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BOOK CLUB

‘Astonishing and
unsettling . . .
A masterwork’

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

‘Announces Yanagihara
as a major
American novelist’

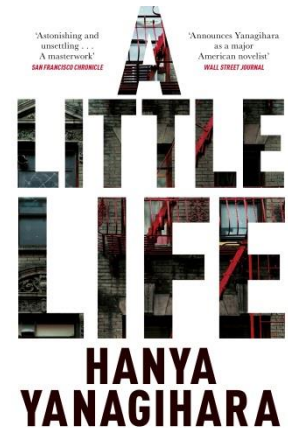
WALL STREET JOURNAL



**HANYA
YANAGIHARA**

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A Little Life *Hanya Yanagihara*



Fiction
720 Pages; pub 2016

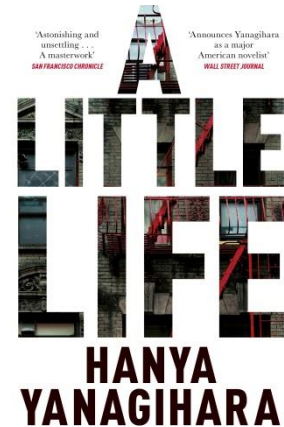
Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2015 Shortlisted for the Baileys Prize for Women's Fiction 2016 Finalist for the National Book Awards 2015 *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara is an immensely powerful and heartbreaking novel of brotherly love and the limits of human endurance. When four graduates from a small Massachusetts college move to New York to make their way, they're broke, adrift, and buoyed only by their friendship and ambition. There is kind, handsome Willem, an aspiring actor; JB, a quick-witted, sometimes cruel Brooklyn-born painter seeking entry to the art world; Malcolm, a frustrated architect at a prominent firm; and withdrawn, brilliant, enigmatic Jude, who serves as their centre of gravity. Over the decades, their relationships deepen and darken, tinged by addiction, success, and pride. Yet their greatest challenge, each comes to realize, is Jude himself, by midlife a terrifyingly talented litigator yet an increasingly broken man, his mind and body scarred by an unspeakable childhood, and haunted by what he fears is a degree of trauma that he'll not only be unable to overcome - but that will define his life forever.

REVIEWS

Publishers Weekly

The story begins with four college friends moving to New York City to begin their careers: architect Malcolm, artist JB, actor Willem, and lawyer Jude. Early on, their concerns are money and job related as they try to find footholds in their respective fields. Over the course of the book, which spans three decades, we witness their highs and lows as they face addiction, deception, and abuse, and their relationships falter and strengthen. The focus narrows as the story unspools-and really, this is Jude's story. Unlike his friends, who have largely ordinary lives, Jude has a horrific trauma in his past, and his inner demons are central to the story. Throughout the years, Jude struggles to keep his terrible childhood secret and to trust those who love him. He cuts himself and contemplates suicide, even as his career flourishes and his friends support him. This is a novel that values the everyday over the extraordinary, the push and pull of human relationships-and the book's effect is cumulative.

A Little Life *Hanya Yanagihara*



DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Why the title, A Little Life? Certainly Jude's life is hardly insignificant or small. Here's what Hanya Yanagihara said when asked by Newsweek if the title is ironic: "All life is small.... Life will end in death and unhappiness, but we do it anyway." The Newsweek interviewer referred to the author's view of life as tragic and futile. Does that make it small? What do you think?
2. An editor once advised Yanagihara to trim the amount of time spent on Jude's childhood, arguing that concentrating so heavily on his physical and psychological deprivations would repulse readers. Yanagihara refused to cut. What do you think? Should she have trimmed the sections? How difficult or painful were those passages for you?
3. Talk about the four main characters: Willem, JB, and Malcolm, as well as Jude. How are they similar, how are they different, and what is behind the strength of their long-lasting friendships? How would you compare their male friendship to those among women?
4. A Little Life focuses heavily on the inner lives of its characters, with very little attention paid to exterior surroundings. Do you feel the interiority slows the book down, makes it drag in parts? Or do you find the inward focus enriches the story, making it compelling, even enthralling?
5. Were you disappointed with the lack of central, well-developed female characters? Yanagihara, again in Newsweek, said that "men are offered a much, much smaller emotional vocabulary to work with," which makes them more challenging to write about. Women, on the other hand, have a well-trod emotional landscape and are less interesting to her as a writer. What are your thoughts?

<http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/10333-little-life-yanagihara?start=3>

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