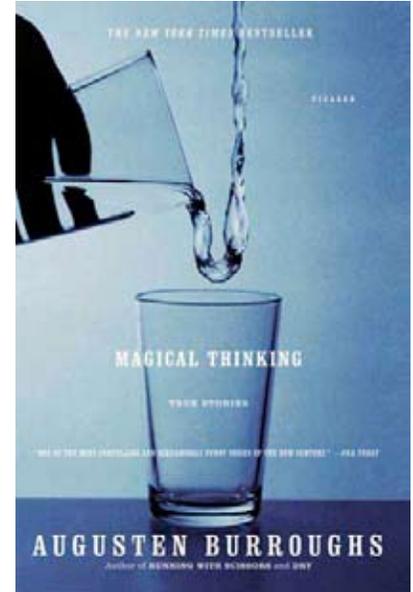




# Reading Group Gold

## Magical Thinking True Stories

by Augusten Burroughs



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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Magical Thinking* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Magical Thinking*.

### About the Book

Augusten Burroughs follows the success of his bestselling memoirs *Running with Scissors* and *Dry with Magical Thinking*—a contagiously funny, heartwarming, shocking, twisted, and absolutely magical collection. It begins with a Tang Instant Breakfast Drink television commercial when Augusten was seven. Then there is the contest of wills with the deranged cleaning lady. The execution of a rodent carried out with military precision and utter horror, telemarketing revenge, dating an undertaker: inimitable ruminations on everything from transsexuals to Martha Stewart.

Whether threatening demonic little girls in Key West or finding domestic bliss in Kmart, *Magical Thinking* once again proves, as *Entertainment Weekly* writes, that Burroughs “is still endearingly neurotic and self-centered . . . He hooks you into a story better than anybody.”

“Augusten Burroughs shows why he is the memoirist-of-the-moment with his harrowing and laugh-out-loud new essay collection, *Magical Thinking*.” —*Vanity Fair*

“Ruthlessly funny . . . deliciously perverse . . . he extracts something funny from every shred of his own warped experience. *Magical Thinking* indeed.” —*People* (four stars)

“Deeply satisfying, full of both gleeful one-liners and shocking instances of profound wisdom . . . There are few writers as outrageously magical or as surprisingly thoughtful as Augusten Burroughs.”  
—*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“Wild, sad, funny, tender, and frightening . . . It’s all about the journey. Do go along. Just be sure to pack some tissues for the laughing and the crying.” —*The Seattle Times*



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## About the Author

Augusten Burroughs is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Sellelevision*, *Dry*, *Running with Scissors*, and *Possible Side Effects*. A film version of *Running with Scissors* was adapted for the screen by Ryan Murphy. Augusten has been named one of the fifteen funniest people in America by *Entertainment Weekly*. He lives in New York City and western Massachusetts.

## Discussion Questions

1. If you were to write a letter to Burroughs about *Magical Thinking*, which essays would you mention? Was there one you found funniest? Most moving? Particularly upsetting? Why? Do you think Burroughs writes about his childhood differently from how he writes about his life as an adult? Explain.
2. “Commercial Break,” “Model Behavior,” and “I’m Gonna Live Forever” deal with Burroughs’s fascination with fame. Why do you think he was preoccupied with being famous? Do you think that all kids dream of being famous or is there something specific to Burroughs’s childhood that encouraged these fantasies? What does “I’m Gonna Live Forever” reveal about Burroughs’s adult understanding of fame? If you saw him crossing the street toward you, would you approach him? Why?
3. Several of Burroughs’s essays involve his transfixion with transsexuals. What is it in transsexuals that appeals to Burroughs? When he writes, “In a way, I am a psychological transsexual, always trying to ‘pass’ for a normal person but being clocked every time” (p. 260), what do you think he means?
4. “I Dated an Undertaker,” “Beating Raoul,” and “Mark the Shrink” involve Burroughs’s dating experiences. Do you think Burroughs’s bizarre childhood prepared him for the dating world? Do you have any dating stories that would make a great essay?
5. “I like flaws and feel more comfortable around people who have them,” writes Burroughs (p. 110). “I myself am made entirely of flaws, stitched together with good intentions.” Why do you think he feels this way? Can you identify? Explain.
6. How would you have handled Debby in “Debby’s Requirements”? Do you think Burroughs suspected what he was getting into when he hired her? Why do you think he kept her on for so long?
7. “My Last First Date” is the midpoint of *Magical Thinking*. What is significant about this essay? In what ways are Burroughs’s preoccupations different after this essay? Explain.
8. On page 149, Burroughs states: “Straight guys are like fags used to be. And the fags now are more like straight guys were. Fags today are all about body building and pickup trucks, and straight guys are all about feelings and open-toe sandals.” Do you think there is any truth to this statement? Explain. Regardless of your sexual orientation, what things about you are “gay”? What things are “straight”?
9. In “I Kid You Not,” Burroughs writes on page 202: “Let the people who want to have kids, have them.



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And let the rest of us spend the extra money on ourselves.” Which type of person are you? Do you think Burroughs might make a better father than he expects? Why? How might a difficult childhood make someone an effective parent?

10. Based on Burroughs’s interaction with animals in “The Rat/Thing,” “Life Cycle of the North American Opossum” and “*Magical Thinking*,” do you think that he is a friend or foe to the four-legged creatures of this world? On page 186, Burroughs wonders “Did normal Americans kill everything that caused them trouble?” How would you respond that question?

11. In “Puff Derby,” why does Burroughs seem to admire P. Diddy? In what ways is P. Diddy like a transsexual? How does the theme of reinvention and transformation run throughout *Magical Thinking*? How is the theme significant to the book’s title?

12. In “Up the Escalator,” Burroughs observes on page 267: “The ‘down’ side always works. You can always slide down with ease. It’s going up that sometimes takes extra effort. The symbolism is not lost on me as I drift down to the main floor.” What do you think Burroughs means? Does the essay provide a good ending for the collection? Why?