

Age of Miracles – Karen Thompson Walker

Summary

With a voice as distinctive and original as that of *The Lovely Bones*, and for the fans of the speculative fiction of Margaret Atwood, Karen Thompson Walker's *The Age of Miracles* is a luminous, haunting, and unforgettable debut novel about coming of age set against the backdrop of an utterly altered world.

It still amazes me how little we really knew.... Maybe everything that happened to me and my family had nothing at all to do with the slowing. It's possible, I guess. But I doubt it. I doubt it very much.

On a seemingly ordinary Saturday in a California suburb, Julia and her family awake to discover, along with the rest of the world, that the rotation of the earth has suddenly begun to slow. The days and nights grow longer and longer, gravity is affected, the environment is thrown into disarray.

Yet as she struggles to navigate an ever-shifting landscape, Julia is also coping with the normal disasters of everyday life—the fissures in her parents' marriage, the loss of old friends, the hopeful anguish of first love, the bizarre behavior of her grandfather who, convinced of a government conspiracy, spends his days obsessively cataloging his possessions. As Julia adjusts to the new normal, the slowing inexorably continues. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

Karen Thompson Walker is a graduate of UCLA and the Columbia MFA program and a recipient of the 2011 Sirenland Fellowship as well as a *Bomb* magazine fiction prize. A former editor at Simon & Schuster, she wrote *The Age of Miracles* in the mornings before work. Born and raised in San Diego, she now lives in Brooklyn with her husband. *The Age of Miracles* is her first book. (*From the publisher.*)

Discussion Questions

1. As readers, why do you think we're drawn to stories about the end of the world? What special pleasures do these kinds of narratives offer? And how do you think this element works in *The Age of Miracles*?
2. Julia is an only child. How does this fact affect who she is and how she sees the world? How would her experience of the slowing be different if she had a sibling? How would her experience of middle school be different?
3. How much do you think the slowing alters Julia's experience of adolescence? If the slowing had never happened, in what ways would her childhood have been different? In what ways would it have been the same?
4. Julia's parents' marriage becomes increasingly strained over the course of the book. Why do you think they stay together? Do you think it's the right choice? How much do you think Julia's mother does or does not know about Sylvia?
5. Julia's father tells several crucial lies. Discuss these lies and consider which ones, if any, are justified and which ones are not. Is lying ever the right thing to do? If so, when?
6. How would the book change if it were narrated by Julia's mother? What if it were narrated by Julia's father? Or her grandfather?
7. Why do you think Julia is so drawn to Seth? Why do you think he is drawn to her?
8. Did you identify more with the clock-timers or with the real-timers? Which would you be and why?
9. The slowing affects the whole planet, but the book is set in southern California. How does the setting affect the book? How important is it that the story takes place in California?
10. How do you feel about the way the book ends? What do you think lies ahead for Julia, for her parents and for the world?
11. The slowing throws the natural world into disarray. Plants and animals die and there are changes in the weather. Did this book make you think about the threats that face our own natural world? Do you think the book has something to say about

climate change?

12. If you woke up tomorrow to the news that the rotation of the earth had significantly slowed, how do you think you would respond? What is the first thing you would do?

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