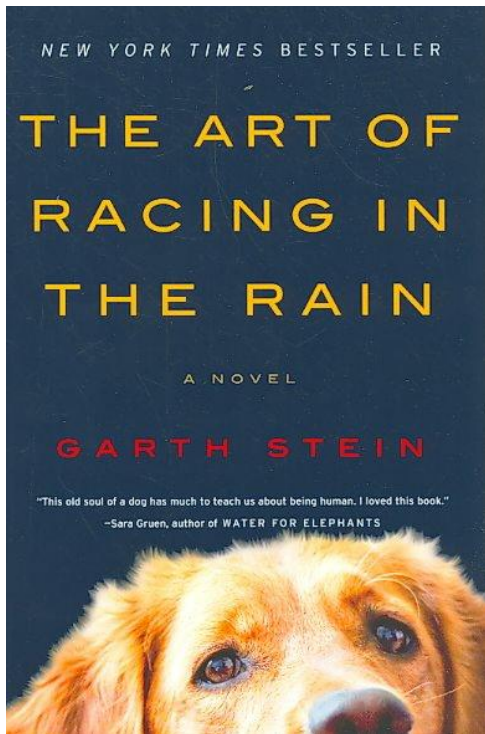


## About the book...



Heart-wrenching but deeply funny and ultimately uplifting story of family, love, loyalty and hope, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is a beautifully crafted and captivating look at the wonders and absurdities of human life... as only a dog could tell it.

Enzo knows he is different from other dogs: a philosopher with a nearly human soul (and an obsession with opposable thumbs), he has educated himself by watching television extensively, and by listening very closely to the words of his master, Denny Swift, an up-and-coming race car driver. Through Denny, Enzo has gained tremendous insight into the human condition, and he sees that life, like racing, isn't simply about going fast. Using the techniques needed on the race track, one can successfully navigate all of life's ordeals.

On the eve of his death, Enzo takes stock of his life, recalling all that he and his family have been through: the sacrifices Denny has made to succeed professionally; the unexpected loss of Eve, Denny's wife; the three-year battle over their daughter, Zoë, whose maternal grandparents pulled every string to gain custody. In the end, despite what he sees as his own limitations, Enzo comes through heroically to preserve the Swift family, holding in his heart the dream that Denny will become a racing champion with Zoë at his side.

## About the author... (<http://www.garthstein.com/bio.php>)



Garth Stein is the author of the New York Times best selling literary novel, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (Harper, 2008). Now published in 23 languages, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* was the #1 BookSense selection for June, 2008, the Starbucks spring/summer 2008 book selection, and has been on the IndieBound™ bestseller list since its publication. Stein's previous novel,

*How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets* (Soho Press, 2005) won a Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award, and was a BookSense Pick in both hardcover and paperback. *Raven Stole the Moon* (Harper, 2010) was Stein's first novel. He has also written a full-length play, *Brother Jones*, and produced a number of award-winning documentaries.

With an M.F.A. in film from Columbia University (1990), Garth worked as a documentary film maker for several years, and directed, produced, or co-produced several award winning films.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Seattle, Garth's ancestry is diverse: his mother, a native of Alaska, is of Tlingit Indian and Irish descent; his father, a Brooklyn native, is the child of Jewish emigrants from Austria. After spending his childhood in Seattle and then living in New York City for 18 years, Garth returned to Seattle, where he currently lives with his wife, three sons, and their dog, Comet.

## **Awards**

**Pacific Northwest Bookseller's Association Book Award for Fiction, 2008**

## **Reviews**

### *Booklist*

Enzo the dog feels sure that his next life will be spent in a man's body. In preparation, he closely studies human behavior, and it's from Enzo's observant point of view that Stein writes his moving third novel. Enzo is deeply jealous when his owner, Denny, falls in love with Eve, but after baby Zoe is born, Enzo assumes his role as the family's unconditional protector, particularly after Eve is diagnosed with brain cancer. After Eve's death, her parents drag Denny into a bitter custody battle for Zoe, and Enzo, despite his canine limitations, passionately defends Denny and even alters the course of events. Denny is a race-car driver, and Enzo, who has watched countless televised races, folds thrilling track scenes and driving lessons into the terse family drama. The metaphors may feel purposeful, but readers will nonetheless delight in Enzo's wild, original voice; his aching insights into the limitations and joys of the canine and human worlds; and his infinite capacity for love. A natural choice for book clubs, this should inspire steady demand.

