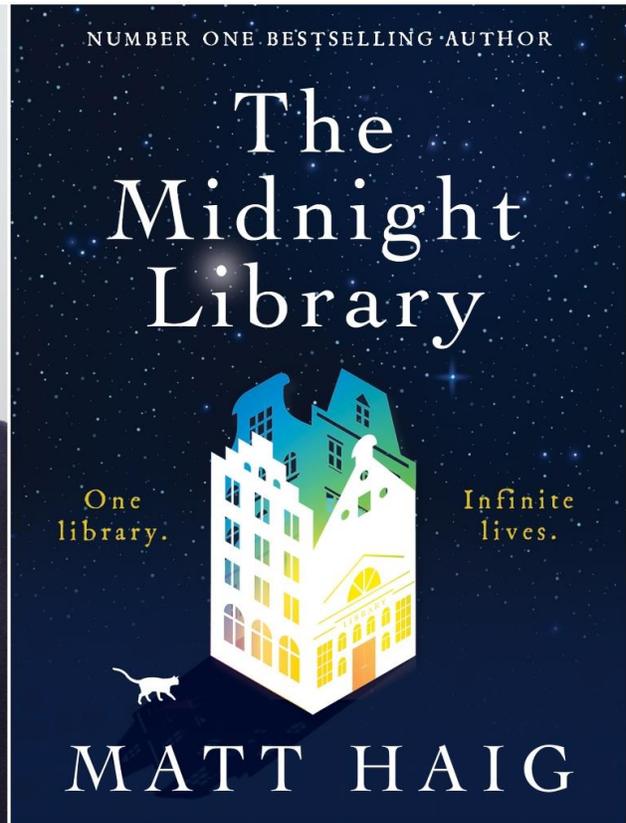


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The Midnight Library

About Matt Haig

from matthaig.com

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

from penguinrandomhouse.com

Plot Summary

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.

Reviews

NPR
npr.org

It's Not Quite Dark Enough In 'The Midnight Library'

October 3, 2020

Reviewer: Jason Sheehan

Nora Seed wants to die.

This is where we begin, in Matt Haig's new novel, *The Midnight Library*: with a young woman on the verge of making a terrible choice. She's lost her job, her best friend, her brother. Her relationships are in shambles and her cat is dead. More importantly, she is just deeply, seemingly irretrievably, sad. She can't imagine a day that is better with her in it. Living has become nothing but a chore.

So she ends it. Overdose. Antidepressants. The world goes black.

And then Nora wakes up. Not in heaven (dull) or hell (overdone) or purgatory (insert *Lost* joke), but in a library. The Midnight Library, which is the place people go when they find themselves hanging precariously *between* life and death and not entirely sure about which way to go.

The library is immense. Perhaps endless. And it is filled with nothing but books, shelves and, curiously, Nora's school librarian, Mrs. Elm. "Every life contains many millions of decisions," says Mrs. Elm.

Some big, some small. But every time one decision is taken over another, the outcomes differ. An irreversible variation occurs, which in turn leads to further variations. These books are portals to all the lives you could be living.

Yes, it really is that simple. And yes, it really is presented that plainly. As a place, the Midnight Library isn't really a library (of course), but is instead a 101-level lecture in parallel universe theory, philosophy and quantum indeterminacy. Really, it's a therapist simulator, minus the couch. A place of regret and possibility. Because who, in their darkest moments — or maybe just on a Tuesday — hasn't wondered what life would be like if only...

Nora certainly has. She is wracked with regret. What would've happened if she'd married her fiance rather than walking out two days before the wedding? What would've happened if she'd stuck with the band she and her brother and their friend Ravi had started rather than bailing just when they were about to get big? What would've happened if she'd stuck with competitive swimming, been a better cat owner, been nicer to her parents, followed her best friend to Australia or become a glaciologist?

Again, yes. The questions are that simple. And again, yes, they're presented that plainly.

The Midnight Library is the place where Nora gets to find out. Where, for an hour, a day or a month, she gets to dip into and sample lives where she made different choices, with the ultimate goal of erasing those regrets and finding a life she's comfortable in.

Haig presents all of this as a straight line. 'The Midnight Library' is unusual in that it follows a plot with no twists, no turns that don't feel like a gentle glide.

