



All My Puny Sorrows by Miriam Toews

About the author:

Miriam Toews was born in the small Mennonite town of Steinbach, Manitoba. She has published five novels and a memoir of her father, and is the recipient of numerous literary awards in Canada, including the Governor General's Literary Award (for *A Complicated Kindness*) and the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize (for *The Flying Troutmans*). In 2010 she received the prestigious Writers' Trust Engel/Findley Award for her body of work. She lives in Toronto.

Source: HarperCollins Publishers (<https://www.harpercollins.com/>)

About this book:

Miriam Toews is beloved for her irresistible voice, for mingling laughter and heartwrenching poignancy like no other writer. In her most passionate novel yet, she brings us the riveting story of two sisters, and a love that illuminates life.

You won't forget Elf and Yoli, two smart and loving sisters. Elfrieda, a world-renowned pianist, glamorous, wealthy, happily married: she wants to die. Yolandi, divorced, broke, sleeping with the wrong men as she tries to find true love: she desperately wants to keep her older sister alive. Yoli is a beguiling mess, wickedly funny even as she stumbles through life struggling to keep her teenage kids and mother happy, her exes from hating her, her sister from killing herself and her own heart from breaking.

But Elf's latest suicide attempt is a shock: she is three weeks away from the opening of her highly anticipated international tour. Can she be nursed back to "health" in time? Does it matter? As the situation becomes ever more

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complicated, Yoli faces the most terrifying decision of her life.

All My Puny Sorrows, at once tender and unquiet, offers a profound reflection on the limits of love, and the sometimes unimaginable challenges we experience when childhood becomes a new country of adult commitments and responsibilities. In her beautifully rendered new novel, Miriam Toews gives us a startling demonstration of how to carry on with hope and love and the business of living even when grief loads the heart.

Source: Penguin Random House Canada (<http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/>)

Discussion Questions

1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?
2. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, inner qualities.
 - Why do characters do what they do?
 - Are their actions justified?
 - Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
 - How has the past shaped their lives?
 - Do you admire or disapprove of them?
 - Do they remind you of people you know?
3. Do the main characters change by the end of the book? Do they grow or mature? Do they learn something about themselves and how the world works?
4. Is the plot engaging—does the story interest you? Is this a plot-driven book: a fast-paced page-turner? Or does the story unfold slowly with a focus on character development? Were you surprised by the plot's complications? Or did you find it predictable, even formulaic?



5. Talk about the book's structure. Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories? Does the time-line move forward chronologically...or back and forth between past and present? Does the author use a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints? Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did—and what difference does it make in the way you read or understand it?

6. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas? (See our free LitCourses on both Symbol and Theme.)

7. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?

8. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?

9. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?

10. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

Source: *LitLovers* (<http://www.litlovers.com/>)

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- eBook