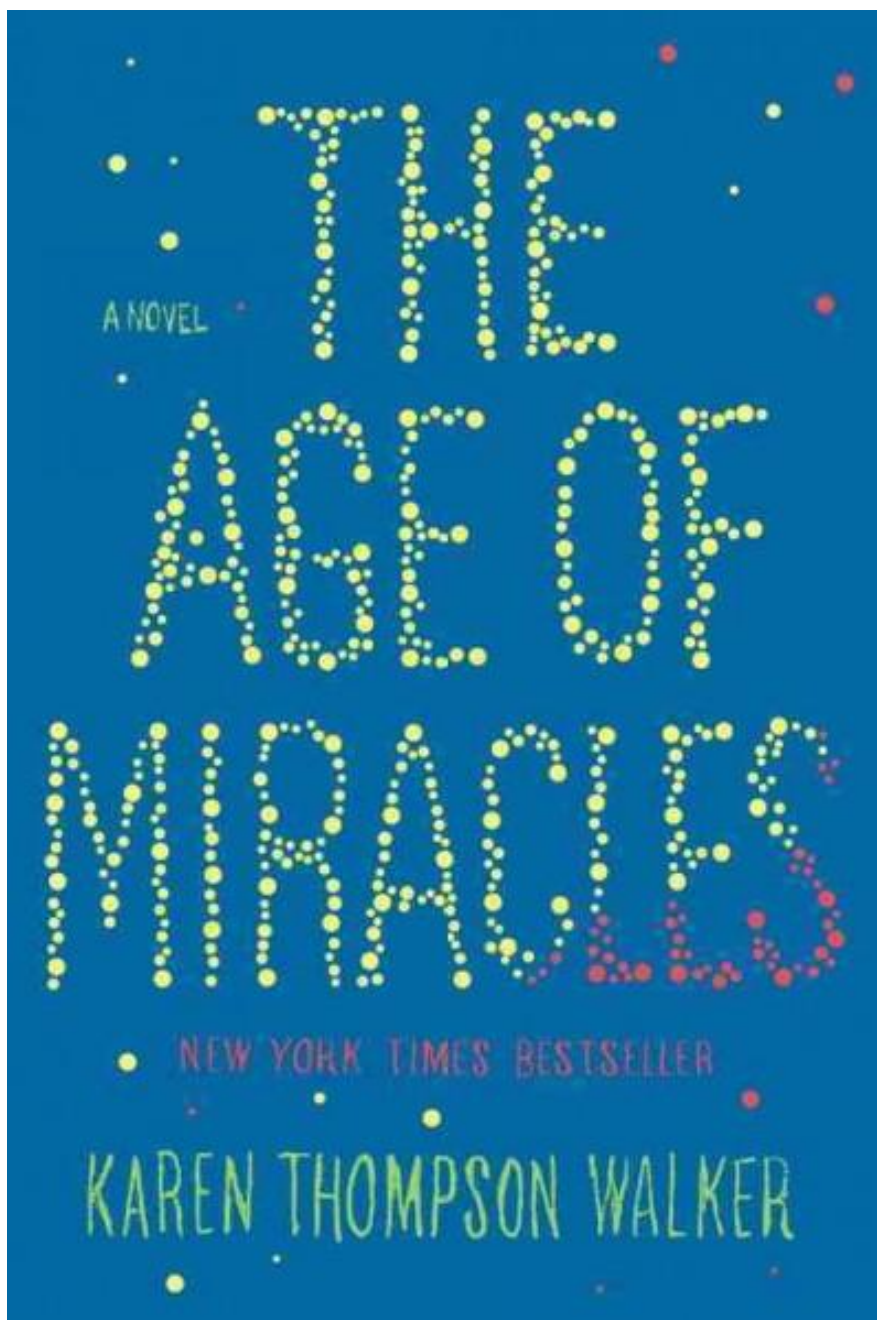


About the book...



