



# Storied life of A. J. Fikry

By Gabrielle Zevin

First published in 2014

## Genre & subject

Widowers

Abandoned children

Man-women relationships

## Synopsis

Originally published as “The Collected Works of A.J. Fikry”. A.J. Fikry owns a failing bookshop. His wife has just died, in tragic circumstances. His rare and valuable first edition has been stolen. His life is a wreck. Amelia is a book rep, with a big heart, and a lonely life. Maya is the baby who ends up on A.J.'s bookshop floor with a note. What happens in the bookshop that changes the lives of these seemingly normal but extraordinary characters? This is the story of how unexpected love can rescue you and bring you back to real life, in a world that you won't want to leave, with characters that you will come to love.

## Author biography

Gabrielle Zevin (born October 24, 1977, New York City) is an American author and screenwriter. She graduated from Harvard University in 2000 with a degree in English & American Literature and lives in Los Angeles. Zevin's father is a Russian-Jewish American, and her mother is Korean.

Zevin's first novel *Elsewhere* was published in 2005. It was nominated for a 2006 Quill award, won the Borders Original Voices Award, and was a selection of the Barnes & Noble Book Club. It also made the Carnegie long list. The book has been translated into over twenty languages.

In 2007 Zevin was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award for Best First Screenplay for *Conversations with Other Women* which starred Helena Bonham Carter and Aaron Eckhart and was also directed by Hans Canosa.

In 2014, her eighth novel, *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry*, debuted on the New York Times Best Seller List.

## Discussion starters

- At the beginning of the story, Amelia says she is considering quitting online dating. How would you compare the act of buying books online to the act of dating online? Is it relevant to the story that Amelia meets her eventual husband in a very analog location, a bookstore?

- Consider the setting. Why do you think the author chooses to set the book on an island? How does the island setting reflect A.J.'s character?
- Perhaps oddly, vampires are a recurring motif in the story: for example, when A.J.'s wife throws the vampire prom and when A.J. watches *True Blood* to court Amelia. What do you make of the references to vampires?
- Lambiase moves from an occasional or non-reader, to a reader, to a bookseller. How do you think becoming a reader changes him? Consider the scene where he decides not to confront Ismay about the backpack. Do you think Lambiase's reaction is different than it would have been if he hadn't taken up reading?
- The author chooses to begin each chapter with a description of a short story. Discuss some of the ways the stories relate to the chapters with which they are paired. Is A.J. creating a canon for Maya? How does the book itself function as a kind of canon? If these are A.J.'s favourites, what do they say about A.J. as a reader and as a man?
- Did you find Ismay's motivations for stealing Tamerlane to be forgivable? How do you think she should pay for her crime? Why do you think Lambiase lets her off?
- At one point, Maya speculates that perhaps "your whole life is determined by what store you get left in" (page 85). Is it the people or the place that makes the difference?
- When did you become aware that Leon Friedman might be an imposter? What did you make of Leonora Ferris's reasons for hiring him?
- How do you think Daniel Parrish might have changed if he had lived? Do you think some people never change?
- Were you surprised by the outcome of the short story contest? What do you think of A.J.'s comments to Maya about why certain books and stories win prizes and others don't? Does the knowledge that a book has won a prize attract you to reading it?
- Compare Maya's "fiction" about the last day of her mother's life to Ismay's version. Which do you consider to be more accurate and why?
- How do you think the arrival of the e-reader is related to the denouement of the story? Is A.J. a man who cannot exist in a world with e-books? What do you think of e-books? Do you prefer reading in e- or on paper?
- At one point, A.J. asks Maya, "Is a twist less satisfying if you know it's coming? Is a twist that you can't predict symptomatic of bad construction?" What do you think of this statement in view of the plot of *The Storied Life of A. J. Fikry*? Did you guess who Maya's father was? If so, what were the clues?
- The author chooses to end the novel with a new sales rep coming to an Island Books that is no longer owned by A.J. What do you make of this ending?
- What do you think the future holds for physical books and bookstores?

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