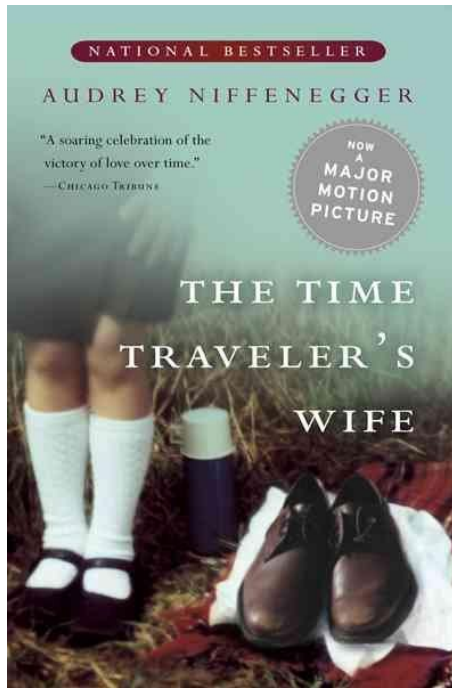


Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1371686>

About the Book



The Time Traveler's Wife is the story of Clare, a beautiful art student, and Henry, an adventuresome librarian, who have known each other since Clare was six and Henry was thirty-six, and were married when Clare was twenty-three and Henry was thirty-one. Impossible but true, because Henry is one of the first people diagnosed with Chrono-Displacement Disorder: periodically his genetic clock resets and he finds himself misplaced in time, pulled to moments of emotional gravity from his life, past and future. His disappearances are spontaneous, his experiences unpredictable, alternately harrowing and amusing.

The Time Traveler's Wife depicts the effects of time travel on Henry and Clare's marriage and their passionate love for each other, as the story unfolds from both points of view. Clare and Henry attempt to live normal lives, pursuing familiar goals - steady jobs, good friends, children of their own. All of this is threatened by something they can neither prevent nor control, making their story intensely moving and entirely unforgettable.

About the Author



Henry and Clare's love story was inspired by the marriage of Audrey Niffenegger's grandparents, Elizabeth and Norbert Tamandl, to whom *The Time Traveler's Wife* is dedicated. The Tamandls' happy marriage was cut short when Norbert died tragically young of a brain tumor.

"One day he had a headache and three days later he was dead," says Niffenegger. "So it was this idea that you can't depend on people to be there, that you can't predict anything."

Niffenegger never met her grandfather, but she wanted to write about the kind of relationship she imagined her grandparents must have had, "a perfect marriage that is tested by something outside the control of the couple". If Clare's waiting for Henry resembles Elizabeth Tamandl's patient endurance, Clare also waits in the much more prosaic fashion that Niffenegger's mother did, running the household while her husband, a civil engineer, traveled as much as four days a week for his work.

Audrey Niffenegger grew up in Evanston, Illinois, a suburb just north of Chicago; she has lived in or near Chicago her entire life. Her love for the city and its environs is evident in the carefully described settings of her novel, which she used, she has said, to give the novel a "documentary" tone in an effort to balance the "fantastical" premise of the story she is telling. Most of the places described in *The Time Traveler's Wife* actually exist and can be visited, including the Newberry Library, the Aragon Ballroom, Bookman's Alley, Vintage Vinyl, and, of course, the Field Museum.

Niffenegger is also a visual artist; examples of her haunting work, some of which evokes themes that will be familiar to readers of *The Time Traveler's Wife*. She earned a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1985 and an MFA from Northwestern University in 1991. She is currently a professor of Book Arts at the Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts, which she helped found, teaching graduate courses in fine edition book production and letterpress printing.

Awards

In 2004, *The Time Traveler's Wife* was nominated for the Locus Award for Best First Novel (<http://www.locusmag.com/SFAwards/Db/Locus.html>), and longlisted for the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction (<http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/>). In 2005, the novel was shortlisted for the Arthur C. Clarke Award (<http://www.clarkeaward.com/>), received third place for the John W. Campbell Memorial Award (<http://www.sfcenter.ku.edu/campbell.htm>), and won Exclusive Books Boeke Prize (<http://www.exclusives.co.za/boeke/>). In 2006, it was nominated for the Geffen Award (http://geffen.sf-f.org.il/?page_id=79), and won the British Book Award for Popular Fiction (<http://www.galaxynationalbookawards.com/index.asp>).