But here's the problem. Haig presents all of this as a straight line. *The Midnight Library* is unusual in that it follows a plot with no twists, no turns that don't feel like a gentle glide. Inside the library itself, Mrs. Elm's job is to present everything to Nora very clearly and to lay out the stakes very directly. Infinite options, yes, but maybe not an infinite amount of time in which to choose. Infinite possibility, sure, but only one shot at each of them. When Nora loses hope, the library starts to collapse. When she finds herself excited again about living, things calm down.

And there's a deliberateness to it all. A simplicity to the narrative that has to be taken as a choice on Haig's part, not an accident. After meeting another "slider" (as those who can bounce around between multiverse possibilities are called), and discussing the pop-science implications of a multi-dimensional existence, Nora muses on her situation:

[She] had read about multiverses and knew a bit about Gestalt psychology. About how human brains take complex information about the world and simplify it, so that when a human looks at a tree it translates the intricately complex mass of leaves and branches into this thing called 'tree'. To be human was to continually dumb down the world into an understandable story that keeps things simple. She knew that everything humans see is a simplification. A human sees the world in three dimensions. That is a simplification. Humans are fundamentally limited, generalizing creatures, living on auto-pilot, who straighten out curved streets in their minds, which explains why they get lost all the time.

Haig lives by that here. He takes what could've been (what *has* been in so many other books) a dark or sad or curvy or weird spin through the logical and philosophical possibilities of regret crossed with multiverse theory and ... straightens it out. There is tragedy, but it feels muted by the existence of infinite chances. There is sadness and pointlessness, soft meditations on the cost of fame and the dignity of smaller lives, lots of quotes from philosophers (because that's what Nora studied in school), and quiet thoughts about the weight of meaning in a universe where everything that *can* happen, does.

... what sucks a measure of the color and life from 'The Midnight Library' is that Nora, as a character, doesn't really want anything.

But what sucks a measure of the color and life from *The Midnight Library* is that Nora, as a character, doesn't really *want* anything. Or maybe she does, but the arc of the plot hinges on her trying to figure out what exactly it is. And a character who doesn't actively want something — even when it is something so basic as to keep on living — is a hard character to identify with.

Ultimately, Haig gives Nora (and those of us following along with her) a straightforward path from suicide to closure, from regret to acceptance. He gives her a tree, and though there are many branches, it is still just a tree. The story, then, forms solely around the lives she passes briefly through, the choices and their consequences. Nora lives a hundred lives. A thousand. Enough of a theoretical portion of an infinity that she feels as though she has seen them all by the time we're closing on the final pages.

The only question left hanging over all of it is which one she'll finally choose. And in a multiverse of infinite choice and infinite possibility, I'm just not sure that the answer matters enough.

Jason Sheehan knows stuff about food, video games, books and Starblazers. He is currently the restaurant critic at Philadelphia magazine, but when no one is looking, he spends his time writing books about giant robots and ray guns. Tales From the Radiation Age is his latest book.

The New York Times
nytimes.com

In 'The Midnight Library,' Books Offer Transport to Different Lives

September 29, 2020

Reviewer: Karen Joy Fowler

Few fantasies are more enduring than the idea that there might be a second chance at a life already lived, some sort of magical reset in which mistakes can be erased, regrets addressed, choices altered. This deep desire for a different life, or for more lives than just the one, is at the heart of any number of stories — movies like “Groundhog Day,” “Sliding Doors” and “It’s a Wonderful Life”; television shows like “Sliders” and “Quantum Leap”; wonderful novels like Kate Atkinson’s “Life After Life,” Andrew Sean Greer’s “The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells,” Jo Walton’s “My Real Children” and many others. Into this ever-popular genre, Matt Haig’s “The Midnight Library” is a welcome addition.

Haig’s central character is 35-year-old Nora Seed. Nora is a woman with many gifts and few accomplishments. She’s estranged from her only living relative, an older brother, and also distant from her only close friend both emotionally and geographically. She had “always had the sense that she came from a long line of regrets and crushed hopes that seemed to echo in every generation.” In short order, in a life already littered with remorse, she loses both her job and her beloved cat, Voltaire. “As she stared at Voltaire’s still and peaceful expression — that total absence of pain — there was an inescapable feeling brewing in the darkness. Envy.”

