

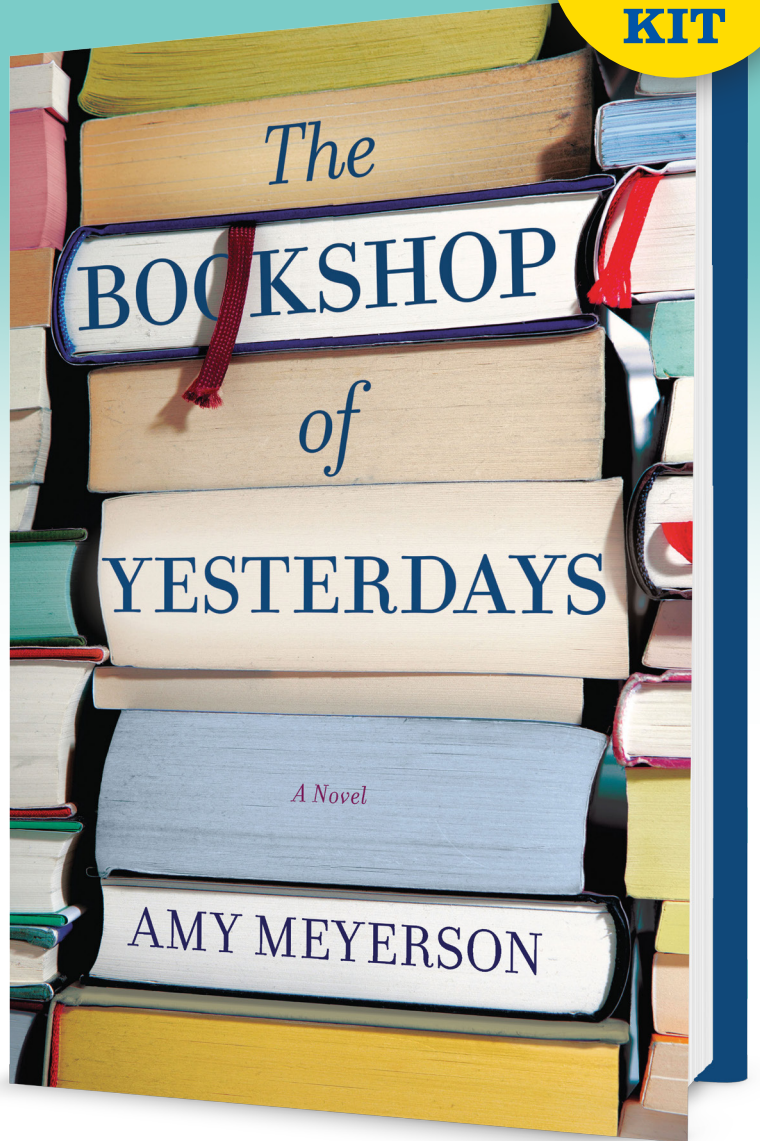
Your Next Book Club Read



No matter what you're looking for, you can find it in a great book...

Miranda Brooks grew up in the stacks of her eccentric Uncle Billy's bookstore, solving the inventive scavenger hunts he created just for her. But on Miranda's twelfth birthday, Billy suddenly disappears from her life. She doesn't hear from him again until sixteen years later when she receives unexpected news: Billy has died and left her Prospero Books, which is teetering on bankruptcy—and one final scavenger hunt.

When Miranda returns home to Los Angeles and to Prospero Books—now as its owner—she finds clues that Billy has hidden for her inside novels on the store's shelves, in locked drawers, in the name of the store itself. She soon finds herself drawn into a journey she never expected—and the terrible secret that tore her family apart.



"Terrifically fun... Part riddle, part mystery, part family drama, part a bookstore lover's dream, and then more."

—Aimee Bender, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*



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Discussion Questions

1. Miranda is forced to face some pretty shocking truths about her family. Were you surprised? What did you think Billy and Susan's secret was? When did you discover the truth? When do you think Miranda realized the truth?
2. Miranda's curiosity is piqued when she discovers that Evelyn died of a massive seizure. Did this strike you as suspicious? Does your family have any stories that you've always found suspicious?
3. Before Susan tells Miranda the truth of her past, Miranda realizes that no one else from Billy's journey knows why Billy and Susan fought. Why does Billy let Susan's version of their estrangement be the only version Miranda and the reader learn? How does Susan allow us to see the fight from both of their perspectives? Who do you sympathize with? Do you have any estrangements in your family?
4. Throughout the novel, Miranda meets several individuals from Billy's past. Who is your favorite? Why?
5. We get different perspectives on Billy through the people Miranda meets. What do these versions of Billy have in common? How do they differ? How do they change Miranda's memory of Billy? What do you think of Billy in response?
6. What impression do you have of Evelyn? How does her untimely death affect the way people remember her?
7. In the novel, Miranda has two love interests, Jay and Malcolm. How are they different? Who do you think is a better fit for her? Do you think she made the right decision?
8. What do you think the fate of Prospero Books is at the end of the novel? What statement does the novel make about independent bookstores? Is there a bookstore that you love?
9. The novel is full of literary references. Which clues are your favorites? Are there any books that you plan to read after reading this novel?
10. In Billy's last clue from *The Tempest*, he highlights: The Rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance. Miranda also tells her mother that *The Tempest* is ultimately a play about forgiveness. How is this a novel about forgiveness?



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Behind The Bookshop of Yesterdays: A Conversation with Author Amy Meyerson

1. What inspired you to write this novel?

When I was in graduate school, I read an essay in *The New York Times* Book Review about the strange things people leave in books—everything from a piece of bacon to a baby tooth. In addition to these bizarre keepsakes, the article talked about things people purposefully left in books for others to find: letters, flowers, dead bugs. I was so charmed by the idea that you could learn about someone from items he or she discarded in a book that I tore out the article and tucked it in my journal. I didn't know what I was going to do with it, but I knew that I wanted to hold onto it. Eventually that became the origin of Billy's literary scavenger hunt.