### *Library Journal*

Enzo narrates his life story, beginning with his impending death. Enzo's not afraid of dying, as he's seen a television documentary on the Mongolian belief that a good dog will reincarnate as a man. Yes, Enzo is a dog. And he belongs to Denny: husband, father, customer service technician. Denny's dream is to be a professional race-car driver, and Enzo recounts the triumphs and tragedies—medical, financial, and legal—they share in this quest, the dangers of the racetrack being the least of their obstacles. Enzo ultimately teaches Denny and the reader that persistence and joie de vivre will see them through to the checkered flag. Stein (*Raven Stole the*

Moon ) creates a patient, wise, and doggish narrator that is more than just fluff and collar. This should appeal to fans of both dogs and car racing; recommended for public libraries.

#### *Kirkus Reviews*

Stein (*How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets*, 2005, etc.) uses a dog as narrator to clever effect in this tear-jerker about an aspiring race-car driver who suffers more woes than Job but never mistreats his dog. Lab mix Enzo believes he is different from other dogs, that he has a human soul in a dog body. Enzo is frustrated that he can use only "gestures" to communicate with his beloved owner Denny. Denny works in a Seattle auto-repair shop to earn money to race. Enzo watches racing channels on TV, soaking up facts and lore. Dog and man are happy in their bachelor Eden. Enter Eve. She and Enzo are wary at first. Then she goes into labor while Denny's away racing and she keeps Enzo beside her. Enzo adores the baby, Zoë, but he soon smells that something is off with Eve. By the time Zoë is a toddler, Eve has increasingly bad headaches but refuses to see a doctor until it's too late. Now come the travails. During Eve's painful, lingering death, her parents, who have never approved of Denny, loom increasingly large. When Eve dies, they sue for permanent custody of Zoë. Their case is weak until Denny is charged with rape: After a reunion of Eve's family shortly before her death, Denny gave a ride home to Eve's 15-year-old cousin, who attempted to seduce him; he rebuffed her but Enzo was the only witness. Eve's evil parents are behind the trumped-up charges. Noble Denny keeps fighting for Zoë, living by his mantra, "That which you manifest is before you." When he almost buckles, Enzo provides some rather unique assistance .Pointedly inspirational.

#### *PW Reviews*

If you've ever wondered what your dog is thinking, Stein's third novel offers an answer. Enzo is a lab terrier mix plucked from a farm outside Seattle to ride shotgun with race car driver Denny Swift as he pursues success on the track and off. Denny meets and marries Eve, has a daughter, Zo, and risks his savings and his life to make it on the professional racing circuit. Enzo, frustrated by his inability to speak and his lack of opposable thumbs, watches Denny's old racing videos, coins koanlike aphorisms that apply to both driving and life, and hopes for the day when his life as a dog will be over and he can be reborn a man. When Denny hits an extended rough patch, Enzo remains his most steadfast if silent supporter. Enzo is a reliable companion and a likable enough narrator, though the string of Denny's bad luck stories strains believability. Much like Denny, however, Stein is able to salvage some dignity from the over-the-top drama.

### **Discussion Questions (<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>)**

1. Some early readers of the novel have observed that viewing the world through a dog's eyes makes for a greater appreciation of being human. Why do you think this is?

2. Enzo's observations throughout the novel provide insight into his world view. For example:

- "The visible becomes inevitable."
- "Understanding the truth is simple. Allowing oneself to experience it, is often terrifically difficult."
- "No race has ever been won in the first corner; many races have been lost there."

How does his philosophy apply to real life?

3. In the book's darkest moments, one of Zoe's stuffed animals --- the zebra --- comes to life and threatens him. What does the zebra symbolize?

4. Can you imagine the novel being told from Denny's point of view? How would it make the story different?

5. In the first chapter, Enzo says: "It's what's inside that's important. The soul. And my soul is very human." How does Enzo's situation --- a human soul trapped in a dog's body --- influence his opinions about what he sees around him? How do you feel about the ideas of reincarnation and karma as Enzo defines them?

6. Do you find yourself looking at your own dog differently after reading this novel?

7. In the book, we get glimpses into the mindset and mentality of a race car driver. What parallels can you think of between the art of racing and the art of living?

8. The character of Ayrton Senna, as he is presented in the book, is heroic, almost a mythic figure. Why do you think this character resonates so strongly for Denny?

## Multimedia

### **Garth Stein Discusses *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (Online Content)**

Available At: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WXNOcIZkyg>

Garth Stein discusses his novel *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, a heart-wrenching but deeply funny and ultimately uplifting story of family, love, loyalty, and hope, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is a beautifully crafted and captivating look at the wonders and absurdities of human life . . . as only a dog could tell it.

