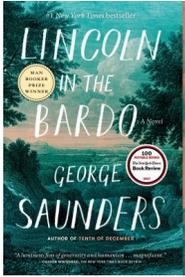


# Books by the Stack



## **Lincoln in the Bardo by George Saunders**

Traces a night of solitary mourning and reflection as experienced by the sixteenth president after the death of his eleven-year-old son at the dawn of the Civil War.

**Why you'll like it:** *Biographical fiction. Multiple perspectives. Stylistically complex. Melancholy.*

**About the Author:** George Saunders was born in 1958. He received a bachelor's degree in geophysical engineering and a master's degree in creative writing from Syracuse University. He is a professor at Syracuse University and a writer of short stories, essays, novellas, and children's books. His books include *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, *Pastoralia*, *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*, *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, *In Persuasion Nation*, and *Tenth of December: Stories*, which won the inaugural Folio Prize in 2014. His debut novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo*, received the Man Booker Prize in 2017. (Bowker Author Biography)

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. The presence of a child in the bardo is rare, but what other things about Willie make him different from other ghosts?
2. Which of the ghosts' stories resonated with you the most?
3. How did style and form of the book enhance or detract from your experience of the story? What did you think of the author's decision to include snippets of real, historical sources among the fictional narration?
4. In what ways do the social structures of this time period manifest in the bardo? How does Saunders play with and explore historical attitudes towards race and class throughout the novel?
5. In what ways does Saunders challenge and expand the genre of historical fiction? Why do you think Lincoln and his legacy remain such popular subjects in literature today?
6. It is unknown, both to the reader and to the character of the Reverend Everly Thomas, why he is damned, even though he understands that he is dead. What do you think is meant by this omission?
7. On page 87, the Reverend Everly Thomas explains the Barons' existence on either side of the dreaded fence as not about wealth per se, but about being "wealthy in the spirit." Discuss what this means, and how it relates to the slaves' ability to be near the fence while the other ghosts remain unable to stand such proximity?
8. Roger Bevins says that "all were in sorrow, or had been, or soon would be." Vollman responds by saying "It was the nature of thing" and that we are all "suffering, limited beings." Do you agree?

**9.** George Saunders has described the question at the core of this book as, “How do we continue to love in a world in which the objects of our love are so conditional?” Did you find this to be true, and do you feel you came to a deeper understanding of mortality?

**10.** Towards the end, the ghosts unite in an attempt to “enter” Lincoln’s mind and stop him from leaving the graveyard. In doing so, they find themselves transformed from their wretched states, remembering parts of their lives that had been lost to them since entering the bardo? Discuss the significance of this transformation?

**11.** Discuss the final scene, in which Thomas Havens follows Lincoln out of the graveyard on horseback. What do you think this foreshadows?

*(Questions provided by the publisher)*



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