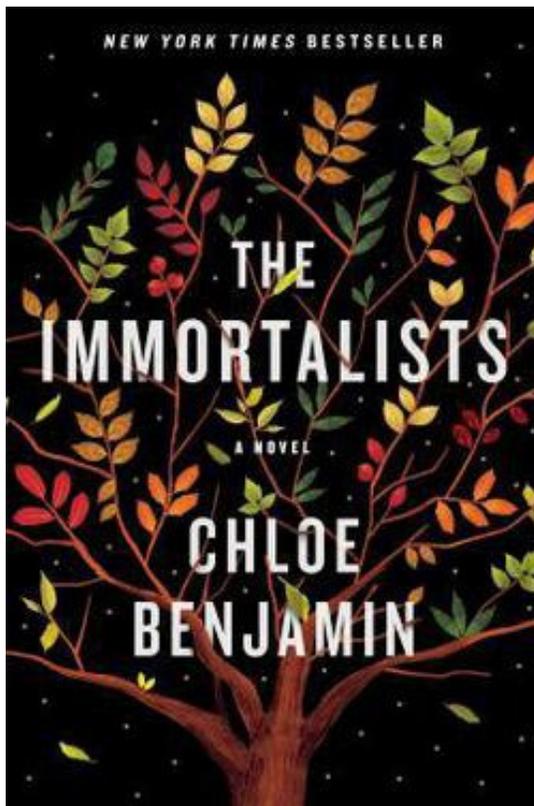


Reading Guide for

THE IMMORTALISTS

by Chloe Benjamin



DURHAM COUNTY
Library

SYNOPSIS

If you knew the date of your death, how would you live your life?

It's 1969 in New York City's Lower East Side, and word has spread of the arrival of a mystical woman, a traveling psychic who claims to be able to tell anyone the day they will die. The Gold children—four adolescents on the cusp of self-awareness—sneak out to hear their fortunes.

The prophecies inform their next five decades. Golden-boy Simon escapes to the West Coast, searching for love in '80s San Francisco; dreamy Klara becomes a Las Vegas magician, obsessed with blurring reality and fantasy; eldest son Daniel seeks security as an army doctor post-9/11; and bookish Varya throws herself into longevity research, where she tests the boundary between science and immortality.

A sweeping novel of remarkable ambition and depth, *The Immortalists* probes the line between destiny and choice, reality and illusion, this world and the next. It is a deeply moving testament to the power of story, the nature of belief, and the unrelenting pull of familial bonds. -GoodReads

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chloe Benjamin is the author of *The Immortalists*, a New York Times bestseller, and *The Anatomy of Dreams*.

A Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, LibraryReads favorite, and #1 Indie Next pick, *The Immortalists* was named a best book of 2018 by NPR, The Washington Post, Entertainment Weekly, and others.

The Anatomy of Dreams received the Edna Ferber Fiction Book Award and was long listed for the 2014 Center for Fiction First Novel Prize.

Her work has been translated into over thirty languages. Originally from San Francisco, CA, Chloe is a graduate of Vassar College and the M.F.A. in fiction at the University of Wisconsin. She lives with her husband in Madison, WI.

REVIEWS

"*The Immortalists* is not just a novel about grief; it conjures characters with such dimension that you mourn them too, a magic rare enough to leave one astonished." -The Guardian

" . . . an imaginative and satisfying family saga." -Publisher's Weekly

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Book Club Questions from the publisher

1. *THE IMMORTALISTS* explores the degree to which we shape our own destinies. Do you believe that the siblings' fate was preordained? Why or why not?
2. The novel takes place in very different settings --- 1960s New York City, the San Francisco dance scene, glitzy Las Vegas hotels. In what ways do these locations affect the characters? Why do you think all four of the siblings moved away from New York City?
3. *THE IMMORTALISTS* is narrated by the four siblings in separate sections. What was your reading experience when you switched sections? Did you identify more closely with certain siblings?
4. The power of belief --- whether it be magic, religious faith or storytelling --- is an important theme in the novel. How does belief affect each of the siblings? What is different or similar about the stories they tell themselves?
5. At its heart, *THE IMMORTALISTS* is a family love story, exploring both past and future generations of the Gold family. In what ways does family history shape us? What kind of legacies do the four siblings leave behind?
6. How do magic and reality blur in the novel? Were there any particular moments that seemed to defy logic? Why are certain characters drawn to magic and the unknowable more than others?
7. Discuss the siblings' significant others: Raj, Mira and Robert. How are their lives affected by the prophecy? How do romantic and familial relationships interact and contrast in *THE IMMORTALISTS*?
8. At the end of the novel, Gertie tells Varya about the beauty and freedom in uncertainty, questioning why her children believed the fortune teller. Did you believe the fortune teller? What gives the fortune teller her power? What freedoms does uncertainty bring?
9. What do you imagine happens to Varya after the book's ending? How have her views on longevity and death changed?
10. Would you want to find out the date of your death? How would you live your life differently if you had this information?



READ-ALIKES

Loved *The Immortalists*? Try these "read-alikes" from NoveList Plus

1. *Eternal life*

by Dara Horn

Steeped in Jewish lore, these poignant, engaging novels delve into questions of life and death, whether immortality (*Eternal Live*) or knowledge about your own death (*The Immortalists*). What does your life look like? How does family work? Can you evade fate? -- Melissa Gray

2. *An extraordinary destiny*

by S. N. Paleja,

Exploring the role of fate in life and the persistence of the past, these magic-tinged family sagas follow four siblings in 1970s NYC (the moving *The Immortalists*) and three generations of a family in 1947 Lahore, India (the sweeping *Extraordinary Destiny*). -- Mike Nilsson

3. *The children's crusade*

by Ann Packer

These character-driven family sagas each follow the paths of four siblings, revealing the strong hold the past has on the present. Both moving tales are a thoughtful look at the truth of family dynamics and the surprising complexity of personalities. -- Mike Nilsson

4. *Them*

by Joyce Carol Oates

The complex lives of the Wendalls (*Them*) and the Golds (*The Immortalists*) are dramatically chronicled in these sweeping novels. Both heartwrenching stories depict families marked by tragedy and circumstances compounded by difficult life choices. -
- Andrienne Cruz