On a seemingly ordinary Saturday in a California suburb, Julia and her family awake to discover, along with the rest of the world, that the rotation of the earth has suddenly begun to slow. The days and nights grow longer and longer, gravity is affected, the environment is thrown into disarray. Yet as she struggles to navigate an ever-shifting landscape, Julia is also coping with the normal disasters of everyday life : the fissures in her parents' marriage, the loss of old friends, the hopeful anguish of first love, the bizarre behavior of her grandfather who, convinced of a government conspiracy, spends his days obsessively cataloging his possessions. As Julia adjusts to the new normal, the slowing inexorably continues.

About the author...



Karen Thompson Walker was born and raised in San Diego, California, where *The Age of Miracles* is set. She studied English and creative writing at UCLA, where she wrote for the UCLA Daily Bruin. After college, she worked as a newspaper reporter in the San Diego area before moving to New York City to attend the Columbia University MFA program.

A former book editor at Simon & Schuster, she wrote *The Age of Miracles* in the mornings before work—sometimes while riding the subway.

She is the recipient of the 2011 Sirenland Fellowship as well as a Bomb Magazine fiction prize. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband.

Reviews

Booklist Reviews *Starred Review*

This is the way the world ends: by gradually slowing down. When scientists reveal that the earth's rotation has been extended by 56 minutes, there is a minor panic. Twelve-year-old Julia doesn't really recognize what's happening - sure, her drama-queen mother starts hoarding food, and she loses some school friends when their families leave town, but at first, life seems to go on as usual. Until the slowdown continues, and it isn't only by an hour anymore - the days keep stretching, with no apparent return to normal. The world's governments agree to keep "clock time," forcing everyone to stick to a 24-hour schedule, despite sunrise and sunset. Rebels known as "real-timers" are ostracized and harassed. Some people become afflicted with "slowing syndrome," leaving them disoriented and prone to passing out, including Julia's mother, who causes a fatal accident due to a fainting spell. Studies document an increase in impulsive behavior in others, and those seemingly unaffected by the slowing find themselves making bad decisions. All of this has an impact on Julia, who sees her parents, teachers, and neighbors crumbling around her. All at once a coming-of-age story and a tale of a frightening possible future, this is a gem that will charm readers as well as give them the shivers.

Library Journal* *Starred Review

Eleven-year-old Julia awakens on a Saturday morning in her suburban California home to find the world irrevocably altered. Somehow, Earth's rate of rotation has slowed. Julia's physician father and former-actress mother struggle with their own fears as they try to maintain the normalcy of soccer games and piano lessons. Neighborhoods and friendships fracture after families make conflicting choices in coping with the lengthening and unpredictable days. Julia's perspective here is mature because she is looking back on events that began several years in the past, but the accounts of middle-school bullying and cliques ring true, and her coming-of-age struggles are universal even in these heightened circumstances. VERDICT A former editor at Simon & Schuster, Walker sparked a bidding war with this timely and engaging debut. Film rights have already been sold, and the buzz is growing for another entry in child-narrated fiction, which has done well of late (see Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*). This work demands inclusion in any "If You Liked *The Hunger Games*..." readers' advisory list or discussion and should have the same YA/adult, fiction/sf crossover appeal.

Kirkus Reviews* *Starred Review

In Walker's stunning debut, a young California girl coming of age in a dystopian near future confronts the inevitability of change on the most personal level as

life on earth withers. Sixth-grader Julia, whose mother is a slightly neurotic former actress and whose father is an obstetrician, is living an unremarkable American middle-class childhood. She rides the school bus and takes piano lessons; she has a mild crush on a boy named Seth whose mother has cancer; she enjoys sleepovers with her best friend Hanna, who happens to be a Mormon. Then one October morning there's a news report that scientists have discovered a slowing of the earth's rotation, adding minutes to each day and night. After initial panic, the human tendency to adapt sets in even as the extra minutes increase into hours. Most citizens go along when the government stays on a 24-hour clock, although an underground movement of those living by "real time" sprouts up. Gravity is affected; birds begin to die, and astronauts are stranded on their space station. By November, the "real time" of days has grown to 40 hours, and the actual periods of light and dark only get longer from that point. The world faces crises in communication, health, transportation and food supply. The changes in the planet are profound, but the daily changes in Julia's life, which she might be facing even in a normal day, are equally profound. Hanna's family moves to Utah, leaving Julia without a best friend to help defend against the bullies at the bus stop. She goes through the trials and joys of first love. She begins to see cracks in her parents' marriage and must navigate the currents of loyalty and moral uncertainty. She faces sickness and death of loved ones. But she also

witnesses constancy and perseverance. Julia's life is shaped by what happens in the larger world, but it is the only life she knows, and Walker captures each moment, intimate and universal, with magical precision. Riveting, heartbreaking, profoundly moving.

