying an American man. Why did you choose to include a British character in this very American novel?

A. Well, it felt pretty audacious to be writing about Appalachia, even with research. I felt that if much of it was seen through the eyes of someone unfamiliar with that world, it made everything a little more accessible. Given it was such a closed world, I also liked the tensions inherent in introducing someone "foreign" into it.

Q. Literacy and censorship are huge issues in *The Giver of Stars*, something that affects the women of the novel very differently from the men. Why did you choose to focus on these issues, and do you feel they are still relevant today?

A. I think they've never been more relevant. We live in an age where the very notions of truth and facts are under attack—without knowledge we are prey to anyone who can work up a smart speech. Without knowledge women have little control over their own bodies. There are numerous ways in this book in which the acquisition of knowledge changes lives—protecting their homes, educating their families, liberating themselves from marriages.

Q. Many of your books deal with class struggles, and *The Giver of Stars* features families from vastly different backgrounds. Why is this an important subject matter to you, and how did you approach writing about class set during the Great Depression?

A. I did a lot of reading, and as with the modern day, the poor seemed to be disproportionately affected. To read about the mining communities of Depression-era America is to see class inequalities laid bare in the most explicit way. Many miners were little better than indentured servants, while the mine bosses made fortunes off the backs of their labor. Disputes like those in Harlan County were what happened when people attempted to push back. Also, I wanted this book to be full-blooded, in terms of the violence of the age, as well as the love stories. You can't write about Kentucky of that period without bringing the class struggles into it.

Q. The librarians in *The Giver of Stars* are incredibly positive about sex for women living in early twentieth-century Kentucky—the librarians quietly distribute a book focused on female pleasure, and one of the women stoutly refuses marriage, despite carrying on a relationship with a man for several years. Was it essential for you to emphasize women's agency in a time when it was so limited? Were any of the characters based on real women you encountered in your research?

A. One of the reasons I wanted to write this book in the first place was that I wanted to write about a woman of a certain age (i.e., not twenty-one) having great sex with a mutually respectful partner. It happens! And yet so often in fiction we don't see it. A woman's lot in Kentucky at that time was a pretty rotten one much of the time—it was a very patriarchal society, and domestic violence was rife—but I also discovered that the

women of the state are tough, proud, funny and resilient. I wanted Margery to reflect that, even while the inequality showed through elsewhere.

Q. *The Giver of Stars* is your first novel following the *Me Before You* trilogy. How did it feel to step away from characters you've been writing for so long?

A. It was tough leaving Louisa behind, but I fell so hard in love writing this book that from the moment I arrived in Kentucky I pretty much forgot her. I have never enjoyed writing a book like I enjoyed writing this one: I wrote when I was meant to be on holiday, at weekends, whenever I could spare half an hour to sit down. I didn't want to leave it, or these women. That rarely happens. So in that respect it was the loveliest way to leave *Me Before You* behind.

Q. The librarians develop very close relationships with their horses, spending long, solitary days with them while delivering books. Do you feel a special kinship with horses? Why are the horses so important to the story?

A. I have loved horses since I was five years old. For me they were a route to strength, independence and have given me some of the loveliest relationships of my life. I felt that this shone out of those pictures of the women—and of the reports I read. These were partnerships, and the horses and the women understood each other.

Q. What draws you to historical fiction?

A. I think it's always story, whether it's modern or historical. Some fact or snippet just lodges in my brain and I can't shift it. If it stays for months then it's usually insisting on being written about. It's no coincidence that this contains horses, love stories and library books—three of my favorite things. . . .

Q. What does the title *The Giver of Stars* mean?

A. *The Giver of Stars* is the title of a poem that forms a pivotal moment of the story. It's a beautiful, tender, romantic poem that spells nothing out but leaves you a little breathless and it was written by a woman who couldn't express what she really felt—a little like Alice and Frederick.

Q. What are the main themes of the book? What do you want people to take away from reading *The Giver of Stars*?

A. I wanted to write a book about women who had agency, and did worthwhile things, rather than simply existing in a romantic or domestic plotline. These women achieved epic things, and, more importantly, supported one another while doing it. I reject the constantly pushed narrative that says women must always be in competition with one another; in my experience other women have been my greatest friends and supports and I wanted to show that. Mostly I want to entertain and transport the reader a little, to make them laugh and cry. I really hope readers enjoy reading *The Giver of Stars* as much as I've enjoyed writing it.

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Other Links and Resources:

Book Reviews for the Giver of Stars: <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-reading-guides/fiction/11675-giver-of-stars-moyes?start=1>

Five Fun Facts about Giver of Stars: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=five+fun+Facts+about+giver+of+stars

Author Website: <https://www.jojomoyes.com/books/>

10 Things You Didn't Know About Jojo Moyes: <https://tvovermind.com/jojo-moyes/>

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