Author's Official Website: <http://www.garthstein.com/>

## Further Reading

*The Mythology of Dogs: Canine Legend and Lore Through the Ages* by Gerald Hausman

(Call Number: 636.71 Ha)

Written in brisk detail, generous with anecdote, legend and fact, and equipped with illustrations, [*The Mythology of Dogs*] is a wonderful guide to the whys and wherefores of dogs.

*The Lost History of the Canine Race: Our 15,000 Year Long Love Affair With Dogs* by Mary E. Thurston

(Call Number: 636.7 Th)

The title of this anecdotal history of canine-human relations is somewhat misleading. Thurston documents their relatively recent (in evolutionary terms) association and introduces a wealth of material documenting the cruel and often bloodthirsty uses of dogs for war, genocide, and ethnic and class subjugation. Love of dogs and their humane treatment appears to have been restricted to the aristocracy until 19th-century Europe. In a readable and engaging style, the author covers dogs found at prehistoric sites and their life in ancient Egypt, Rome, and the Americas. The greatest coverage is given to Europe from medieval times to the present and to current controversies and customs in our treatment and mistreatment of dogs. The book is well produced with numerous black-and-white and several color illustrations. The lack of references and some scientific errors greatly reduce the usefulness of the book for research; there is a list of recommended readings, a glossary, and a short index. The greatest use of the book for college and university libraries may be to put current animal rights arguments in historical perspective.

## Read-alikes

*One Good Dog* by Susan Wilson (2010)

Susan Wilson's *One Good Dog* follows a wealthy man who makes one mistake and loses it all. It all started when Adam March's assistant, Sophie, informs him that his sister called. Adam's sister, Veronica, left 40 years ago. He never heard from her again. His widowed father placed Adam in foster care. Adam believes that Veronica's departure was the cause of his miserable childhood. After receiving the message, Adam loses his temper. He unintentionally slaps Sophie across the face, which results in the loss of his job. Soon after, his wife packs up and leaves. Then, Adam is sentenced to community service for his assault on Sophie. He starts working in a soup kitchen where he meets Chance, a pit bull mix whose owner made him fight other dogs. The two form a special bond that helps them heal.

*The Story of Edgar Sawtelle: A Novel* by David Wroblewski (2008)

Edgar Sawtelle is a 14-year-old boy, who was born congenitally mute. He lives with his parents on their farm in northern Wisconsin, where they breed an intelligent and

loyal type of dog, epitomized by Edgar's companion, Almondine. Life is idyllic, until the surprise return of Uncle Claude and the sudden death of Edgar's father. Edgar believes that his uncle is responsible for his father's death. Edgar's plan to prove Claude's guilt backfires badly, and he flees into the surrounding woods, afraid that the police are now searching for him. Edgar learns to survive on his instinct. Accompanied by three dogs, Edgar and his companions endure dangerous and desperate circumstances in the wilderness.

*Marley & Me* by John Grogan (2005)

When journalist John Grogan and his wife, Jenny, were first married, they decided to get a dog, partly to practice their "parenting" skills. They were totally unprepared for their sweet and cuddly little puppy to turn into 97 pounds of undisciplined exuberance. Marley was expelled from obedience school, frequently cleared coffee tables with his tail, crashed through screen doors, affectionately knocked down little children, and ate everything in sight--including furniture and an 18-kt. solid gold necklace. His boundless energy was matched by his boundless love and affection, and he quickly won a permanent place in the hearts of the entire Grogan family. This memoir is one that will resonate with everyone who has ever loved a dog.

*Dog Years: A Memoir* by Mark Doty (2007)

Poet Mark Doty offers this memoir of his experiences with his dogs, a black retriever named Arden and Beau, a golden retriever. In very personal and loving terms, Doty details the roles these dogs played in sharing his life. He describes the strength, healing, and comfort they provided when his partner died of AIDS, sharing his grief and helping him find the will to live. He traces Arden and Beau's lives and deaths with a profound appreciation. Doty's reflections and musings will be recognizable to all pet lovers.

*A Dog's Purpose* by W. Bruce Cameron (2010)

Heartwarming, insightful, and often laugh-out-loud funny, *A Dog's Purpose* is not only the emotional and hilarious story of a dog's many lives, but also a dog's-eye commentary on human relationships and the unbreakable bonds between man and man's best friend. This moving and beautifully crafted story teaches us that love never dies, that our true friends are always with us, and that every creature on earth is born with a purpose.

*Summaries from AADL.org Catalog*

## **Activity**

Take the time before discussing the book for each person to share their favorite experience with a dog. If the group is open to meeting in public reserve a table at a

Mongolian Grill (keeping in mind the Mongolian culture's expectations for our canine friends).

