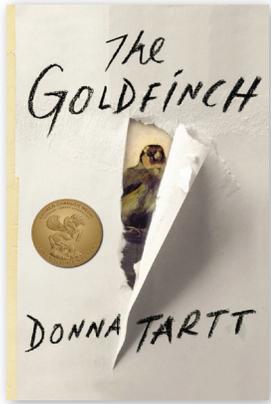


Andrew Carnegie

Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction



2014 FICTION WINNER

The Goldfinch
by Donna Tartt
published by Little, Brown

"In the wake of his nefarious father's abandonment, Theo, a smart, 13-year-old Manhattanite, is extremely close to his vivacious mother—until an act of terrorism catapults him into a dizzying world bereft of gravity, certainty, or love."—*Booklist*

To read the full review, visit Booklistonline.com.

BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Author Tartt has noted that the purposeful destruction of the giant sandstone Buddhas of Bamiyan Valley Afghanistan in March of 2001 inspired her to begin her novel with an explosion. Does this statement, by Theo's mother speak to this? "People die, sure," my mother was saying. "But it's so heartbreaking and unnecessary how we lose things. From pure carelessness. Fires, wars. The Parthenon, used as a munitions storehouse. I guess that anything we manage to save from history is a miracle." Talk about the loss, recovery, and loss and recovery again of the painting *The Goldfinch*. Is it a miracle? What else is lost in this story?
2. How many ways is Theo tied to the Goldfinch, "forced, always, to land in the same hopeless place". What are the similarities between the chains on the boy and the chains on the bird?
3. Coincidentally, Fabritus's painting "The Goldfinch" came to New York City and opened at the Frick on the same day Tartt's book was released. Coincidentally, Donna Tartt received the ALA Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction in Las Vegas in June 2014. Some readers have expressed public dismay about the rather long middle section of the book that takes place in Las Vegas. Do you think this section was important? Why or why not?
4. For an "orphan", Theo actually participated in a number of flawed family units. What were the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Cont. on next page

Co-sponsored by *Booklist* and RUSA (Reference and User Services Association), these awards were established to recognize the best fiction and nonfiction books for adult readers with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. To learn more about the awards, books, and authors, visit ala.org/carnegieadult.

Interested in starting a book group? The American Library Association offers resources on how to get started, how to structure a meeting, how to select books and how to facilitate a meaningful literary discussion. For more information visit ala.org/tools/atoz/book-discussion-grps.

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BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE CONT.

5. In the tradition of *bildungsroman* we observe Theo's growth and development. Pippa is sure he is suffering from PTSD. What evidence do we have that Theo actually grows out of his 13-year old self?
6. Theo asks how can you follow your heart if your heart can't be trusted? Are there situations in this story where you would advise him to follow his heart? His head? Why?
7. Stephen King called *The Goldfinch* a smartly written literary novel. In the sense that great art is timeless, what clues do you get about the time period in which the story takes place, and do these references (Bon Jovi, iPods) make it more or less likely that the book itself will become a classic in a future literary canon?
8. There are many literary references in this book, not the least of which is Boris's habit of calling Theo "Potter". What are some similarities between Theo and Harry? Or Theo and Oliver Twist? Or Pippa and Estella from Dickens' *Great Expectations*? Can you find more similarities with literary themes? For example, the theme of unrequited love?
9. If you read for language, you will have found some beautiful passages in this book. Reviewers have called it "flawless", "sparkling", "eloquent and assured" Do you have a favorite paragraph, or one to share? How do you feel about the attention to detail her descriptions of people, places, and situations offer?
10. What connections do you read into the fact that Hobie calls his re-made furniture "changelings". Tartt uses that the phrase in relation to Xerox machines and "the line of beauty". Talk about art and imitation.
11. Read these two statements and discuss where this "place" is, what she calls the "rainbow edge" and "polychrome edge".

"Between reality on the one hand, and the point where the mind strikes reality, there's a middle zone, a rainbow edge, where beauty comes into being, where two different surfaces mingle and blur and provide what life does not, and this is the space where all art exists, and all magic, and I would argue as well, all love. "

"And that's why I've chosen to write these pages as I've written them. For only by stepping into the middle zone, the polychrome edge between truth and untruth, is it tolerable to be here and writing this at all."

[Hint: Watch "How a Dutch Master Made 'The Goldfinch' Come Alive" on YouTube at <http://bit.ly/1pJ9rD2>]