

Reading Group Guide

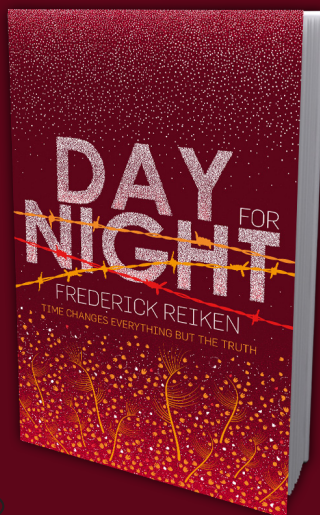
DAY FOR NIGHT

Frederick Reiken

Gliding effortlessly across time and space, in settings that range from Florida to New Jersey to the Caribbean and the Dead Sea, *Day For Night* builds towards moments of revelation when refugees from their own lives, or from history's cruelties, come together in unpredictable and extraordinary ways.

The novel opens in Florida in 1984, where Beverly Rabinowitz, a Polish doctor who escaped the Holocaust, vacations with her boyfriend, David, and his son, Jordan. The next section is narrated by Tim Birdsey, a young man whose band Beverly goes to see; Tim persuades Beverly to accompany him to see a carousel sunk in a river following a transportation accident, around which manatees swim. The third section is from the point of view of an FBI special agent who has spent the last fourteen years on the trail of a woman with multiple aliases. And so on. . .

Each step of the story comes with a new narrator, as the action moves between Utah, New Jersey and Israel, and forwards and back across the decades. An uncommon assortment of characters - including an elderly woman in a residential home, a boy in a coma, and an Israeli soldier - reveal stories that combine eventually reminding us of the myriad ways in which seemingly unrelated lives can collide. And so gradually *Day for Night* becomes a tale of unexpected links and coincidences; an examination of the way people are interconnected one to another, whether they know it or not.



What others are saying . . .

'*Day for Night* does what really good books so often do by forcing us to see the familiar world in new ways that reveal its wonder. It's a nifty trick that not every writer can pull off. Frederick Reiken can and does'

Richard Russo, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of
Empire Falls

'*Day for Night* is beautiful, original, brilliant and swift. A novel that seems to be about everything, everywhere, yet wears its ambitions lightly and keeps hold of a strong, mysterious emotional core. I admired every page of it and can't wait to read it again'

Kevin Canty, author of *Where the Money Went*

'From the dazzling opening chapter of *Day For Night*, Frederick Reiken makes clear that the stakes for his characters, and for his readers, are nothing less than everything. Here is a world, our world, in which no one gets to escape the net of history and no one, finally, gets to deny their human connections. I held my breath while I watched Reiken assemble his own extraordinary minyan'

Margot Livesey, author of *The House on Fortune Street*

Points for discussion

Who is your favourite narrator and why? Would you describe what a narrator has to say as an interior monologue?

Which character do you feel is the most pivotal to the story?

'We are all magicians' says one of Reiken's characters in section 5, 'Little Wolf'. 'What we see will never coincide with absolute reality. As a result, the human brain must make a narrative.' Discuss this assertion in the light of having finished reading *Day for Night*.

Could the order of the sections in *Day for Night* have been different?

Discuss what you think this novel is about. And how it might be described?

How important do you think the WWII angle of the story is to the author? Would you say that he is trying to do something different with this aspect of his narrative? Does he assume that his reader has a prior knowledge of literature about WWII?

How long was it before you began to pick up on the links between the various narrators?

Would you say that *Day for Night* insists that the reader takes an active role in deciphering the novel's meaning? Would you agree with the character in section 9, 'The Ancient Forest', who comments, 'Perhaps the meaning of the story is that you must look deep rather than far if you want to unlock any of the secrets of the universe, that once unlocked a secret loses its power unless a part of it is withheld.' What do you think this narrator is trying to say?

More points for discussion

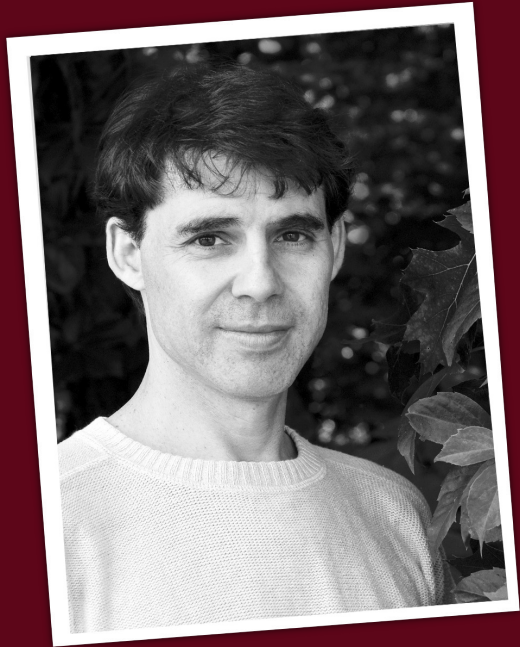
How successful is Reiken's characterization of his various narrators? Which narrator were you most drawn to? Would you have liked a section narrated from the point of view of the young man in the wheelchair?

Does the structure of *Day for Night* remind you of that of films such as *Crash*, *Babel* or *Short Cuts*? What are the different demands for the reader/viewer between watching or reading films and novels with inter-linked structures? Does it make a difference that, unlike watching a film where one must continue at the pace dictated by the director, with a novel the reader can take the work at a pace that suits them, and backtrack to various sections if need be? What other novels or films with interlinked stories have you enjoyed?

'*Day for Night* is a book about connection and the way people are interconnected, whether they know it or not,' Reiken has claimed when interviewed. Discuss the various types of connection in this novel.

Which word best describes *Day for Night* and why? Challenging, thought-provoking, accessible? What other words would you use?

What do you think of the following assertion? 'For most of my life I have believed that words are the ruins by those compelled to record their thoughts as the result of their addiction to the world, and just as ancient pottery must break into shards and ancient buildings are reduced to their foundations and dinosaurs have left behind their skeletons, all our scribblings and notations, even our books, must eventually lose their meaning . . . Stories are like dreams in this way. They happen. They do not happen. They are right here. They exist in some other place entirely.' [10: 'This World']



Author biography

Frederick Reiken is the author of two previous novels, *The Odd Sea* and *The Lost Legends of New Jersey*, and his short stories have appeared in the *New Yorker*. He lives in western Massachusetts.

Websites

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Suggested further reading

The History of Love by Nicole Krauss

If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things by Jon McGregor

The Glass Room by Simon Mawer