In Haig’s book, the mechanism through which transmigration takes place is the Midnight Library of the title. This structure occupies a magical space between life and death. Its facade replicates an ordinary library, shelves with books, but on an infinite scale.

The librarian is very wise, as librarians tend to be. She explains to Nora that every book on the shelves is a doorway into a different life. Only one book is an exception to this, “The Book of Regrets,” a volume so heavy and toxic it’s dangerous for Nora to read more than a few lines.

By the time Nora arrives at the Midnight Library, the reader has already learned what her chief regrets are. Each of these now functions in the plot as a kind of promissory note; we expect to experience the lives in which these particular regrets are addressed and, in this, we are not disappointed. But the repercussions of eliminating each regret often surprise Nora. Choices are not the same as outcomes, the librarian warns her.

The librarian encourages Nora to sample a variety of texts, promising that as soon as Nora feels dissatisfied with a new life, she’ll find herself back in the library, ready to have another go. This may happen after only a few moments or months might pass. All this while, time in the library is at a standstill. An infinite number of other lives beckon.

Nora is initially reluctant — life is just what she didn't want more of — but the librarian is firm. Why else would you be here? she asks. So Nora opens her first book.

By the end, she'll have opened a great many more. Haig describes some of Nora's provisional lives in detail. Others last only as long as a sentence: "In one life she only ate toast." Suspense comes from the fact that Nora is dropped in midstream, with no preparation. She always remembers her original life — her root life — so she always has that point of comparison. But she knows nothing of the life she's just entered. Often she must look for herself online, read her social media accounts, in order to know who she is. More than once she finds herself performing before large crowds, speaking on a subject in which she has no background or expected to sing a song some other Nora recorded, but this one has never heard before. More than once, she's in a sexual relationship with a man she doesn't know or mother to children she's never met.

Editors' Picks

A small cast of characters reappears in many of Nora's lives. Her brother, her parents, her best friend are almost always present. She sometimes crosses paths with a man she came close to marrying. As she plays through her own myriad possibilities, the impact of her choices on each of these characters is also profound; their lives are as altered by Nora's decisions as her own. Even peripheral characters from her root life are transformed.

As in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life" Nora appears to be the X factor in all these changes. The supporting cast is also making different choices, but these are largely posited as responses to Nora's own altered actions. Only Nora's choices feel determinative.

The issue of the many Noras temporarily displaced from their own root lives is somewhat troubling. Where do they go in the interim? If/when Nora finds the life in which she will stay, what will become of the Nora whose life that actually is? Answers are hinted at, but the issue is not directly addressed. The conundrum at the heart of the book is the implication that our Nora is the real Nora and the other lives all variations on that first life, the root life, rather than equally valuable universes filled with equally valuable people. In the infinity of the multiverse, surely there are other Noras also trying on our Nora's life from time to time, displacing her as they do so. The universe is full of infinite possibility, but the story here remains tightly focused on the internal life of a single woman and all her might-have-beens.

It can be hard to keep a reader's energy invested in a depressed and somewhat listless character, but Nora is smart and observant; she remains good company. She's studied philosophy and has a particular affection for the American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau. The book is all the richer, as any book would be, for the inclusion of several of his quotes: "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams" and "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude."

There is likewise a danger that such a recursive plotline will tire the reader. But here, too, the book succeeds. At just the right moment, not too soon and not too late, Nora makes her final

decisive move, taking us into the last section of the book. The ending is satisfying but not surprising. By the time it comes, in fact, only one choice still seems possible.

The narrative throughout has a slightly old-fashioned feel, like a bedtime story. It's an absorbing but comfortable read, imaginative in the details if familiar in its outline. The invention of the library as the machinery through which different lives can be accessed is sure to please readers and has the advantage of being both magical and factual. Every library is a liminal space; the *Midnight Library* is different in scale, but not kind. And a vision of limitless possibility, of new roads taken, of new lives lived, of a whole different world available to us somehow, somewhere, might be exactly what's wanted in these troubled and troubling times.

Karen Joy Fowler is the author of three story collections and seven novels. Her most recent novel is *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*.