2. In the novel, Billy has set up a final scavenger hunt for Miranda. Much of their relationship was cemented over scavenger hunts. Why did you decide to use a scavenger hunt for Billy to tell Miranda about her family's past? What role have scavenger hunts played in your life?

I've always loved logic games, puzzles, scavenger hunts. When I was in middle school, I used to come up with riddles to stump my math teacher. I also voraciously read Choose Your Own Adventure books and used to craft my own versions of them and other little mysteries. When I decided to write this novel, I wanted it to embody some of that adventure and mystery.

3. How did you choose the novels you used in the scavenger hunt?

As soon as I decided to include a scavenger hunt, I knew I wanted to make it a literary scavenger hunt. I wanted the novel to be a love letter to reading and to literature. So, I wanted it to be a collection of novels that I loved, that other readers love too, but I also wanted the novels to resonate with the story Billy was revealing to Miranda. A plot detail or theme from each novel Billy selected had to connect to the clue and the person from Billy's past that Miranda would meet. This was a lot tougher than it might seem. It required a lot of trial and error, but it was a fun challenge that made me appreciate novels I've always loved in new ways.



Photo Credit: Amanda Treyz

4. The novel makes several references to *The Tempest*. Miranda is named after Miranda in *The Tempest*. The bookstore is also an homage to Shakespeare's play. Why did you choose *The Tempest*? What role does it play in your novel?

The Tempest has always been one of my favorite plays. When I was crafting the story for my novel, I was drawn to the idea that, at the onset, the novel appears a revenge plot but as it progresses, it's really about forgiveness. Immediately, I thought of *The Tempest* and how the play, among other things, is about Prospero learning to let go of his desire for vengeance and to forgive. Once I committed to this parallel, I realized that *The Tempest* worked on several other levels too: a betrayal between siblings, the power of Prospero's books, and of course, Miranda, who knows little of her past.



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- 5. Much of the novel takes place in Prospero Books. Was there a bookstore that inspired Prospero Books? What role have bookstores played in your life?**

Like most readers and writers, I've always had a soft spot for bookstores. Whenever I travel, I seek out an independent bookstore. There's that feeling you get whenever you enter a bookstore, a feeling of familiarity and communion, even if you've never been there before. I also love how bookstores reaffirm that people still read, that literature still matters. Once I decided to set the novel in a bookstore, I became a voyeur, visiting dozens of bookstores across America, eavesdropping on conversations, noting how the shelves were subdivided and what titles employees recommended, absorbing the smells and sounds of the stores. From these stores, I held onto the details I loved, trying to craft the type of bookstore I'd want to spend all my time in. When I'm not traveling, I spend a lot of time in Skylight Books in Los Feliz and Stories in Echo Park. I wrote the first draft of the novel in Stories' café. Steve, the manager of Skylight, was kind enough to give me the insider's tour of Skylight Books, complete with the joys and adventures of running a bookstore. Overall, I've found that people in the independent bookstore community are exceptionally generous, welcoming, and kind. They make it easy to want to embody their world.

- 6. During the novel, we're introduced to several characters from Billy's past. Which of these characters is your favorite? Are they based on anyone from your life?**

I never base characters directly off of people I know, but I do like to borrow details and make composite characters inspired by friends and family. While I like all of the characters and tried to make each of them appealing in distinct ways, I think my favorite character is Sheila. I admire her strength and freedom. It was incredibly fun to write in her voice, to be that independent and self-assured.

- 7. The novel is told in first person from Miranda's perspective. Why did you decide to tell it in Miranda's voice? Do you identify with Miranda's struggles throughout the novel?**

Although a lot of the story occurred before Miranda was born, I fundamentally saw this novel as her story. Miranda is very observant and a student of history, yet she's never been that curious about her family's past. She doesn't know about her mother's estrangement with Billy. She doesn't

know how her father's family died. I was really drawn to this contradiction, how we disconnect our family narratives from history. As I've gotten older, I've become really interested in the stories of history, how we mythologize the past. I also was drawn to the unreliability of history, particularly personal history, how stories are constructed and reconfigured. I thought it was really important that when Miranda meets people from her uncle's past and they share their stories, Miranda is the one to tell the reader. These stories are still from Miranda's perspective. They include details she couldn't possibly know, and that makes them her stories, complete with her discoveries about the past. It seemed really important to me that, in order for this to be Miranda's story, it had to be in her voice.

- 8. What was your process of writing this book? Did it take you a long time?**

This book was a lot of fun to write. It's my first novel, so it certainly involved a few false starts and a steep learning curve. In the past, I've never really outlined, but because this novel involved a mystery and a scavenger hunt, it required a lot of planning. I couldn't just sit down and write. I had to know where I was going. The clues were a really helpful plotting device. They gave me clear direction. They also helped me keep track of the story. It's helpful to have ways of dividing a novel into distinct sections, both on the page and in your head.

- 9. What writers or books have inspired you?**

Everything! I never start a book without finishing it. And I find something valuable in everything that I read. When I read, I read at two levels: always for pleasure, but also to learn craft. The best way to become a better writer is to be a more engaged reader. I always try to keep on top of new fiction, particularly by debut authors. And I make it a habit of reading at least a dozen classics each year. Writers I always return to are Ann Patchett, Jennifer Egan, Margaret Atwood, Jeffrey Eugenides, and Aimee Bender. In particular, I read a lot of contemporary female authors.



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