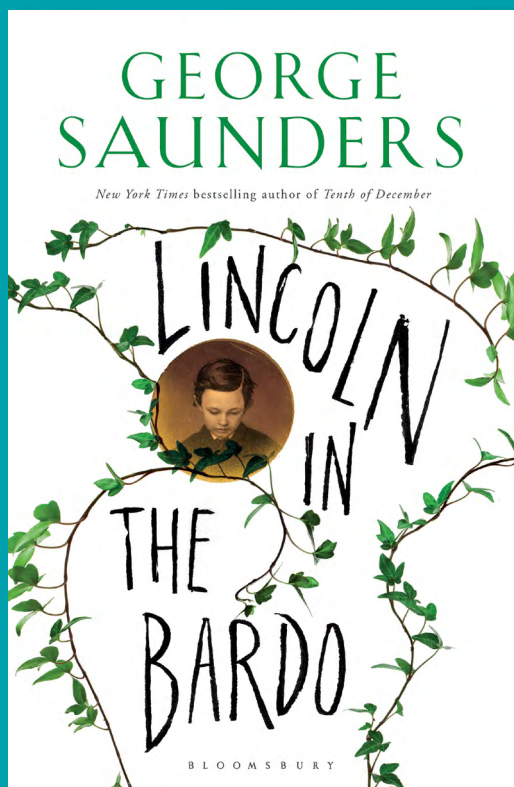




Reader's Guide



Lincoln in the Bardo George Saunders

Bloomsbury Publishing

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About the author

George Saunders was born in 1958 and is the author of nine books, including *Tenth of December*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award and won the inaugural Folio Prize (for the best work of fiction in English) and the Story Prize (best short-story collection). He has received MacArthur and Guggenheim fellowships and the PEN/Malamud Prize for excellence in the short story, and was recently elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2013, he was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by Time magazine. He teaches in the creative writing program at Syracuse University. *Lincoln in the Bardo* is his first novel.

About the book

On 22 February 1862, two days after his death, Willie Lincoln is laid to rest in a marble crypt in a Georgetown cemetery. That very night, shattered by grief, his father Abraham arrives at the cemetery, alone, under cover of darkness.

Over the course of that evening, Abraham Lincoln paces the graveyard unsettled by the death of his beloved boy, and by the grim shadow of a war that feels as though it is without end. Meanwhile Willie is trapped in a state of limbo between the dead and the living – drawn to his father with whom he can no longer communicate, existing in a ghostly world populated by the recently passed and the long dead.

Unfolding in the graveyard over a single night, narrated by a dazzling chorus of voices, this is a thrilling exploration of death, grief and the deeper meaning and possibilities of life.

What the judges thought

This 'haunting and haunted', 'heartrending and playful' book, said the judges, is a 'virtuoso choral performance' about love and regret. 'Funny, unusual, eccentric', with its versions of history overlaid, this is, they added, 'a phenomenally good novel in a post-truth era'.

Discussion points

This novel has a supernatural narrative, but starts from a real historical event. How well do you think Saunders blends these two stories?

The residents of the cemetery provide a chorus of different voices and stories – did these enrich the narrative for you or did they distract from the main narrative?

Discuss how the death of Lincoln's son affects his views on the war, and the human cost involved.

Although much of the novel is dark in tone, there are moments of lightness and humour – what did you find funny in the book?

Had you heard of the Tibetan tradition of the bardo? What did your group think about it?

Useful links

www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/08/lincoln-in-the-bardo-george-saunders-review

www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/lincoln-in-the-bardo-george-saunders-book-review-abraham-lincoln-wille-typhoid-bardo-tibetan-a7618911

www.vulture.com/2017/02/george-saunders-lincoln-in-the-bardo-debut-novel