

# “THE STORIED LIFE OF AJ FIKRY” BY GABRIELLE ZEVIN

## Discussion questions

1. Why did Amelia ask her date what book had had the greatest influence on him? What was her answer? Or A.J.'s? What is yours?
2. Why is a theft an acceptable social loss while a death is an isolating one, especially for A.J.?
3. A.J. said that “Remember that a fine education can be found in places other than the usual.” What are some of those places?
4. What did A.J. mean by the following statement to his doctor after his wife died “I don’t want to die. I just find it difficult to be here all the time”? Do many survivors of a tragedy feel this way at times? What are some good reasons to tell someone to stay?
5. A.J. talks about the “necessity of encountering stories at precisely the right time in our lives.” What were some of the books he encountered that spoke to him in ways they wouldn’t have at another time? Did Amy have any books like that? Do you?
6. Why did Maya’s mother choose A.J.?
7. How did having the baby in the bookstore increase the number of mothers buying books in the bookstore? What are some of the stories they enjoy? What did she also do for the kids who came into the bookstore?
8. Maya wrote reviews for A.J. in the afternoons. Apple=the book’s smell is approved. A block of cheese=the book is ripe. A self-portrait=she likes the pictures. How would book reviews be different in the adult world if we used symbols like this for our reviews? \*Activity\* What fun symbols would you use to categorize books?
9. What was Amy’s favorite book, and why did it suggest to A.J. “strange and wonderful things about her character...dark places that I might like to visit”? How do you “know everything you need to know about a person from their answer to the question ‘What is your favorite book?’”
10. A.J. asked Amy, “In what restaurant based on a novel would you prefer to dine” when they were eating at the Moby Dick themed restaurant. Her answer was The Gulag Archipelago, because made her hungry reading about bread and soup. What was the item in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe that A.J. had always wanted to try? Why was it disappointing for him? What novel would you prefer a restaurant based off of and why?
11. A.J. appreciated Friedman’s novel because it “gets at something specific about what it is to lose someone. How it isn’t one thing. He writes about how you lose and lose and lose.” What were some of the things he lost when Nic died?



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12. Why did Lambiase believe that “pretty much every bad thing in life is a result of bad timing, and every good thing is a result of good timing”? How did this connect with Tamerlane and Marian Wallace and her daughter, Maya?
13. Why couldn’t Daniel ever get past the success of his first novel, *The Children in the Apple Tree*?
14. What interesting things happened at the bookstore reading for Leon Friedman? Why did A.J. really go to all that trouble with the party and hats and all?
15. Why, for the wedding, was a passage chosen to be read that began with the quote “It is the secret fear that we are unlovable that isolates us, but it is only because we are isolated that we think we are unlovable...”?
16. Is a twist less satisfying if you know it’s coming? Is a twist that you can’t predict symptomatic of bad construction? What were some twists in this book?
17. What makes some authors, teachers, and writing professors disagree with the following statement: “‘Show, don’t tell’ is a complete crock of shit...It comes from Syd Field’s screenplay books, but it doesn’t have a thing to do with novel writing. Novels are all tell. The best ones at least. Novels aren’t meant to be imitation screenplays” ?
18. “...cops go one of two ways as they get older. They either get more judgmental or less so. Lambiase is not so rigid as when he was a young police officer. He has found that people do all sorts of things, and they usually have their reasons.” What things did Lambiase choose not to judge on?
19. Why did A.J. consider a crack pipe to be less destructive than an ereader?
20. “Why is it so much easier to write about the things we dislike/hate/acknowledge to be flawed than the things we love”? How did Maya, and AJ, manage to do both?

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