



Extremely loud & incredibly close

By Jonathan Safran Foer

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Genre & subjects

Fathers and sons fiction

September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001 Fiction

Synopsis

Nine-year-old Oskar Schell has embarked on an urgent, secret mission that will take him through the five boroughs of New York. His goal is to find the lock that matches a mysterious key that belonged to his father, who died in the World Trade Centre on the morning of September 11. This seemingly impossible task will bring Oskar into contact with survivors of all sorts on an exhilarating, affecting, often hilarious, and ultimately healing journey.

Author biography

Jonathan Safran Foer was born in 1977 in Washington, D.C. He is the editor of the anthology *A Convergence of Birds: Original Fiction and Poetry Inspired by the Work of Joseph Cornell*, a Boston Globe bestseller. His stories have been published in the *Paris Review*, *The New Yorker* and *Conjunctions*. He lives in Queens, New York.

Discussion starters

- Talk about Oskar—an unusually precious child. Do you find him sympathetic or annoying? Or both?
- For Shakespeare buffs: Oskar "plays Yorick" (the long dead jester whose skull Hamlet holds in his hand!) in a school production. What is the significance of that role? (See *Hamlet*: Act V, Scene I, Line 188).
- Jonathan Safran Foer has said that he writes about characters and their miscommunications: some characters think they're saying a lot but say nothing; others say nothing but end up saying a lot. Which characters fall into which category in *Extremely Loud*? What might Foer be saying about our ability to communicate deep-seated emotions?
- Some critics have wondered where Oskar's mother is and how the child is left alone to wander the streets of New York alone at night. Is that a relevant comment? Do you see this book as a work of realism (in which case the mother's role would matter) ... or as more of a fable, on the order, say, of *Life of Pi*? If the latter, what is *Extremely loud and incredibly close* a fable of? (Like *Pi*, Oskar seems to be a quester—but of what?)

- Do you find the illustrations, over-written texts, etc. a meaningful, integral part of the work? Or do you find them distracting and gimmicky? Why are they there?
- How do both main plot and subplot (Oskar's grandfather and the bombing of Dresden) interweave with one another?

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