Reviews

Booklist

On the surface, Henry and Clare Detamble are a normal couple living in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. Henry works at the Newberry Library and Clare creates abstract paper art, but the cruel reality is that Henry is a prisoner of time. It sweeps him back and forth at its leisure, from the present to the past, with no regard for where he is or what he is doing. It drops him naked and vulnerable into another decade, wearing an age-appropriate face. In fact, it's not unusual for Henry to run into the other Henry and help him out of a jam. Sound unusual? Imagine Clare Detamble's astonishment at seeing Henry dropped stark naked into her parents' meadow when she was only six. Though, of course, until she came of age, Henry was always the perfect gentleman and gave young Clare nothing but his friendship as he dropped in and out of her life. It's no wonder that the film rights to this hip and urban love story have been acquired.

Library Journal

This debut novel tells the compelling love story of artist Clare and her husband, Henry, a librarian at the Newberry Library who has an ailment called Chrono-Displaced Person (CDP), which without his control removes him to the past or the future under stressful circumstances. The clever story is told from the perspectives of Henry and Clare at various times in their lives. Henry's time travels enable him to visit Clare as a little girl and later as an aged widow and explain "how it feels to be living outside of the time constraints most humans are subject to." He seeks out a doctor named Kendrik, who is unable to help him but hopes to find a cure for his daughter, Alba, who has inherited CDP. The lengthy but exciting narrative concludes tragically with Henry's foretold death during one of his time travels but happily shows the timelessness of genuine love. The whole is skillfully written with a blend of distinct characters and heartfelt emotions that hopscotch through time, begging interpretation on many levels. Public libraries should plan on purchasing multiple copies of this highly recommended book.

Kirkus Reviews

Mainstreamed time-travel romance, cleverly executed and tastefully furnished if occasionally overwrought: a first from fine newcomer Niffenegger. While the many iterations and loops here are intricately woven, the plot, proper, is fairly simple. Henry has a genetic condition that causes him to time-travel. The trips, triggered by stress, are unpredictable, and his destination is usually connected to an important event in his life, like his mother's death. Between the ages of 6 and 18, Clare, rich, talented, and beautiful, is repeatedly visited by time-traveling Henry, in his 30s and 40s; they're in love, and lovers, when the visits end. In Chicago, now 20, Clare spots Henry, who, at 28, has never seen her before; she explains, and they begin their contemporaneous life together, which continues until Henry dies at 43. (Clare receives one more visit in her 80s, in a moving final scene.) Henry is presented as dangerous and constantly in danger, but-until his grisly and upsetting final days-

those episodes seem incidental, in part because everything is a foregone conclusion, paradox having been dismissed from the start. There's a great deal of such incident; the story could be cut by a third without losing substance. Teenaged Clare is roughly treated on a date; adult Henry beats up the lout. Clare and Henry want to be parents; after a series of heartbreaking miscarriages they have a perfect, time-traveling child. Will Henry's secret be discovered? Henry reveals it himself. Presented as a literary novel, this is more accurately an exceedingly literate one, distinguished by the nearly constant background thrum of connoisseurship. Henry works as a rare-books librarian and recites Rilke; Clare is an avant-sculptress and papermaker; they appreciate the best of punk rock, opera, and Chicago, live in a beautiful house, and have better sex than you. A *Love Story* for educated, upper-middle-class tastes; with a movie sale to Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston, it could have some of that long-ago book's commercial potential, too.

Publishers Weekly

This highly original first novel won the largest advance San Francisco-based MacAdam/Cage had ever paid, and it was money well spent. Niffenegger has written a soaring love story illuminated by dozens of finely observed details and scenes, and one that skates nimbly around a huge conundrum at the heart of the book: Henry De Tamble, a rather dashing librarian at the famous Newberry Library in Chicago, finds himself unavoidably whisked around in time. He disappears from a scene in, say, 1998 to find himself suddenly, usually without his clothes, which mysteriously disappear in transit, at an entirely different place 10 years earlier-or later. During one of these migrations, he drops in on beautiful teenage Clare Abshire, an heiress in a large house on the nearby Michigan peninsula, and a lifelong passion is born. The problem is that while Henry's age darts back and forth according to his location in time, Clare's moves forward in the normal manner, so the pair are often out of sync. But such is the author's tenderness with the characters, and the determinedly un gimmicky way in which she writes of their predicament (only once do they make use of Henry's foreknowledge of events to make money, and then it seems to Clare like cheating) that the book is much more love story than fantasy. It also has a splendidly drawn cast, from Henry's violinist father, ruined by the loss of his wife in an accident from which Henry time-traveled as a child, to Clare's odd family and a multitude of Chicago bohemian friends. The couple's daughter, Alba, inherits her father's strange abilities, but this is again handled with a light touch; there's no Disney cuteness here. Henry's foreordained end is agonizing, but Niffenegger has another card up her sleeve, and plays it with poignant grace. It is a fair tribute to her skill and sensibility to say that the book leaves a reader with an impression of life's riches and strangeness rather than of easy thrills.

