

Book Club Discussion Questions The Time Traveler's Wife by Audrey Niffenegger

1. Audrey Niffenegger includes a section of *The Odyssey* at the end of the book. In many ways Clare and Henry are a modern Penelope and Odysseus. What parallels do you see? Are there other couples in literature that remind you of Clare and Henry?
2. On page xv, Clare says, "I wait for Henry." One of her art projects focuses on birds and longing. How is Clare shaped by waiting and absence? How do these themes develop throughout the novel?
3. On page xviii, Henry says, "I hate to be where she is not, when she is not. And yet I am always going, and she cannot follow." Do you see Henry as a traveler, an adventurer? Or is he a victim of chance?
4. Defining moments in Henry's life become points in the past that he revisits. The death of Henry's mother is one of these pivotal events. How does losing his mother define Henry? What other key moments are like this one?
5. Was Henry right to give young Clare a list of when he would visit? Was she too young, even though Henry knew they would be together in the future? Would you want the list if you were Clare?
6. Henry says, on page 55, "[T]here is only free will when you are in time, in the present . . . in the past we can only do what we did, and we can only be there if we were there." Was Henry destined to live his life as he did? Did he have a choice in every moment? Are there things you think he should have tried to change?
7. How do you view Gomez? Was he ultimately more helpful or harmful as a friend to Henry? What would you have done in his shoes?
8. Henry and Clare disagree over having a child, with strong arguments on both sides. Henry wants to protect Clare, and Clare doesn't want to give up (though she thinks of doing so until a Henry from the future assures her that eventually they succeed). Who do you think is right?
9. Alba has more control over her ability to time travel, and she has the benefit of Henry's experience, but we don't know if there will be a cure for the genetic disorder causing her Chrono-Impairment. What do you imagine for Alba's future?
10. The dynamics of Clare and Henry's relationship are such that they deal with their past, present, and future selves simultaneously. On pages 146–47, Clare says, "With Henry, I can see everything laid out, like a map, past and future, everything at once. . . . I can reach into him and touch time." What do you imagine this would be like? What tactics do they use to reconcile their past, present, and future selves?

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11. The ending is foreshadowed early in the book, driving the novel toward the final scene where an elderly Clare awaits Henry's last visit. How did this affect your reading experience? Do you ultimately find the book uplifting, or is it tragic?

12. Audrey Niffenegger has said that she had two rules while writing the novel:

13. Everything happens once and nothing can be changed once it has happened.

14. Henry has a genetic disorder that causes him to time travel. He cannot control it and it is not his fault.

15. Do you think this made the idea of time travel more credible? Have you read other time-travel novels? Do you think the authors were similarly precise about how they managed the complexity of characters who are not confined by time?

Discussion Questions by Publisher

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