



The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry by Gabrielle Zevin

Martin County Library System Book Club Kit:

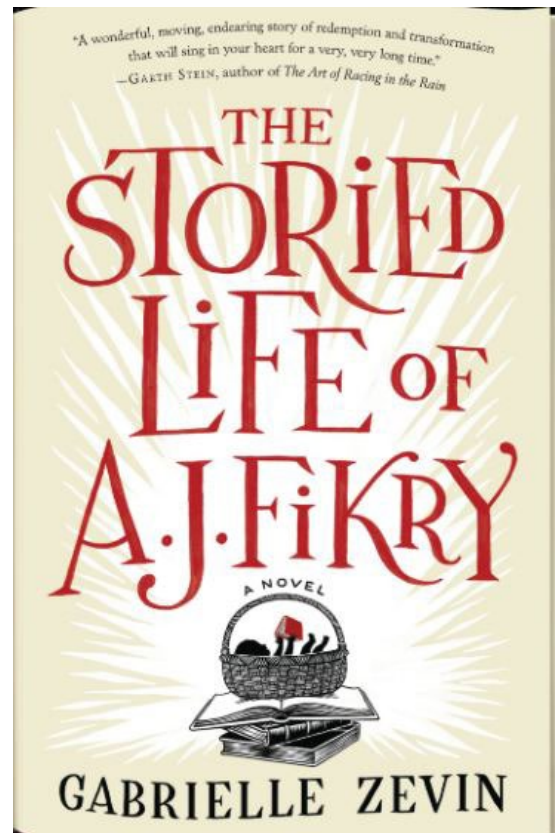
The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry by Gabrielle Zevin

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Book summary

A. J. Fikry's life is not at all what he expected it to be. His wife has died, his bookstore is experiencing the worst sales in its history, and now his prized possession, a rare collection of Poe poems, has been stolen. Slowly but surely, he is isolating himself from all the people of Alice Island—from Lambiase, the well-intentioned police officer who's always felt kindly toward Fikry; from Ismay, his sister-in-law who is hell-bent on saving him from his dreary self; from Amelia, the lovely and idealistic (if eccentric) Knightley Press sales rep who keeps on taking the ferry over to Alice Island, refusing to be deterred by A.J.'s bad attitude. Even the books in his store have stopped



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holding pleasure for him. These days, A.J. can only see them as a sign of a world that is changing too rapidly.

And then a mysterious package appears at the bookstore. It's a small package, but large in weight. It's that unexpected arrival that gives A.J. Fikry the opportunity to make his life over, the ability to see everything anew. It doesn't take long for the locals to notice the change overcoming A.J.; or for that determined sales rep, Amelia, to see her curmudgeonly client in a new light; or for the wisdom of all those books to become again the lifeblood of A.J.'s world; or for everything to twist again into a version of his life that he didn't see coming. As surprising as it is moving, *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry* is an unforgettable tale of transformation and second chances, an irresistible affirmation of why we read, and why we love.

Source: Author's website (gabriellezevin.com/books/the-storied-life-of-a-j-fikry)



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Meet the Author

Gabrielle Zevin is a New York Times best-selling novelist whose books have been translated into thirty-nine languages.

Her tenth novel, *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow*, was an instant *New York Times* Best Seller, a *Sunday Times* Best Seller, and a selection of the Tonight's Show's Fallon Book Club. *Tomorrow* was Amazon.com's #1 Book of the Year, Time Magazine's #1 Book of the Year, a New York Times Notable Book, and the winner of both the Goodreads Choice Award for Fiction and the Book of the Month Club's Book of the Year. Following a twenty-five bidder auction, the feature film rights to *Tomorrow* were acquired by Temple Hill and Paramount Studios. Zevin is currently writing the screenplay.



The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry also spent many months on the *New York Times* Best Seller List. A.J. Fikry was honored with the Southern California Independent Booksellers Award for Fiction, the Japan Booksellers' Prize, and was long listed for the International Dublin Literary Award, among other honors. A.J. Fikry is now a feature film with a screenplay by Zevin. She has also written children's books, including the award winning *Elsewhere*.

She is the screenwriter of *Conversations with Other Women* (Helen Bonham Carter) for which she received an Independent Spirit Award Nomination for Best First Screenplay. She has occasionally written criticism for the *New York Times Book Review* and NPR's *All Things Considered*, and she began her writing career, at age fourteen, as a music critic for the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel. Zevin is a graduate of Harvard University. She lives in Los Angeles.

Source: Author's website (gabriellezevin.com/about-gabrielle)



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Discussion Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. Lambiase moves from an occasional or nonreader, 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?
5. The author chooses to begin each chapter with a description of a short story. Discuss some of the ways 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 favorites, what do they say about A.J. as a reader and as a man?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. When did you become aware that Leon Friedman might be an imposter? What did you make of Leonora Ferris's reasons for hiring him?
9. How do you think Daniel Parrish might have changed if he had lived? Do you think some people never change?