Interview

Cambridge Independent
cambridgeindependent.co.uk

Matt Haig interview: the accidental mental health guru

by Alex Spencer

When you accidentally become a national spokesperson on mental health it can feel overwhelming, admits author Matt Haig.

After overcoming suicidal depression, the novelist wrote a book about his experiences and recovery called *Reasons to Stay Alive*, which he thought would be of only modest interest to the general public.

But it rocketed to the top of the bestseller charts leaving Matt, who admits his own mental health can still be wobbly, to suddenly become an unofficial agony uncle fielding messages from thousands of readers touched by his insights.

Now he has written a new novel, *The Midnight Library*, which he hopes expands on the discoveries he made about finding acceptance and happiness in an imperfect life.

“There was a time a couple of years ago when I would honestly have pressed the button to have not written *Reasons to Stay Alive* because it was getting too much for me,” says Matt. “Now, I don’t think it is my best written book. I wrote it very quickly, not thinking many people would read it. And it used terms I wouldn’t use now, such as ‘depressive’ because that’s saying you are a depressed person rather than someone with depression. But out of all my books it has been the most useful to people so I’m very pleased I managed to do something people found some comfort and use in.”

Reasons to Stay Alive was Matt’s account of how, aged 24 and living in Ibiza, he became ill with a depression which was so sudden and frightening he found himself standing on the edge of a cliff, considering whether to jump off and take his own life.

With the help of his partner and family, he slowly made his way back to health and along the way discovered some of the things that helped his recovery – such as time in nature and taking pleasure in exercise. The book recorded those hopeful moments and struck such a chord with readers that it was in the top 10 bestsellers chart for 46 weeks.

Matt says: “It can be a lot of pressure when people contact you and they are often in a very bad state, but I should have expected it writing a book literally called *Reasons to Stay Alive*. That was the surprise, though, when the book was getting big and I was getting a lot of messages like that every day. There were messages that needed a response and I didn’t know how to respond; a few times it was really serious. There was one situation at the start of this year, pre-Covid, where this woman had done something. She had actually done something life-threatening, then told me about it in real time. I didn’t even have her full name in the message and I had to get on the

internet and find out from people who she was and we had to get an ambulance and police to go around to her house. It did have a positive outcome and she survived, but that was an incredibly stressful experience.

“I didn’t know when I started writing about mental health that those sorts of things would start happening. It was incredibly frightening. Even when it’s not that dramatic, you often get people in very low states and when your own mental health isn’t 100 percent perfect – that can be very hard to read and can be quite triggering. I have had to be much more careful and I don’t look at everything on social media now or I would spend my whole life just doing that. You have to have some sort of wall around you sometimes.”

Matt is coming to terms with his inspirational status and says it has helped him find comfort in hearing other people’s stories of recovery from mental illness and made him feel less alone with his experiences.

“The flip side, of course, is you actually find comfort in messages from strangers. I hear a lot of survival stories and I hear a lot of hope,” says Matt. “I think one of the reasons I started writing about mental health is I had been so quiet about it for over a decade. I hadn’t told anyone except my partner and my parents about it. I had lost friends because I had been to different or cancelled things, so coming out and writing a book about it was quite a big way of empowering things. Actually, back when we were doing real-world book events, meeting people who had gone through similar things was incredibly empowering because the one thing I really remember from my experience of depression and anxiety was of being very alone and misunderstood and the feeling of being the only person in the world going through this; all these melodramatic things that aren’t particularly true, but it’s often the way depression makes you feel.”

Matt’s self-help books *Reasons to Stay Alive* and its sequel *Notes on a Nervous Planet*, have both been huge hits but his novels for adults, including *How to Stop Time* and *The Humans*, have also become bestsellers and his children’s book, *A Boy Called Christmas*, is being made into a movie by Netflix.

In his latest work, Matt tells the story of Nora Seed who finds herself in a mysterious place between life and death – the *Midnight Library*. Up until now, her life has been full of misery and regret. She feels she has let everyone down, including herself. But things are about to change.

The books in the *Midnight Library* enable Nora to live as if she had done things differently. With the help of an old friend, she can now undo every one of her regrets as she tries to work out her perfect life. What would have happened if she had married that boyfriend, stayed in her band or carried on with her swimming career? Would life have turned out better, happier? But things aren’t always what she imagined they’d be, and soon her choices place the library and herself in extreme danger. Before time runs out, she has to discover what is the best way to live.

