

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Light the Dark, edited by Joe Fassler

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The secrets of writing with ease are sometimes profound and sometimes mundane. Explore a selection in this anthology.

QUOTE | p.x, Preface - "At the core of each of these pieces is a moment of transformative reading — an encounter with a short, artful sequence of words that hits with life-altering force."

QUOTE | p.xii, Preface - "That's the experience told and retold in this book, the moment when the high candle of the mind beams incandescent, bringing clarity to what had been obscure, mysterious, overlooked, and forgotten — lighting up the dark."

QUOTE | p.186, Lev Grossman - "And I'm fairly certain that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was the first book that I ever was transported by. I think it's the book that taught me what novels are supposed to do."

QUESTION | What is one book that had an impact on your life? Why was it so powerful?

QUOTE | p.2, Aimee Bender - "When I had it all memorized, I felt elated. I had a physical response to holding all those words in my mind together."

QUOTE | p.3, Aimee Bender - "Memorization was a way for me to force myself to be more precise, and to forge a more permanent relationship to the words."

QUESTION | Is there a poem or paragraph, outside of school, that you have memorized?

QUOTE | p.8, Sherman Alexie - "I'd never seen myself in a work of literature."

QUESTION | What's the first work of writing you remember deeply resonating or identifying with?

QUOTE | p.11, Sherman Alexie - "The very act of storytelling is a return to the prison of what torments us and keeps us captive, and writers are repeat offenders."

QUOTE | p.12, Sherman Alexie - "We're all cursed to haunt and revisit the people and places that confine us. But when you can pick and choose the terms of that confinement, you, and not your prison, hold the power."

QUESTION | Has scrapbooking helped you navigate or cope with more difficult stories of your life?

QUOTE | p.17, Elizabeth Gilbert - "This defines exactly what I want to strive to be — a person who holds onto 'stubborn gladness,' even when we dwell in darkness. I want to be able to contain both of them within me at the same time, remain able to cultivate joy and wonder even at life's bleakest."

QUESTION | How does scrapbooking help you cultivate this sense of 'stubborn gladness'?

QUOTE | p.25, Stephen King - "An appealing voice achieves an intimate connection — a bond much stronger than the kind forged, intellectually, through crafted writing."

QUOTE | p.275, Ben Marcus - "I want writing to be the most intense form of feeling that I can find. As if we're putting words together in order to deeply alter or enhance or trigger our feelings — in order to feel more alive."

QUESTION | Recognizing that everyone approaches this craft differently, how important is journaling and storytelling in your scrapbooking?

QUOTE | p.34, Amy Tan - "Stories begin with microscopic-level detail, in the particularities that make up each individual life."

QUOTE | p.35, Amy Tan - "I'll blow up an image as much as I can, and work through it pixel by pixel."

QUOTE | p.235, Emma Donoghue - "You don't want to just cut all that out, but nor do you want to weigh down the book by putting in a conversation in which people discuss things in very abstract or stodgy terms."

QUESTION | Do you often include small details in your journaling or try to capture them in your photos?

QUOTE | p.41, Junot Díaz - "It also describes what a monumental work of art does: takes the pieces of you, reassembles them, and hands them back to you in all the right order."

QUESTION | What album class (or project of your own) has felt 'monumental' to your scrapbooking?

QUOTE | p.58, Khaled Hosseini - "That's why we come to art — we feel less alone. We are less alone. You see, through art, that others have felt the way you have — and you feel better."

QUESTION | How has scrapbooking or being part of a scrapbooking community made you feel less alone?

QUOTE | p.62, Andre Dubus III - "So I've learned over the years to free-fall into what's happening. ... But that's when the work starts to have a beating heart."

QUESTION | Do you think out your journaling in advance or just let the words flow? Why is this your preferred approach?

QUOTE | p.73, Mary Gaitskill - "But through a book like Anna Karenina, we can be enticed to go beyond the uninteresting, day-to-day appearance — and find the true person beneath the surface."

QUESTION | How can storytelling prompts or story-based products help you to tell richer stories?

QUOTE | p.78, Michael Chabon - "It's just a list, this paragraph; the listiness of it is far from being concealed."

QUESTION | Do you use lists in your scrapbook journaling?

How do they help you tell the story?

QUOTE | p.91, Jim Crace - "This little rhyme is one of my most powerful reminders of my family's love."

QUESTION | Is there a nursery rhyme or little saying that was important in your life? Have you documented the story of it?

QUOTE | p.95, Edwidge Danticat - "Because they couldn't, they channeled their creativity into domestic forms of art — into their quilts, say, or gardens."

QUESTION | What other forms of art do you enjoy? How do they serve different roles in your life?

QUOTE | p.103, Billy Collins - "Unlike prose, which is complete, linear, headlong movement forward — a poem is a design that displaces silence on the page."

QUESTION | Do you have a favorite poem? What does it say to you?

QUOTE | p.111, Kathryn Harrison - "But people really write better without thinking, by which I mean without self-consciousness."

QUOTE | p.117, David Mitchell - "Learn to rush to your laptop and open it up. Open the file without asking yourself if you're in the mood, without thinking about anything else."

QUESTION | How do you get past self-consciousness to create with ease?

QUOTE | p.120, David Mitchell - "In this way, Wright captures the most timeless, unchanging human experience: the simple, profound act of perceiving the world."

