



## ***The Goldfinch by Donna Tartt***

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### **About the author:**

Donna Tartt was born in Greenwood, Mississippi and is a graduate of Bennington College. She is the author of the novels *The Secret History* and *The Little Friend*, which have been translated into thirty languages.

Source: Hachette Book Group (<http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/>)

### **About this book:**

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

Theo Decker, a 13-year-old New Yorker, miraculously survives an accident that kills his mother. Abandoned by his father, Theo is taken in by the family of a wealthy friend. Bewildered by his strange new home on Park Avenue, disturbed by schoolmates who don't know how to talk to him, and tormented above all by his longing for his mother, he clings to the one thing that reminds him of her: a small, mysteriously captivating painting that ultimately draws Theo into the underworld of art.

As an adult, Theo moves silkily between the drawing rooms of the rich and the dusty labyrinth of an antiques store where he works. He is alienated and in love-- and at the center of a narrowing, ever more dangerous circle.

*The Goldfinch* is a mesmerizing, stay-up-all-night and tell-all-your-friends triumph, an old-fashioned story of loss and obsession, survival and self-invention, and the ruthless machinations of fate.

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April 2016



### Discussion Questions:

1. Donna Tartt has said that the Goldfinch painting was the "guiding spirit" of the book. How so—what do you think she meant? What—or what all—does the painting represent in the novel?

2. David Copperfield famously says in the first line of Dickens's book,  
*Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.*

Because of the many comparisons made between Dickens's work and *The Goldfinch*, that same question could rightfully be asked by Theo Decker. What do you think—is Theo the "hero" of his own life? What, in fact, does it mean to be the "hero" of a novel?

3. Tartt has said that "reading's no good unless it's fun."

*The one quality I look for in books (and it's very hard to find), but I love that childhood quality of gleeful, greedy reading, can't-get-enough-of-it, what's-happening-to-these-people, the breathless kind of turning of the pages. That's what I want in a book.*

In other words, a good book should propel readers from page to page, in part because they care about the characters. Has Tartt accomplished that in *The Goldfinch*? Did you find yourself rapidly turning the pages to find out what happens to the characters? Does the story engage you? And do you care about the characters? If so, which ones?

4. How convincingly does Tartt write about Theo's grief and his survival guilt? Talk about the ways Theo manifests the depth of his loss and his sense of desolation?

5. What do you think of Andy's family: especially Andy himself and Mrs.



Barbour? Are we meant to like the family? Is Mrs. Barbour pleased or resentful about having to take Theo in? What about the family as it appears later in the book when Theo re-enters its life? Were you surprised at Mrs. Barbour's reaction to seeing Theo again?

6. Talk about the ways in which the numerous adults at his school try—to no avail, as it turns out—to help Theo work through his grief. If you were one of the grown-ups in Theo's life, what would you do or say differently to him. Is there anything that can be said?

7. Many reviewers have remarked on Boris as the most inventive and vividly portrayed character in the book. How do you feel? Are you as taken with him as both Theo and book reviewers are? Talk about his influence over Theo—was it for better for worse?

8. Readers are obviously meant to find Theo's father negligent and irresponsible, a reprobate. Are you able to identify any redeeming quality in him? What about his girlfriend?

9. Talk about Hobie and how Tartt uses his wood working and restoration as a symbol of his relationship to Theo. How does Theo disappoint him...and why? Theo fears he will, or already has, become like his father. Has he?

10. Tartt asks us to consider whether or not our world is orderly, whether events follow a pattern (which could indicate an underlying meaning), or whether everything that happens is simply random—like the explosion that killed Theo's mother. What does Theo's father believe...and what does Theo believe? Do Theo's views by the end of the story?

11. The book also ponders beauty and art. Why is art so important to the



human soul? What are its consolations...and what are its dangers? In what ways can we allow ourselves to be trapped by art or beauty? And HOW does this relate to the Goldfinch, the painting at the heart of this story— a painting of a bird chained to its perch and a painting that Theo clings to for 14 years.

12. What do you think the future holds for Theo? Why do you think Tartt left the book's conclusion open as to whether he will end up with Pippa or Kitsy?

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