The links between this book and *Reasons to Stay Alive* are obvious. Nora is suicidal at the beginning of the novel and seems to be in a situation she can’t escape. How much did Matt draw on his own memories of his breakdown when he was writing the book?

“I have obviously written about my own experiences directly in my non-fiction, but in my fiction this is the first time I had the central character have an official diagnosis that was similar to mine,” he says.

“And I think one of the reasons she’s a woman is that I wanted to make it clearly not me. That then almost gave me more freedom to put my own experiences in there, in a weird way, because my first draft of the book had a male character but I felt it was too obviously me or too close to me. So, I think changing the gender was one way to give me that sort of distance.”

When she enters the library, Nora is asked to read a book on the shelves about the regrets she had in her life, which Matt says was a way of explaining the experience of depression.

“Regret, I suppose, is the big theme of the book and how we deal with regret. It’s almost a modern condition in 2020 where we are having this existential moment and a lot of time to think about stuff and the uncertainty of things. I just thought it would be a nice way to illustrate that.

“Anyone who has had any experience of a mental health situation will know that the way it often manifests is you’re kind of drowning in lists in your head of regrets, things you wish you had done or hadn’t done. Often it is at a kind of subconscious level. So I thought it would be quite nice to make it quite literal and have it as one of the books in the library to show how our regrets are kind of never-ending but also futile. And as Nora tried out each different life, I wanted at the root of each life to be a regret that she could undo and see what happened.”

The idea of the library is that it contains an infinite number of books, each telling the story of her parallel lives that are taking place somewhere in the multiverse. It’s an idea that has intrigued Matt for years.

“There’s one theory of parallel universes where there are infinite versions of you so, for example, there could be a place where each and every one of us could have learned the piano to the best standard we could. Piano was the big one for me because I used to play piano until the age of 13 when I stopped because I was a self-conscious teenage boy and I just didn’t want to be telling my friends I was having piano lessons or something silly. And so I have little regrets like that where I think ‘oh it would be nice to step into the life where I hadn’t given up piano lessons and to see if I could have become good at that or whatever’. But I also think nowadays, because of the internet and social media and comparison culture, we are surrounded by other people’s lives, if not our own versions of our lives, so there is always a reason to feel bad about yourself.

“With this book I was trying to offer a little counterweight to that and say ‘yes, there might be a life or many lives where you do something exceptional, or outwardly exceptional, like the life where you are rich or the life where you are famous’. In an infinite universe of possibilities there are probably versions where you could have done something differently or better. But I wanted to correct the ‘grass is greener’ effect in our heads and to hopefully give the reader some sort of feeling of acceptance of the life they are in.

“I already feel in terms of my mind and different states of beings that I have lived lots of different kinds of versions of myself in terms of my career of being a struggling writer and then a

not-so-struggling writer, and then in terms of my health from being happy to suicidal; I've lived in various different places abroad and even with the different lives you live within your own life while it can look like everything changes. But nothing really changes.

“If you look at it in terms of emotions rather than in terms of things, the quality of your life is always accessible. The sadness, the joy, all the elements of emotion; we focus so much on the appearance of a life or the material surroundings of a life and less on the emotions of a life. I suppose once you concentrate on the inner feeling the whole universe is accessible to you. As soon as you give up on the idea that you need a certain thing, or have a regret to undo or want to live in Australia or to be a top scientist or whatever it is, once you give that up you realise you can access everything.”

He says he has been influenced to an extent by Buddhist writings – although he is not a Buddhist – which teach “the key to accepting life and of becoming a more complete person is to actually understand you need the despair and suffering in your life, you cannot run away from that if you also want the joy and in fact the joy and the pleasure of life is intertwined in many ways with despair as well. Very often, in the west, we want to run away from anything negative.

“I wanted to say that you feel like you need the world to change or the situation around you to fundamentally change things that you don't necessarily have control over. You can't go back in time, you can't bring people back to life. Depression happens when you feel like you are in a total cul- de-sac and you can't do anything about it, so I wanted to take someone who was in that situation and sort of stays in that situation but finds a different way to view the situation.

