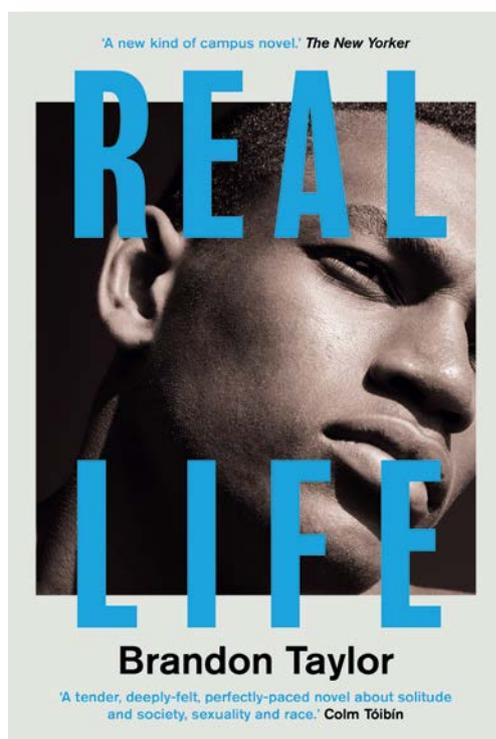




Readers' Guide



Real Life

Brandon Taylor

Daunt Books Publishing

thebookerprizes.com

About the author

Brandon Taylor was born in Alabama in the US in June 1989. He is the senior editor of Electric Literature's Recommended Reading and a staff writer at *Literary Hub*. His writing has earned him fellowships from Lambda Literary Foundation, Kimbilio Fiction, and the Tin House Summer Writer's Workshop. He holds graduate degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Iowa, where he was an Iowa Arts Fellow at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in fiction. *Real Life* is his first novel.

About the book

Wallace has spent his summer in the lab breeding a strain of microscopic worms. He is four years into a biochemistry degree at a lakeside Midwestern university, a life that's a world away from his childhood in Alabama. His father died a few weeks ago, but Wallace didn't go back for the funeral, and he hasn't told his friends – Miller, Yngve, Cole and Emma. For reasons of self-preservation, he has become used to keeping a wary distance even from those closest to him. But, over the course of one blustery end-of-summer weekend, the destruction of his work and a series of intense confrontations force Wallace to grapple with both the trauma of the past, and the question of the future.

Deftly zooming in and out of focus, *Real Life* is a deeply affecting story about the emotional cost of reckoning with desire, and overcoming pain.

What the judges thought

'This debut is a fresh take on the age-old 'campus novel' tradition, providing a deeply painful, nuanced account of microaggressions, abuse, racism, homophobia, trauma, grief and alienation. We admired the vivid ways the book evokes daily, repetitive action as well as memory and fantasy to get at its profound central question: what is 'real life' anyway?'

Discussion points

How does hearing about Wallace's accounts of his experiences in a predominantly white university make you feel?

Why does Wallace feel isolated from other people?

What is the 'real life' that the title of the novel refers to?

How has Wallace's childhood influenced how he interacts with other people?

Themed reading

On Beauty by Zadie Smith

The Human Stain by Philip Roth

The Secret History by Donna Tartt

The Skin We're In by Desmond Cole

Taking Up Space by Chelsea Kwakye and Ore Ogunbiyi

Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/05/brandon-taylor-author-real-life-interview>

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/real-life-is-a-new-kind-of-campus-novel>

<https://www.vox.com/culture/2020/2/24/21147513/real-life-review-brandon-taylor>

<https://www.npr.org/2020/02/17/806729417/author-brandon-taylor-on-his-coming-of-age-novel-real-life?i=1596032393206>

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