Literary Criticism

Forward to the past

If time travel were possible, surely there'd be people from the future causing mischief in the present? Well, not necessarily: perhaps when you travel back in time you visit a parallel universe and therefore can't muck about with history, even if you try to. Alternatively there might already be time travellers dotted about, but when they start talking about coming from the future we think they're bonkers and cart them off to the friendly hospital--like Andrew Carlssin, arrested in New York in January 2003 on insider-trader charges after turning \$800 into \$350 million in two weeks. A Security and Exchange Commission source labeled him 'either a lunatic or a pathological liar' when he claimed he had travelled back from 2256 and had therefore known exactly where to place his money. He refused to tell them where his 'time craft' was hidden, but the SEC could find no record of an Andrew Carlssin prior to December 2002. Spooky.

In Audrey Niffenegger's novel, Henry is the time traveller of the title, Clare his wife. Henry has damaged DNA ('Chrono-Displacement Disorder') and can be whisked back into the past--often his own, often his wife's, rarely the future--with little or no warning. One moment he's standing in the present chatting to his wife, and the next he's vanished, to return who knows when. So it goes like this: Henry and Clare racer, fall in love, and marry. Henry is born in 1963. Clare is born in 1971. But while Clare meets Henry in 1977 when she is six and he is 36, Henry does not meet Clare until he is 28. By the time Henry meets Clare she has known him for 13 years.

The novel is really a straight love story with a quirk. Audrey Niffenegger has tried to absorb the time-travelling concept into an everyday romance, but she has succeeded too well in making an extraordinary idea commonplace. She has ignored the depressing implications of a predetermined existence. Clare is a character who knows what her future will be. This is--to me at least--a nightmarish idea, but one Clare accepts with bewildering calm. She spends her childhood being visited by her future husband, and her adult life waiting for that husband to return from his trips into her past: she is almost entirely passive. Whilst Henry zips about having albeit unhappy and confusing experiences, Clare is trapped, doomed to fulfil a future she has been groomed for. Yes, they love each other, but it is creepy, hot romantic, to slot into Henry's disordered life with little more than a shrug of the shoulders. (But then again, what can she do? She is powerless.) Even after Henry's death she just sits and waits, knowing (because he's told her) that he makes one visit to her when she is an old lady. The story has been written as a sweet fairytale about devotion, but I found it troubling and weird.

Source: Glazebrook, Olivia. "Forward to the past." *Spectator* 31 Jan. 2004: 53.
Literature Resource Center. <http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Discussion Questions Source: <http://www.readinggroupguides.com>

1. In *The Time Traveler's Wife*, the characters meet each other at various times during their lifetime. How does the author keep all the timelines in order and "on time"?
2. Although Henry does the time traveling, Clare is equally impacted. How does she cope with his journeys and does she ultimately accept them?
3. How does the writer introduce the reader to the concept of time travel as a realistic occurrence? Does she succeed?
4. Henry's life is disrupted on multiple levels by spontaneous time travel. How does his career as a librarian offset his tumultuous disappearances? Why does that job appeal to Henry?
5. Henry and Clare know each other for years before they fall in love as adults. How does Clare cope with the knowledge that at a young age she knows that Henry is the man she will eventually marry?
6. *The Time Traveler's Wife* is ultimately an enduring love story. What trials and tribulations do Henry and Clare face that are the same as or different from other "normal" relationships?
7. How does their desire for a child affect their relationship?
8. The book is told from both Henry and Clare's perspectives. What does this add to the story?
9. Do you think the ending of the novel is satisfactory?
10. Though history there have been dozens of mediums used for time travel in literature. Please cite examples and compare *The Time Traveler's Wife* to the ones with which you are familiar.

Multimedia

'The Time Traveler's Wife' Interview With Author Audrey Niffenegger

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7ZJIJLL0g0>

Audrey Niffenegger speaks in the spring of 2008 about her novel *THE TIME TRAVELER'S WIFE*.

***The Time Traveler's Wife* (Movie)**

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1354526>

(Call number: DVD Drama Time)

Clare has been in love with Henry her entire life. She believes they are destined to be together, even though she never knows when they will be separated: Henry is a time traveler, cursed with a rare genetic anomaly that causes him to live his life on a shifting timeline, skipping back and forth through his lifespan with no control. Despite the fact that Henry's travels force them apart with no warning, Clare desperately tries to build a life with her one true love.