PW Reviews* *Starred Review

In this gripping debut, 11-year-old Julia wakes one day to the news that the earth's rotation has started slowing. The immediate effects - no one at soccer practice; relentless broadcasts of the same bewildered scientist - soon feel banal compared to what unfolds. "The slowing" is growing slower still, and soon both day and night are more than twice as long as they once were. When governments decide to stick to the 24-hour schedule (ignoring circadian rhythms), a subversive movement erupts, "real-timers" who disregard the clock and appear to be weathering the slowing better than clock-timer at first. Thompson's Julia is the perfect narrator. On the brink of adolescence, she's as concerned with buying her first bra as with the birds falling out of the sky. She wants to be popular as badly as she wants her world to remain familiar. While the apocalypse looms large, it has in fact already arrived the narrative remains fiercely grounded in the surreal and horrifying day-to-day and the personal decisions that persist even though no one knows what to do. A triumph of vision, language, and terrifying momentum, the story also feels eerily plausible, as if the problems we've been

worrying about all along pale in comparison to what might actually bring our end.

Discussion questions

(<http://www.theageofmiraclesbook.com/readers-guide/>)

1. As readers, why do you think we're drawn to stories about the end of the world? What special pleasures do these kinds of narratives offer? And how do you think this element works in *The Age of Miracles*?

2. Julia is an only child. How does this fact affect who she is and how she sees the world? How would her experience of the slowing be different if she had a sibling? How would her experience of middle school be different?

3. How much do you think the slowing alters Julia's experience of adolescence? If the slowing had never happened, in what ways would her childhood have been different? In what ways would it have been the same?

4. Julia's parents' marriage becomes increasingly strained over the course of the book. Why do you think they stay together? Do you think it's the right choice? How much do you think Julia's mother does or does not know about Sylvia?

5. Julia's father tells several crucial lies. Discuss these lies and consider which ones, if any, are justified and which ones are not. Is lying ever the right thing to do? If so, when?
6. How would the book change if it were narrated by Julia's mother? What if it were narrated by Julia's father? Or her grandfather?
7. Why do you think Julia is so drawn to Seth? Why do you think he is drawn to her?
8. Did you identify more with the clock-timers or with the real-timers? Which would you be and why?
9. The slowing affects the whole planet, but the book is set in southern California. How does the setting affect the book? How important is it that the story takes place in California?
10. How do you feel about the way the book ends? What do you think lies ahead for Julia, for her parents and for the world?
11. The slowing throws the natural world into disarray. Plants and animals die and there are changes in the weather. Did this book make you think about the threats that face our own natural world? Do you think the book has something to say about climate change?
12. If you woke up tomorrow to the news that the rotation of the earth had significantly slowed, how do

you think you would respond? What is the first thing you would do?

Readalikes

***The Brightest Star in the Sky* by Marian Keyes**

Seven neighbors who live in an apartment building at 66 Star Street in Dublin, Ireland, are about to have their lives changed, but their fates rest in the hands of a wild spirit who has come down to Earth. Among the residents at this address is Katie, who works as a publicist and waits for her boyfriend, Conall, to grow up. Neighbors Maeve and Matt are newlyweds who are going through their first difficult time together. Lydia drives a taxi, which forces her to exhibit a tough exterior, but she is very vulnerable. Jemima, the oldest of the neighbors, is trying to reconnect with her son, Fionn, who is in town to perform in a television show.

