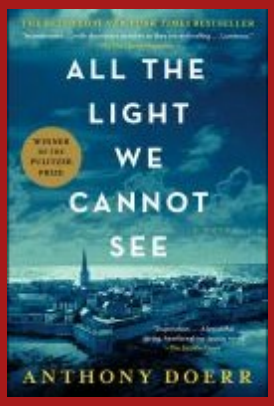
BOOK CLUB IN A BAG



All the Light We Cannot See / Anthony Doerr

Marie-Laure has been blind since the age of six. Her father builds a perfect miniature of their Paris neighbourhood so she can memorize it by touch and navigate her way home. But when the Nazis invade, father and daughter flee with a dangerous secret. Werner is a German orphan, destined to labour in the same mine that claimed his father's life, until he discovers a knack for engineering. His talent wins him a place at a brutal military academy, but his way out of obscurity is built on suffering. At the same time, far away in a walled city by the sea, an old man discovers new worlds without ever setting foot outside his home. But all around him, impending danger closes in.

About the Author

Anthony Doerr is an American author, who was born in 1973 in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2010, Doerr was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship, given to those "demonstrating exceptional creative ability in scholarship and the arts." Other writers who have received the fellowship in the past include John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, and Saul Bellow. That year he released another collection of short stories called *Memory Wall*. Doerr says it took him 10 years to write *All the Light We Cannot See*, which was released in 2014; the novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 2015 and was on The New York Times' Bestseller List. Aside from writing and publishing books, Doerr has worked as a professor in Boise State University's MFA program in creative writing, and he writes a column on science books for The Boston Globe. He also writes for an online publication called *The Morning News*. He was the writer-in-residence for the state of Idaho from 2007-2010.

Discussion Questions

- The book opens with two epigraphs. How do these quotes set the scene for the rest of the book? Discuss how the radio plays a major part in the story and the time period. How do you think the impact of the radio back then compares with the impact of the Internet on today's society?
- The narration moves back and forth both in time and between different characters. How did this affect your reading experience? How do you think the experience would have been different if the story had been told entirely in chronological order?
- Whose story did you enjoy the most? Was there any character you wanted more insight into?
- Werner thinks, "That is how things are…with everybody in this unit, in this army, in this world, they do as they're told, they get scared, they move about with only themselves in mind. Name me someone who does not." But in fact many of the characters show great courage and selflessness throughout the story in some way, big or small. Talk about the different ways they put themselves at risk in order to do what they think is right. What do you think were some shining moments? Who did you admire most?
- The author writes, "To shut your eyes is to guess nothing of blindness." What did you learn or realize about blindness through Marie-Laure's perspective? Do you think her being blind gave her any advantages?
- One of Werner's bravest moments is when he confronts von Rumpel: "All your life you wait, and then it finally comes, and are you ready?" Have you ever had a moment like that? Were you ready? What would you say that moment is for some of the other characters?
- Why do you think Marie-Laure gave Werner the little iron key? Why might Werner have gone back for the wooden house but left the Sea of Flames?

More questions can be found at:
www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/all-the-light-we-cannot-see/guide

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