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10. 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?
11. 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?
12. 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?
13. 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 A.J. Fikry? Did you guess who Maya's father was? If so, what were the clues?
14. 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?
15. What do you think the future holds for physical books and bookstores?

Source: Author's website
(gabriellezevin.com/books/the-storied-life-of-a-j-fikry/discussion-questions)

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Recipes

Mini Quiche 4 Ways

- 48 miniature muffin cups tin
- 4 pie crusts thawed (homemade or from two boxes store bought)

For the Egg Mixture:

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

For the Mini Bacon Quiche:

- 3 oz. Swiss cheese grated
- 3 slices bacon, fried and crumbled
- 2 Tablespoons green onion sliced



For the Mini Ham and Cheese Quiche:

- 3 oz. Swiss cheese grated
- 1/4 cup (about 1.5 oz.) ham cubed

For the Mini Spinach Quiche:

- 3 oz. Swiss cheese grated
- 4 cups (3 oz.) spinach wilted (boil in water until dark green and wilted, drain and dry between two kitchen towels or paper towels)
- 1 tablespoon red bell pepper cubed

For the Mini Mushroom Quiche:

- 2 Tablespoons (1/2 oz.) mushrooms finely chopped



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- 3 oz. Swiss cheese grated.

To Prepare the Crusts

Let the pie crust stand at room temperature for 15 to 20 minutes. Preheat the oven to 375 F. Spray 48 miniature muffin tin with non-stick cooking spray.

Open and unfold one pie crust, then press out any fold lines. With a 2 1/2 inch biscuit cutter, cut out 12 rounds. Repeat with the remaining 3 pie crusts. In the prepared mini muffin tin, press 1 round of pie crust into the bottom and up the sides of the cup.

In a 2-cup measuring cup (for ease of pouring), combine the eggs, milk and the salt. Whisk well. Set aside.

To Assemble the Mini Bacon Quiche

- In 12 of the mini muffin cups, add 1 Tablespoon of cheese. Evenly divide the chopped bacon among the 12 cups, using about 1/2 teaspoon bacon in each. Top with a couple slices of green onion.

To Assemble the Mini Ham and Cheese Quiche

- In 12 of the mini muffin cups, add 1 Tablespoon of cheese. Evenly divide the chopped ham among the 12 cups, using about 1/2 teaspoon ham in each.

To Assemble the Mini Spinach Quiche

- In 12 of the mini muffins cups, add 1 Tablespoon of cheese. Evenly divide the wilted spinach among the 12 cups, using about 1/2 teaspoon spinach in each. Evenly divide the chopped red pepper among the mini muffin cups.

To Assemble the Mini Mushroom Quiche



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- In 12 of the mini muffin cups, add 1 Tablespoon of cheese. Evenly divide the chopped mushroom among the 12 cups, using about 1/2 teaspoon mushroom in each.

To Finish and Bake the Mini Quiche

- Pour the egg mixture into each of the 48 cups, filling to within 1/4 inch of the top. Bake at 375 F. until golden brown, about 25 to 30 minutes. Cool slightly and serve warm.

Source: "Mini Quiche 4 Ways." Culinary Hill.
(culinaryhill.com/mini-quiche-4-ways//#wprm-recipe-container-91311)

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French Butter Cookies (Sable Breton)

- 1/2 cup and 1 tbsp. granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup and 5 Tablespoons salted butter*
- 3 egg yolks, separated
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups and 2 tbsp. all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting work surface



Preheat the oven to 375 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone mat. Beat the butter and sugar together on medium speed until light and fluffy—about 1 minute.

Add 2 egg yolks and the vanilla extract and mix on medium speed until they're incorporated. Stop to scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula before resuming the mixing. Add the flour in and mix on low speed just until the dough starts to clump together. Lightly flour a wooden board or counter before placing the mass of dough onto it. Use your hands to shape the dough into a big ball. Then sprinkle some flour on top of the dough before using a rolling pin to roll the dough out. As soon as the dough starts sticking to your pin, sprinkle a pinch of flour on the dough, then resume rolling. Roll your dough out until it is approximately 1/4 inch thick.

Use medium round cookie cutters (2 1/4 inch) to cut out round cookies from the dough. Use a sharp-edged spatula to transfer the cookie rounds onto the baking sheet. Place 12 cookies on the baking sheet, spaced out from each other. Beat the remaining yolk in a small bowl. Use a fork to make a cross-hatch pattern on the cookies (drag the fork down vertically on the cookie, then drag the fork across horizontally). Brush the tops of the cookies with the beaten egg yolk. Bake the



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cookies for 12 to 15 min., until they're a deep golden color. Transfer the cookies to a wire cooling rack to cool completely.

Source: "French Butter Cookies." Mon Petit Four. (monpetitfour.com/french-butter-cookies)

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