QUESTION | How is scrapbooking 'timeless'?

QUOTE | p.130, Tom Perrotta - "The tragedy is that, while we're alive, we don't view our days in the knowledge that all things must pass."

QUOTE | p.143, Ayana Mathis - "But they also recognize what is beautiful in places where others might not see the beauty. There is something in that, in those two things together, that makes art the wild, unbridled, prophetic language that it is."

QUOTE | p.199, Maggie Shipstead - "If there are such things as universal truths about how we experience life, "time passes" is one of them."

QUOTE | p.240, Claire Messud - "But every thought we have had, every smell we have smelled, every change in the light, every embrace, everything is there. When we die, these moments can never be retrieved. They are gone. Forever."

QUESTION | Does being a scrapbooker offer a deeper gratitude and appreciation for the realities of life and death?

QUOTE | p.146, Jim Shepard - "Don't think for a moment that because you've had a brief instant of illumination, and you suddenly see yourself with clarity, you're not going to transgress two days down the road."

QUESTION | Have you experienced any false starts in your scrapbooking journey?

QUOTE | p.154, Karl Ove Knausgaard - "If you have faith in your writing, it's easy. It's when you remove that faith that things become difficult — when you start to think, this is stupid, this is idiotic, this is worthless, and so on."

QUESTION | Do you ever experience self-doubt about the value of your investment in scrapbooking?

QUOTE | p.158, Leslie Jamison - "You remember too much, my mother said to me recently. Why hold onto all that? And I said, Where can I put it down?"

QUESTION | How does scrapbooking reduce the weight of carrying memories?

QUOTE | p.176, Jesse Ball - "When I write, it isn't so important to me that the page itself be beautiful to look at or somehow impeachable. It's simply that it gestures in the right direction, such that something happens within the mind of the reader."

QUOTE | p.181, Angela Flournoy - "But at a certain point, you have to be kind to yourself as a writer and trust your own motives."

QUESTION | Do you like how your scrapbook pages turn out?

QUOTE | p.197, Yiyun Li - "To follow a person beyond a single point in time, to remain with them on the longer course of their life's path, is a way to continue looking."

QUESTION | Do you enjoy telling stories that span a period of time?

QUOTE | p.209, Jeff Tweedy - "I'm proudest of my music when I come to a song after the fact and think — how did that happen?"

QUESTION | What are the dominant feelings when you look back on layouts previously created?

QUOTE | p.222, Charles Simic - "He said. 'Why do you write poems about these things? Why do you write about such inconsequential things as silverware utensils?'"

QUESTION | Have you ever questioned the inclusion of more mundane details in your scrapbooking? Why are they important to the bigger story?

QUOTE | p.229, Viet Thanh Nguyen - "The book acted as a condensed, compact, extremely powerful substance that woke me up to what I needed to do, each day, as a writer. I thought of it as espresso."

QUESTION | Can you think of anything that might be your espresso in scrapbooking?

QUOTE | p.240, Claire Messud - "Things we write down are the fragments shored against our ruins. They outlast us, these scraps of words on paper."

QUESTION | What do you hope future generations will learn about you and your family from your scrapbooks?

QUOTE | p.240, Claire Messud - "But writing leaves behind a visceral sense of what it was like to be alive on the planet in a particular time. Writing tells us what it meant for someone to be human."

QUESTION | How do you think someone 100 years in the future will describe what it was like to be human in 2019?

QUOTE | p.242, Claire Messud - "Just because we lose so much does make the small fragments we do preserve less valuable — quite the opposite. Storytelling is a human impulse, and making meaning is a human impulse."

QUESTION | Why do you think people started scrapbooking? What is the human need behind it?

QUOTE | p.253, Jane Smiley - "I think all novel writing, and all art, is a form of play — and it's the unexpected that gives it the playful aspect, while ideas give it the serious aspect."

QUESTION | Do you think this accurately describes the dual nature of scrapbooking?

QUOTE | p.261, Jonathan Franzen - "Now everyone is armed with a camera 24/7. Is that a good thing? A bad thing?"

QUESTION | What are the pros and cons of having such easy access to a camera?

QUOTE | p.270, Hanya Yanagihara - "So much of being any kind of artist — whether you're a composer, or a painter, or a writer — is a lifelong process of trying to forget everything you've been taught."

QUESTION | What have you needed to forget when it comes to embracing 'your way' in scrapbooking?

QUOTE | p.300, T.C. Boyle - "There are no rules. You do what you do."

QUOTE | p.325, Neil Gaiman - "No matter what anybody tells you about writing, you can do whatever the fuck you want."

QUOTE | p.328, Neil Gaiman - "All of the things that are considered rules are rules until you break them. They're only rules until you throw them out because you don't need them anymore."

QUESTION | What is one thing that defines 'your way' in scrapbooking?

QUOTE | p.314, Eileen Myles - "I'd sooner read the books I found on a table on Avenue A last night than the latest thing everyone else is reading."

QUOTE | p.321, Marilyn Robinson - "Thing how much any individual mind, any brain, is enlarged by what we can know through books and through literature - places, people, ideas that we would never otherwise experience, things much larger than anyone could contain is his or

her own person."

QUESTION | How has the Simple Scrapper Book Club impacted your scrapbooking?

Want to chat about the book?

Join us in the My Simple Scrapper community on November 21, 2019 at 8:00 p.m. for our discussion.

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