



Book Club Questions  
A Little Life by Hanya Yanagihara

1. A Little Life heavily uses location to anchor its plot. The novel feels deeply rooted in place, from the characters eating pho in Chinatown to Jude and Willem creating a life together in their Lispenard Street apartment. How does this serve the story? And why do you think these places have now come to mean so much to readers of the book?

2. Part 1 of the novel focuses on the post-college life of four main characters - Jude, JB, Willem and Malcolm - before the narrative dramatically shifts in part 2, to focus almost entirely on Jude. Through this shift, Yanagihara slowly reveals details of Jude's past and his coping mechanisms for dealing with this in the present. How does this narrative shift affect the reading experience? Why do you think the author chose to dramatically alter the focus of the narrative in such a way?

3. The four lead characters, Willem, JB, Malcolm, and Jude are central to the story with a friendship that spans decades. Do you see any similarities in their characters? What experiences have brought them together to form such a closely-knit group with long-lasting friendship?

4. 'Friendship was witnessing another's slow drip of miseries, and long bouts of boredom, and occasional triumphs. It was feeling honored by the privilege of getting to be present for another person's most dismal moments, and knowing that you could be dismal around him in return'. Discuss this quote - To what extent do the friendship group become crucial as part of Jude's recovery? Do you believe there was ever a chance for Jude to experience any kind of healing?

5. When published, The Atlantic called A Little Life 'an astonishing and ambitious chronicle of queer life in America' in an article titled '[The Great Gay Novel Might Be Here](#)'. Despite this, Yanagihara stated in a recent interview with The Standard that writing a gay novel was 'never a sort of intention,' and that 'it was just who the characters happened to be.' Is it fair to term A Little Life a 'gay novel'? How central to the novel is the characters' sexuality, and what relevance does it bear?



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6. Before publication, Yanagihara's editor suggested she should cut back on some of the darker histories of Jude's childhood. Since its release, A Little Life has been critiqued for these explicit depictions of abuse and even classed as 'torture porn' by one reviewer. Consequently, some readers have found its graphic nature unsettling. Discuss whether the debate around the novel being exploitative is valid.

7. In an interview with Vulture, Yanagihara said that she wanted to 'create a character who never gets better' while exploring 'the idea that there is a level of trauma from which a person simply can't recover. I do believe that really, we can sustain only a finite amount of suffering.' To what extent does this feel realistic? Does Yanagihara's depiction of a person struggling with the legacy of childhood trauma feel true to life?

8. While the novel is set in modern times in New York City, it is very light on any wider specifics such as socio-political or historical events. Why do you think Yanagihara has chosen to omit such detail? Is there a benefit to this?

9. A Little Life contains seven chapters, each with three sections. Each subsection contains 18,000 words. When speaking to [The New Yorker in 2022](#), Yanagihara revealed the purpose behind the book's structure. 'This scaffolding was there to organize, but not dilute, the story's corrosive emotions. She did not separate the subsections with white space, "to deprive readers of natural resting places."' As a reader, did this structure affect your experience of the book? Upon reflection, did you notice it, and if so, how did it impact you?

10. Jude is legally adopted by Harold and his wife Julia. As a thirty-year-old grown man, much of this is symbolic. What is Yanagihara trying to depict here? What is the purpose of the adoption and how does it affect Jude?

Book club questions from [The Booker Prize](#)