

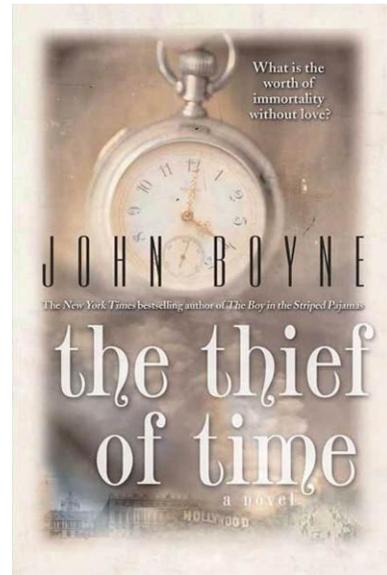
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Thief of Time

By John Boyne

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Thief of Time* 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 *The Thief of Time*.

About the Book

John Boyne has become internationally known for his acclaimed novels *Crippen* and the bestselling *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Now, for the first time in the United States, comes the book that started the career of the author that the *Irish Examiner* calls “one of the best and original of the new generation of Irish writers.”

It is 1758 and Matthieu Zela is fleeing Paris after witnessing the murder of his mother and his stepfather's execution. Matthieu's life is characterized by one extraordinary fact: before the eighteenth century ends, he discovers that his body has stopped ageing. At the end of the twentieth century and the ripe old age of 256 he is suddenly forced to answer an uncomfortable question: what is the worth of immortality without love?

In this carefully crafted novel, John Boyne juxtaposes history and the buzz of the modern world, weaving together portraits of 1920s Hollywood, the Great Exhibition of 1851, the French Revolution, the Wall Street Crash, and other landmark events into one man's story of murder, love, and redemption.



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About the Author

John Boyne is author of the adult novel *Crippen* as well as the *New York Times* and internationally bestselling children's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. He has taught creative writing at the Irish Writers' Centre and at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom. In 2005, *Crippen* was nominated for the *Sunday Independent* Hughes & Hughes Irish Novel of the Year Award. Boyne has also been awarded the Curtis Brown Prize, shortlisted for a Hennessy Literary Award, and shortlisted for the Ottakar's Children's Book Prize and Italy's Paolo Ungari Literary Award for *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Boyne's work has been translated into twenty-one languages. He lives with his partner in Dublin.

Discussion Questions

- 1.) *The Thief of Time* flashes back to Matthieu's past throughout the novel. What possible reasons could the author have had for using this structure? What effect did it have on your experience reading the book? Did it contribute to your connection with the main character or did it make you feel distanced because of the different settings?
- 2.) How did you feel about the way Matthieu handled his relationships with Tomas's descendants? Did you think that he should have maintained his pattern of acceptance for their expected deaths?
- 3.) Because of their behavior, did the nephews seem to get what they deserved? How much can we expect people to change the way they act?
- 4.) How does Dominique's character compare to the other women Matthieu gets involved with throughout his life? In what ways, if any, do you feel she affected his future relationships?
- 5.) Throughout the book events take place that bring into question the issue of morality. Discuss one of these events and explain whether or not you believed certain actions were justified due to the circumstances.
- 6.) What if you were immortal? Considering Matthieu's experiences, is immortality an enviable situation or one that is best avoided?
- 7.) In chapter ten Dominique tells Matthieu that, "You're as closed up as I am. You keep everything in. You don't offer me any more knowledge of yourself that I do to you" (Pg. 109). Would you as a reader agree with this quote? Do you feel that Matthieu's character maintains this attitude towards the people in his life later, using his agelessness as an excuse?



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8.) How did the early chapters about Matthieu's coming of age and his past in Paris affect the way you related to his adult character? How might growing up in a previous century change your character.

9.) Were you in favor of Matthieu's resolution to try and save his nephew? If you had a choice between eternal life and the death of another person, what would you choose?

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