



Readers' Guide



Other novels by Daisy Johnson
Fen (2016)

Everything Under Daisy Johnson

Jonathan Cape

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| About the author | Daisy Johnson was born in Paignton, UK, in 1990. Her debut short story collection, <i>Fen</i> , was published in 2016. She is the winner of the Harper's Bazaar Short Story Prize, the A.M. Heath Prize and the Edge Hill Short Story Prize. She currently lives in Oxford by the river. |
| About the book | <p>Words are important to Gretel, always have been. As a child, she lived on a canal boat with her mother, and together they invented a language that was just their own. She hasn't seen her mother since the age of sixteen, though – almost a lifetime ago – and those memories have faded.</p> <p>Now Gretel works as a lexicographer, updating dictionary entries, which suits her solitary nature. A phone call from the hospital interrupts Gretel's isolation and throws up questions from long ago. She begins to remember the private vocabulary of her childhood. She remembers other things, too: the wild years spent on the river; the strange, lonely boy who came to stay on the boat one winter; and the creature in the water – a canal thief? – swimming upstream, getting ever closer. In the end there will be nothing for Gretel to do but go back.</p> |
| What the judges thought | “A hypnotic, mythic, unexpected story from a beguiling new voice. <i>Everything Under</i> is an exploration of family, gender, the ways we understand each other and the hands we hold out to each other – a story that's like the waterways at its heart: you have to take the trip to understand what's underneath.” |
| Discussion points | <p>Does her childhood on a canal boat have an impact on Gretel and how she sees the world?</p> <p>How does the book deal with memory, or the lack of it?</p> <p>Do you think the Bonak represents something more than what Gretel sees?</p> <p>What role does gender fluidity play in the book?</p> |
| Themed reading | <p>Kory Stamper <i>Word by Word: The Secret Life of Dictionaries</i> Claire-Louise Bennett <i>Pond</i> Simone de Beauvoir <i>A Very Easy Death</i> Carmen Marcus <i>How Saints Die</i></p> |
| Useful links | <p>https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/17/everything-under-daisy-johnson-review</p> <p>https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/26/everything-under-daisy-johnson-review-man-booker-longlist</p> <p>https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/review-everything-under-by-daisy-johnson-modern-look-at-a-monstrous-mother-8062tkswv</p> <p>https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/14/daisy-johnson-seeking-intense-strangeness-in-a-world-that-feels-like-ours</p> |