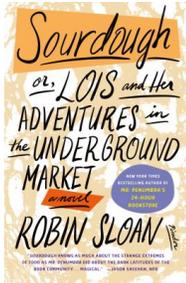


Books by the Stack



Sourdough by Robin Sloan

Lois works at a company trying to perfect a robot arm, and while she has been eating the 'Slurry,' or nutrient paste, that many use for nourishment, she discovers a nearby take-out restaurant that offers the most delicious sourdough bread she has ever tasted. Before they leave San Francisco, the brothers who own this restaurant share with her the starter for the bread, which changes her life forever.

Why you'll like it: *Quirky. Witty. Amusing.*

About the Author: Robin Sloan was born and raised in Michigan, He attended Michigan State University where he majored in economics and co-founded a literary magazine called Oats. He published his first novel, Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore, in 2012. It was about a laid-off Silicon Valley tech worker who gets a job in an old bookstore and starts discovering one secret after another. Along with the store's owner, the old books lead to a 500 year old secret society. His other titles include: Ajax Penumbra and Sourdough: A Novel. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Talk about Lois, especially as the book opens. How does she feel about her job, and how has the job affected her outlook on life? What might her experience, as presented in the novel, suggest about contemporary jobs in Silicon Valley?
2. What does Lois mean when she says, 'Here's a thing I believe about people my age: We are the children of Hogwarts, and more than anything, we just want to be sorted.' Why does that belief or idea inspire her to leave Michigan for San Francisco?
3. Do you find the robotic blue arm just a little creepy...or funny? Is it the wave of the future? While you're at it, can you understand, even define, proprioception? It is truly a marvel of human ability, isn't it?
4. In what ways does the sourdough starter function as a symbol in the novel? Compare, for instance, the sourdough to both the blue arm and Tetra Pak nutritional gel. Think of the meaning of the word "starter" itself.
5. *Follow-up to Question 1:* Once Lois has taken up kneading dough and building a brick oven, consider her statement about exhaustion: "When I fell into my bed, I was truly tired; not merely the brain-spent *Well, I guess I'll give up now* tiredness of a day at the robot factory, but something deeper, actually muscular." How else does her life change? Better yet, how does she change?
6. What do you think of the innovative Marrow Fair Lois is invited to join – funny, frightening, off-putting, even slightly repulsive? All or none of the above?
7. What is Agrippa's empire of microbes - "This is their world, not ours, and their stories are greater."
8. Robin Sloan seems to be taking on both the farm-to-table movement and giant agribusiness. What is his criticism, and does he offer up a solution for feeding the world's growing population?

9. Why does Alice turn down the job offered to her by the doyenne of the California food world?

10. The members of the Lois Club tack adjectives to their names for ease in conversation, which activates the need for self-identifying. How might being given a certain influence the course of a lifetime? How much do you think, upon meeting someone, that *you* signify your name and hold agency over it? How much does *your name* signify you?

11. The starter is one of the main characters in the novel. It is somewhat of a stray dog: unpredictable, devoted, a bit wild. How does Lois' understanding of the starter shift throughout their relationship? What do you make of the starter's unexplainable consciousness, for example, the shapes it forms on its crust as a result of listening to certain kinds of music?

(Questions provided by LitLovers)



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