“So much in life is about perspective. We have seen so many millionaire famous people absolutely cracking up and hitting the gutter and becoming suicidal to know that often these shiny external things that we are encouraged to think that we want or need aren't necessarily the things we want or need and probably wouldn't make a fundamental difference to our happiness.

“Just as with holidays, we always have to take ourselves with us. It's the same with life – we have to reach some acceptance of ourselves, whatever stage we are at in life, because no external thing can change us magically. I suppose what I'm trying to do in *The Midnight Library* is to try to give the reader a little tiny perspective shift, like a feeling that ‘yes, there probably are other lives they could have taken but within this one they can feel everything they need to feel, and that we don't have to want to be other people or other versions of ourselves or need to get jealous of the person on Instagram with 10million followers or whatever is making us feel a bit inadequate’.

“But I wouldn't say that I'm always getting that right, and I'm certainly someone who in the past has often battled feelings of inferiority. When I was a writer in the early days I had major imposter syndrome and all of those insecurities. So very often I'm not like preaching this stuff from the mountain top, I'm very much trying to take it on board myself because I don't always follow that advice or believe those things. Very often the books I'm writing are things I feel that I need to read rather than things I feel I have got totally fixed and sorted in my own life.”

Discussion Questions

from penguinrandomhouse.com

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?

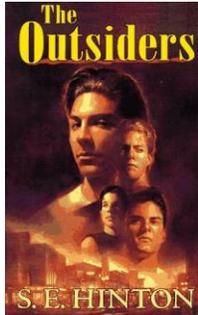
7. As the story progresses, Nora finds herself in lives that she could be more satisfied with than others that proved more difficult. Do you think you would be able to live as an alternate version of yourself? Would you want to?

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 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?

5 Books that Saved Matt Haig

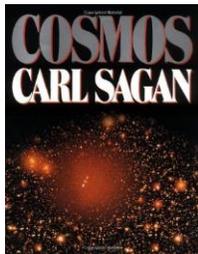
From Scottish Trust Book Week Interview

The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton



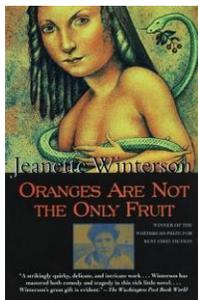
Why? “The first book I read when I was young that made me really feel like books weren’t something to do you good. They could be entertaining. They could be fun. They could be a friend to you. The fact that it was written by a teenager - I think she was nineteen when she wrote it - added some sort of authenticity to it.”

Cosmos by Carl Sagan



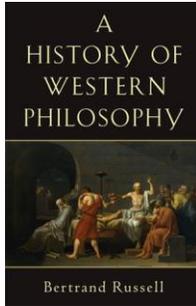
Why? “He made me realize that I was actually interested in science because at school I thought I wasn’t a science person. It took me a long time to get over that and realize that science was a very inspiring poetic thing.”

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson



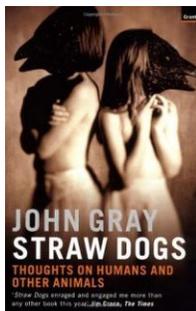
Why? “I would say I like all of her books because of the age I read them. I would say ‘Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit.’ is a very important book for me because it showed me how powerful simple words could be. Because before I read that book, I was quite a pretentious writer and a pretentious reader and I thought you needed such a nice sort of long-winded way of saying everything. Jeanette Winterson’s work is such a force and in such a sort of compacted space. For my writing, I think Jeanette Winterson has been very important.”

A History of Western Philosophy by Bertrand Russell



Why? “It’s a book I like to have on my shelf to just sort of dip into now and then because I like exploring philosophical ideas, but I’m not always prepared for the real sort of dense text. But one that was sort of easy for me was Bertrand Russell’s ‘A History of Western Philosophy’ where he’s sort of talking about everything in western philosophy from the ancient Greeks to the middle of the 20th century when he wrote it.”

Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals by John Gray



Why? “It’s a very good book about the human’s belief in progress and how we’re quite arrogant as animals to actually believe that we have progressed because we have technological progress. I think certainly in our sort of quite scary time with people worrying about nuclear weapons that it’s quite important to remind ourselves that we are just animals and that our brains haven’t changed in a hundred and fifty thousand generations.”