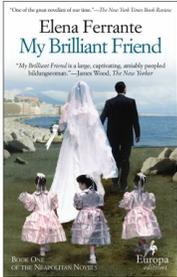


# Books by the Stack



## **My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante**

Beginning in the 1950s Elena and Lila grow up in Naples, Italy, mirroring two different aspects of their nation.

**Why you'll like it:** *Leisurely paced, character-driven, reflective, strong sense of place.*

**About the Author:** Elena Ferrante was born in Naples, Italy. Her work includes *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, *The Story of the Lost Child*, *The Story of a New Name*, *The Lost Daughter*, *Fragments*, and *My Brilliant Friend*. *My Brilliant Friend* made *The New York Times* Bestsellers List and *The New Zealand* Best Seller List 2015. She was included on *Time* magazine's annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world. (Bowker Author Biography)

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why is Don Achille such an important character? His presence looms over the whole novel; what does he represent?
2. Throughout the novel, Lila earns her reputation as 'the misfit,' while Elena come to be known as 'the good girl.' How do the two live vicariously through one another and what is it about their differing personalities that makes their relationship credible? Which girl, if any, do you most easily identify with?
3. Domestic life in the outskirts of Naples in the 1950s is depicted as conservative, challenging and, at times, even severely violent. Ferrante uses the girls' early "child play" to emulate the callous undertones of the town. Why is this analogy so successful? What is so important about Tina and Nu?
4. Why is Elena so invested in her education? Is it a means to an end, or an end unto itself? If a means to an end, what end? And if a means, is she being realistic or is she fooling herself?
5. Elena starts writing 'all the details of our story' as a way of making sure that Lila eliminate all traces of herself, an in doing so, of 'winning.' Is the narrative ultimately an aggressive act?
6. What is revealed of the girls' characters on the day they decide to skip school? Do the discoveries surprise you? How does this affect their relationship (or our sense of their relationship)?
7. While the novel never idealizes childhood as an a time of innocence, and in fact does the opposite, in one way Elena and Lila have been innocent; of what came before. What do they learn about what came before; and how does it affect each of them?
8. It can be assumed that Elena's voice is behind the title of the novel, referring to Lilsa as "her brilliant friend." However, towards the end of the girls' story, it is Lila who praises Elena and encourages her to be "the best of all boys and girls" (page 312). Did this change your understanding of their relationship?

**9.** Is there any rational bases to the girls' friendship? Is their friendship characterized by rivalry? Who is the dominant partner in the friendship overall?

**10.** Did you think the ending was appropriate? How would you have liked to have seen the ending go?

*(Questions provided by publisher)*



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