***The Dog Stars* by Peter Heller**

This debut novel by Peter Heller is set in a near future in which much of the global population has been wiped out by a particularly virulent flu. Hig, pilot of a 1956 Cessna, lives alone with his dog, Jasper, in an airplane hangar, having lost his wife in the pandemic. His only

neighbor is Bangley, a survivalist with a small arsenal at the ready who helps to defend their hideout from marauding bands of violent--and often contagious--looters. Hig, however, does not entirely trust his neighbor. Every day he takes his plane out into the mountains to fish and hunt in an attempt to escape the new reality of his existence. It is on one of these sojourns that he hears a voice over the radio that makes him consider the possibility of rebuilding his life. Hig sets out with Jasper by his side, taking the plane past the point where they will have enough fuel to get back home, knowing the danger they will encounter but refusing to believe that all hope for humanity is lost.

***The Language of Flowers* by Vanessa Diffenbaugh**

At 18 years old, Victoria Jones is finally free of the foster care existence she's known most of her life, but freedom doesn't mean much when you have nowhere to go. With no prospects for the future, Victoria spends her nights sleeping on park benches and her days tending a small garden she's planted in the wild. The only thing that matters to Victoria is flowers, and communicating with them according to centuries-old traditions. Her gift for floral arrangement and her

understanding of each bud's meaning doesn't go unnoticed and Victoria soon lands a job in a local flower shop. But before she can dive deeper into her future, she must confront the painful secrets of her past.

***Life as We Knew It* by Susan Beth Pfeffer**

Through diary entries, Miranda frets about not having a prom date, battles with her mother about ice skating lessons, and worries about her friend Megan, who's become overly religious. The news that an asteroid could collide with Earth's moon seems too distant to bother her, until the impact occurs and the moon is pushed into an orbit closer to Earth. Disaster follows as the tides react and tsunamis result, followed by thunderstorms and earthquakes. Miranda's family faces one adversity after another as electricity and telephones are sporadic; gasoline prices climb to \$10 a gallon; and schools close. As their food supply dwindles, it's hard for Miranda to imagine that a prom date was ever important.

***No One Is Here Except All of Us* by Ramona Ausubel**

As the battle rages on across war-torn Europe in 1939, one small community of Jewish families in a remote

area of Romania sits hopelessly, waiting for the war machines to arrive. With the war closing in from all sides, their only escape, and their only chance at survival, lies within their collective imagination. Inspired by the suggestion of a young girl and a mysterious stranger who seemingly appears out of nowhere on a nearby riverbank, the villagers decide that the only way to improve their lot is to change their world and make a fresh start. To do so, they must erase all their connections with their former reality, which means that their history must be forgotten, their families dissolved and rearranged, and livelihoods exchanged. For a time, a long time, their plan works and their alternate reality community thrives. Eventually, however, the real world begins to reassert itself and the young girl who started it all, now a mother and wife, must leave the world she created to save her loved ones in the world from which she tried to escape.

Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake by Aimee Bender

The enchanted tale of nine-year-old Rose Edelstein, who learns she possesses a very special ability. When she takes a bite of her mother's homemade cake, she finds that she not only tastes the sweet perfection of the dessert but also the emotions of the person who baked it. She is shocked to find the cake is filled with

her mother's discontentment and unhappiness. This unusual sensory ability leads Rose on a journey of discovery--discovery about her family, herself, and the secretive, suffering nature of humanity

Shine Shine Shine by Lydia Netzer

Sunny and Maxon have been madly in love since they were children. Two decades later, they are struggling to keep their marriage together. Sunny is a pregnant stay-at-home mother to her autistic son, Bubber, and a caretaker of her mother, who has an advanced form of cancer. While Sunny is at home in Virginia, her husband, Maxon, a robotics scientist, is traveling to the moon to help set up a space colony. Maxon's long periods away from home have put a strain on Sunny and their marriage. She needs his help, but NASA needs him in space. An accident in space threatens Maxon's mission and further tests his bond with Sunny. Will Sunny and Maxon be able to overcome their problems and save their marriage?

The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood spins a haunting tale about a futuristic society. A catastrophe has wiped out most of the Earth's population, but Adam One has survived. He is the head of God's Gardeners, a group that sought

out ways to blend science and religion. Adam doesn't know it, but there are two other survivors. One is Toby, a fellow Gardener locked inside a spa. The other is Ren, a dancer trapped inside a sex club. Wondering if they are the only people left on the planet, Adam, Toby, and Ren embark on dangerous missions to make contact with other survivors.



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