



Book Club Set

The Midnight Library

By Matt Haig

About the Author

Matt Haig is an author for children and adults. His memoir *Reasons to Stay Alive* was a number one bestseller, staying in the British top ten for 46 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.



About the Book



Between life and death there is a library, and within that library, the shelves go on forever. Every book provides a chance to try another life you could have lived. To see how things would be if you had made other choices . . . Would you have done anything different, if you had the chance to undo your regrets?”

A dazzling novel about all the choices that go into a life well lived, from the internationally bestselling author of *Reasons to Stay Alive* and *How To Stop Time*. Somewhere out beyond the edge of the universe there is a library that contains an infinite number of books, each one the story of another reality. One tells the story of your life as it is, along with another book for the other life you could have lived if you had made a different choice at any point in your life. While we all wonder how our lives might have been, what if you had the chance to go to the library and see for yourself? Would any of these other lives truly be better?

In *The Midnight Library*, Matt Haig’s enchanting new novel, Nora Seed finds herself faced with this decision. Faced with the possibility of changing her life for a new one, following a different career, undoing old breakups, realizing her dreams of becoming a glaciologist; she must search within herself as she travels through the Midnight Library to decide what is truly fulfilling in life, and what makes it worth living in the first place.

Retrieved from:<https://heathermarshallauthor.com/>

Discussion Questions



1. 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 Huge 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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 27 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 just a few seconds?

Author Interview

Matt, welcome! I am always so intrigued with that initial spark for a book.

Where did the idea for THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY originate?



I'd had an idea about a library between life and death for a long time. I have always been fascinated with fantastical libraries, such as Jorge Luis Borges's LIBRARY OF BABEL, because I feel libraries are a kind of magic in themselves. In the Midnight Library, each book on the shelf is another version of the protagonist, Nora Seed's life. There are infinite books and infinite versions, so – with the librarian's help – she has a chance to undo some of her regrets. Every time she opens a book, she falls into that life. I think the idea of wondering how your life would have played out differently is one that a lot of us think about from time to time. Also, my own personal experience with mental health issues, like depression and anxiety, obviously informed some of Nora's experience.

Your two nonfiction books, REASONS TO STAY ALIVE and NOTES ON A NERVOUS PLANET, discuss depression and anxiety, issues that are also at the heart of THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY. How do you blend your nonfiction writing with your fiction?

I think that whether I'm writing fiction or non-fiction, I always make sure I am writing the thing that interests me most at that time. I don't think there has been a book that has fused my interests more closely than this one. It just turns out that fiction was the most obvious way to explore the ideas of regret and happiness that play out in this book. When I was 24, I had a breakdown. I experienced depression, anxiety, and panic disorder, and was suicidal for quite a while. My recovery was long and slow. And yet despite all that, a lot of goodness came out of that experience. It made me a better, more grateful person, and one that wanted to write about these issues clearly and transparently and shamelessly. Non-fiction is great for this, but sometimes fiction allows you to go even deeper. It can allow you to use fantasy as a way of exploring ideas and experiences. For me, depression was often flavored with the desire to inhabit parallel

lives, lives where I had done something differently and ended in a different place. **THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY** explores that idea and takes it to the next level, I suppose. Writing it was a kind of self-therapy.

THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY is your first adult novel written from a woman's perspective. How did you approach writing from this different point of view, and how did it differ from writing from a man's perspective? Or, did it?

When I started writing this book, the narrator was male, but for some reason, I couldn't get a handle on the character – in some weird way – maybe because it was too close to me. So, I needed a narrator who was less obviously me and switching the gender helped do that. In terms of writing Nora's character, there are certain moments – in terms of how she is treated by other people – where her gender plays a part, but to be honest I wasn't seeing her as being defined by her gender, more by her initially desperate state of mind and the lack of options she felt she faced.

In **THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY, Nora gets the chance to live out alternate versions of her own life, based on her past regrets. During her exploration of these alternate realities, Nora becomes a pub owner, a glaciologist, a rock star, and an Olympic swimmer, to name a few. How did you come up with these alternate lives? Were any based on your own interests, or past regrets? And of all of Nora's lives, which do you think you'd most enjoy? And which would not be for you?**

I gave up piano lessons when I was twelve years old because I was a self-conscious boy trying to fit in. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like to continue with music, so the musician strand of her life definitely overlaps with my own wish fulfillment. I never wanted to be a glaciologist or an Olympic swimmer though. I suppose as a British person I have had the odd fantasy of being a pub landlord, but I'm pretty sure that would be a bad idea. I would probably like to live in a vineyard in California, at least to give it a try. I am not that great in cold weather so I would probably skip being a glaciologist.

Obviously, libraries play a key role in THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY. How I loved my childhood library—and librarian! Can you talk about libraries a bit?

Libraries have always been my safe space. When I was a kid, I used to spend a lot of time after school in my local library. There was a library in the center of the small town where I lived and it was my safe space. I think libraries should be especially valued these days, when particularly in my country, they are increasingly under threat. Libraries are one of the last public spaces that like us for who we are and not for our wallets. Libraries seemed the perfect metaphor for parallel lives as they are places that really do allow you to enter other worlds, if only for a while. In THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY, Nora encounters her school librarian from childhood, Mrs. Elm, who acts like a kind of guide, and she is an amalgam of various teachers and librarians I encountered in my youth. For other people in the world of the novel, their portal to other lives is something different, but I'd like to think mine, like Nora's, would be a library.

During our current moment, when many of us can barely leave our own homes, I'm sure a lot of people would like to enter a library full of alternate realities they can slip into as easily as opening a book. How do you think THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY relates to the current state of the world?

I think that when we are feeling physically confined our imaginations tend to roam into wilder territory. The idea of a place where we could go and be absolutely anything at all is possibly even more attractive now than in 2019 when I wrote it.

What do you hope readers will take away from THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY?

Well firstly I just hope they enjoy the story, but I also hope it helps them to think about their own lives and offers some comfort when feeling a sense of inadequacy or regret about their own present situation. Ultimately, like a lot of my books, I wrote it for myself. A kind of therapy for myself, a way of dealing with my own doubts and worries about the

passing of time. So, I hope readers find the same comfort in reading it as I did in writing it.

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Share your thoughts with other readers!



DATE: _____

BOOK CLUB: _____

BOOK TITLE: _____

As a group we rated this book:

1	2	3	4	5
Ugh!		It was OK...		Loved it!

Would we recommend this book to other book clubs?

Yes No Undecided

Why/why not?

Our discussion: