

BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

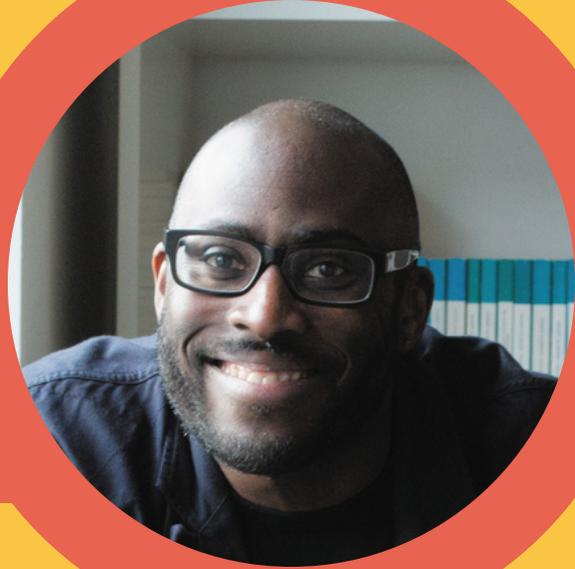
- 1. Jess decides to put her encyclopedias on display in the Museum of Ordinary People because they symbolize her mother's love and encouragement. Discuss the significance of the other objects that get brought into the museum and which had the most emotional impact.**
- 2. The museum was a breaking point in Jess's relationship with Guy, leading them to go their separate ways. Do you think their breakup was inevitable? Or was the museum the root cause of their separation?**
- 3. What lessons can be taken away from Jess's relationship with Guy? Why is their incompatibility important in the story?**
- 4. What social commentary might the author be trying to make about Jess's race and class, and the trials and tribulations that she had to face as compared to Guy?**
- 5. Before she has a chance to curate the Museum of Ordinary People, Jess often acknowledges that she's not able to follow her dreams. What was holding her back? What finally spurred her to take risks, from quitting her stable job to trying to build the museum from the ground up?**
- 6. Alex and Luce's unrelenting support gives Jess some of the strength and reassurance she needs in curating the museum. Who is your biggest supporter in your life? What would you say to them if they were here?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7. The Museum of Ordinary People is deeply concerned with the preservation of memory. In what ways has the museum acted as a safe haven for its operators and patrons?
8. Paul and Dec act as a comedic and compassionate duo. How have they been a positive influence in the story?
9. Discuss the ways in which grief and hope manifest throughout the narrative. How have each of the characters healed and changed?
10. Luce's parents, Dougie and Maggie, are important parental figures in the story. In what ways is their presence important and impactful?
11. Throughout the course of the novel, there are plenty of friendships that flourish. Which platonic relationships felt the most impactful to the story?
12. Family, both chosen and found, is a recurring theme. In what moment in the novel did you find this to be the most effective or moving?
13. Why does Alex need someone like Jess to help overcome his fears about his scars? Why does Jess need someone like Alex to help curate the museum?

Q & A

WITH MIKE GAYLE



MikeGayle.co.uk

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What inspired you to write [The Museum of Ordinary People](#)?

A good friend told me a story about how he was walking past a dumpster outside a house that was being cleared. Curious, he stopped and looked at what was being thrown out and found a bag full of personal items like letters and postcards. He told me it felt wrong that these things, which had clearly been cherished, should end up in a landfill and so he took them home even though he had no connection to the owner. This story stuck with me and I started to think about how sad it was that personal possessions people had once really treasured should become so disposable once their owners passed away. This got me to wondering what would happen if a place existed to look after these forgotten things, something like a museum dedicated to preserving the treasures of the lives of ordinary people.

Throughout the course of the book, Jess creates a community around herself that supports her goals and helps her flourish in life. Who in your life makes up your chosen community for mutual support?

Not long after I became an author, I was asked to contribute to a short story collection for the charity WarChild, and a number of us who wrote pieces for this became firm friends. We had our own secret message board in the days before social media and we even had an annual office Christmas party (which is still going to this day) because, of course, as full-time writers working from

home we didn't have any other option! What I particularly love about this group is the support it offers. We've been there for each other through good times and bad and it absolutely means the world to me.

The Museum of Ordinary People celebrates the ordinariness of everyday people and everyday life. Why was that message so important to you to write about?

From monarchs to presidents, and actors to authors, there is no dearth of institutions willing to look after your belongings after your death if you're rich, famous, or influential. There's an immediate sense that everything these illustrious people owned has some sort of intrinsic value because of who they were and what they did in life. But when it comes to ordinary people, there's no such assumption. Their things, unless kept and treasured by family members, are thrown away, almost as if their lives didn't matter, almost as if to say that they didn't count for anything. To me this just feels wrong, and while I appreciate that not everything can be kept, I find the idea of a place that might value such things comforting in the extreme.

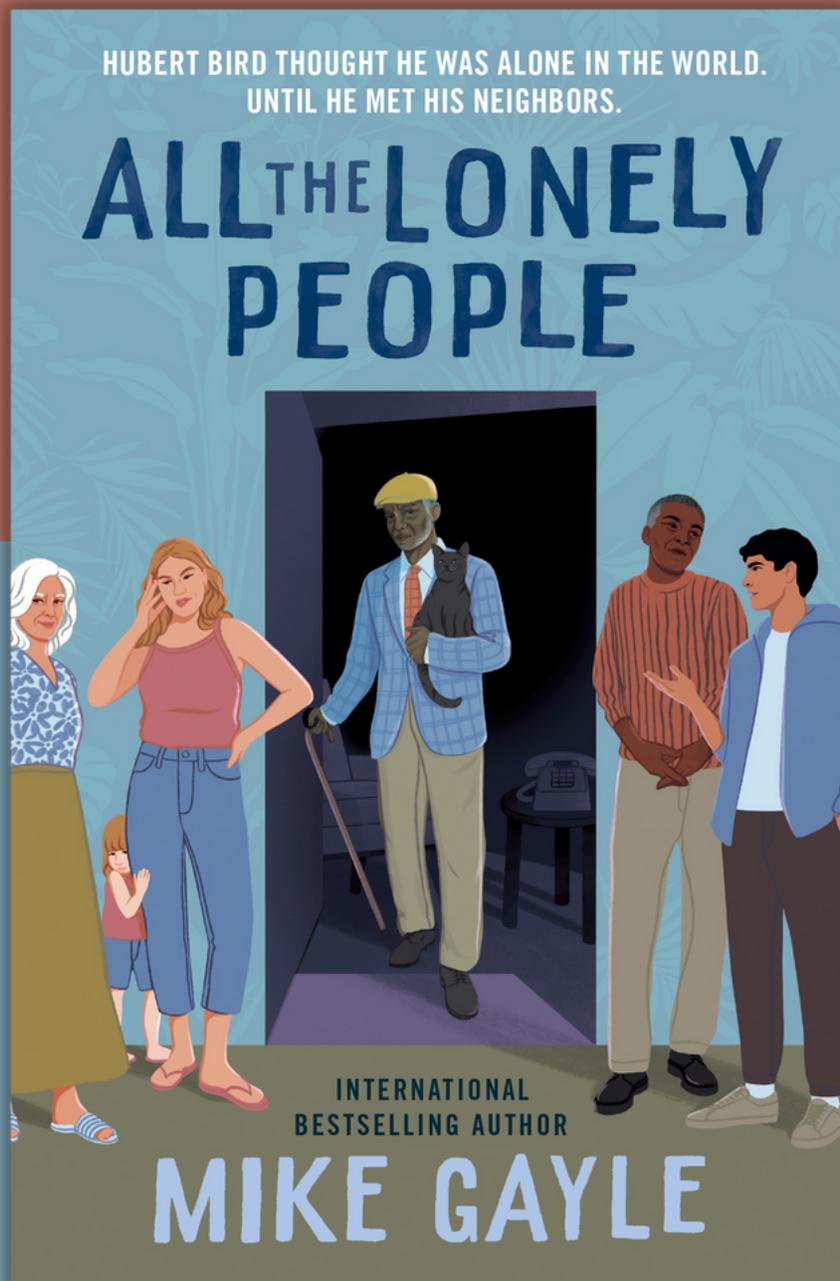
Jess shows that sometimes people lose their way in life. Did you ever have a moment where you felt you lost your way in life?

I think we can all feel a bit lost in life sometimes, especially when it comes to our careers. It's such a big question: What do I want to do with the rest of my life? I mean, how are you supposed to answer that? I started out as a journalist, and there were lots of reasons to love what I did, but as my career advanced I found myself editing other people's work instead of doing the thing I loved, which of course was writing. It wasn't until I left my full-time job and picked up the half-written novel I'd begun in my early twenties that it dawned on me that journalism wasn't the answer; writing books was. So getting lost isn't always a bad thing if eventually it helps you find your way.

Do you have a favorite museum that you like to go to? What about it do you love?

The thing I love about museums is the way they can transport you out of the world you live in. It's as if one moment you're inhabiting the real world, with all its trials and tribulations, and then you step through the doors of a museum and you're somewhere else entirely. A place where you're asked to do nothing more than to look at and enjoy a celebration of things from the past. My favorite has to be Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in my hometown because it was the very first museum I ever went to and I have a lot of fond memories of going there across the years. They used to have a forty-foot-tall papier-mâché T. Rex in their collection, and the first time I saw it I was five and was terrified as I thought it was real! The first time I took my own kids there I tried to find it, only to be told that decades of wear and tear had taken their toll and it had begun to fall apart and so had been thrown away! Such a waste! Even in pieces I think it definitely would have found a home in the Museum of Ordinary People.

MORE FROM MIKE GAYLE



In this "warm, funny" novel (*Good Housekeeping*), Jamaican immigrant Hubert Bird rediscovers the world he'd once turned his back on as he learns to find happiness after staying in isolation for so long.

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