Further Reading

***Her Fearful Symmetry* by Audrey Niffenegger**

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1340551>

(Call number: Fiction Niffenegger)

When Elspeth Noblin dies of cancer, she leaves her London apartment to her twin nieces, Julia and Valentina. These two American girls never met their English aunt, only knew that their mother, too, was a twin, and Elspeth her sister. Julia and Valentina are semi-normal American teenagers--with seemingly little interest in college, finding jobs, or anything outside their cozy home in the suburbs of Chicago, and with an abnormally intense attachment to one another. They are twenty. . The girls move to Elspeth's flat, which borders Highgate Cemetery in London. They come to know the building's other residents. There is Martin, a brilliant and charming crossword puzzle setter suffering from crippling Obsessive Compulsive Disorder; Marjike, Martin's devoted but trapped wife; and Robert, Elspeth's elusive lover, a scholar of the cemetery. As the girls become embroiled in the fraying lives of their aunt's neighbors, they also discover that much is still alive in Highgate, including--perhaps--their aunt, who can't seem to leave her old apartment and life behind.. Niffenegger weaves a captivating story in *Her Fearful Symmetry* about love and identity, about secrets and sisterhood, and about the tenacity of life--even after death.

***The Three Incestuous Sisters* by Audrey Niffenegger**

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1251547>

(Call number: Fiction Niffenegger)

"*The Three Incestuous Sisters*" is an evocative illustrated book by the best-selling author of "*The Time Traveler's Wife*," Audrey Niffenegger. Reminiscent of the gothic style of Edward Gorey, Niffenegger's visually stunning narrative affirms her genius as a storyteller. These rich pages present the tale of three very different sisters: one who is beautiful, one who is smart, and one who is talented. A melodrama of sibling rivalry unfurls as one sister is driven mad with jealousy due to the passionate love affair of another. Escalating to a dizzying climax, the romance of the two lovers ends

in sabotage, shame, and despair. Haunting illustrations and lyrical prose depict a timeless tale of love, revenge, and ultimately, transcendence. "*The Three Incestuous Sisters*" is a unique and lavish tour de force, which showcases Audrey Niffenegger's incredible talent as an artist and a writer.

Author's official website

<http://audreyniffenegger.com/>

Information, news, and biography from the author.

Read-Alikes

Replay by Ken Grimwood

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1029944>

(Call number: Fiction Grimwood)

What if you could do it all over again? Jeff Winston gets that chance, dying at age forty-three, only to awaken -- again and again -- in his college dorm room as an eighteen-year-old college student. Each time, he retains his memories intact, allowing him to correct mistakes and take missed opportunities. He shares his gift (or is it a curse?) with Pamela, a woman who dies just nine minutes after him and who shares each of his lives with him.

The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1192882>

(Call number: Fiction Sebold)

A strange coming-of-age story whose protagonist is already dead. Fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon is raped and murdered on her way home from school one day; she watches from heaven as her family grieves and a detective with his own troubles investigates her case. In the end, Sebold's novel is about those left behind, about memory and grief, and the need to continue.

Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1244963>

(Call number: Fiction Vonnegut)

High school students read Vonnegut's classic novel for its investigation of the horrors of the modern world, but its protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, is the original "chronologically displaced person." Billy comes "unstuck in time" and visits various moments in his life -- most famously the firebombing of Dresden during World War II -- repeatedly and out of order. Where Niffenegger's time travel story turns inward, examining the workings of the human heart, Vonnegut is interested in the workings of history, making for a book that is both wider ranging and more brutal in its perspective.

Crooked River Burning by Mark Winegardner

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1173479>

(Call number: Fiction Winegardner)

A classic tale of star-crossed lovers kept apart by social, economic, and emotional obstacles, and an engaging history of Winegardner's hometown, Cleveland. David Zielinsky is from a working-class ethnic neighborhood; Anne O'Connor's family is rich and powerful. Anne and David fall in love as adolescents, but it takes them twenty years to work around to marrying each other. In the interim, David marries someone else, raises children, and builds a career in local politics, while Anne becomes a rising star in journalism. Their full lives and enduring love become a prism through which Winegardner explores the secrets of the city he loves.

Extras!

Experience the sounds! "From opera to punk, the novel references a breathtaking range of musical allusions. Henry's mother was a famous singer whose death cut short a brilliant career (this is a pivotal plot point). She sang *Aida*, *Carmen*, *Madama Butterfly*, and Kurt Weill and Schubert lieder. Contrast with favorites of Clare, Henry and the rest of the gang: Patti Smith, Violent Femmes, the Sex Pistols and Iggy Pop" (70). *Source: Loevy, Diana. The Book Club Companion. New York: Berkley Books, 2006.*

