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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

One Day by Gene Weingarten

Summary

On New Year's Day 2013, two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Gene Weingarten asked three strangers to, literally, pluck a day, month, and year from a hat. That day—chosen completely at random—turned out to be Sunday, December 28, 1986, by any conventional measure a most ordinary day. Weingarten spent the next six years proving that there is no such thing.

That Sunday between Christmas and New Year's turned out to be filled with comedy, tragedy, implausible irony, cosmic comeuppances, kindness, cruelty, heroism, cowardice, genius, idiocy, prejudice, selflessness, coincidence, and startling moments of human connection, along with evocative foreshadowing of momentous events yet to come. Lives were lost. Lives were saved. Lives were altered in overwhelming ways. Many of these events never made it into the news; they were private dramas in the lives of private people. They were utterly compelling.

One Day asks and answers the question of whether there is even such a thing as “ordinary” when we are talking about how we all lurch and stumble our way through the daily, daunting challenge of being human.

Discussion Questions

1. Did you like this book? Did it engage you? How did you feel while you were reading it – intrigued, bored, emotional ...?
2. Did the concept of exploring one day in depth appeal to you before you started reading this book or were you a reluctant reader?
3. Where were you and what were you doing around the time of December 28, 1986?
4. Which of the chapters/stories appealed to you most? Which stories did you find uninteresting?
5. What are your thoughts about the structure of the book? If you were to write about the events of a single day in history, would you have taken a different approach?

6. What were the recurring themes? How do the stories relate (besides them all taking place on the same day)?
7. Some critics of the book say that the author wrote with outdated sexist and judgmental attitudes. Did you find this to be true? Do you think the author was deliberately writing from a 1986 vantage?
8. What are your thoughts about “ordinary”? Is there such a thing as an ordinary day?
9. What will you remember about this book a year from now?
10. If you could ask the author a question about this book, what would it be? Have you read other books by the author? If not, does this book inspire you to seek out others that he wrote?

Summary from the publisher. Discussion Questions from Johnston Public Library staff