

The Goldfinch

Donna Tartt

Reviewed by: Keerthi, 13

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It's post 9/11 in New York, and thirteen-year-old Theodore "Theo" Decker and his mother leave their dingy little apartment flat on their way to a school conference with the principal. They end up trapped in a local art museum's clutches as torrents of rain hammer the roofs. His mother is an avid art aficionado and shows Theo her favorite painting, a masterpiece by renowned Dutch master Carel Fabritius: *The Goldfinch*. Theo explains his peculiar desire to know every detail about complete strangers, and takes interest in a red-headed girl with an old man next to her. He stays behind in the gallery with the *Goldfinch*, infatuated with the pair, who seemed to be entangled in deep conversation. His mother wanders off into the other galleries. Suddenly, a deafening crack cuts through the air, and the air is clouded with smoke. It is revealed later that it was the explosion of a bombshell, a terrorist attack by al-Qaeda. The red-headed girl is nowhere to be found, and everyone in the gallery is unconscious except Theo. The old man is there, and seems to be conscious, but in a state of delirium. In his last moments, the old man seems to be pointing at the painting, and Theo reluctantly - and unknowingly - steals a three-hundred-million-dollar painting, which propels the story to its feet. The novel demonstrates the lengths of beauty, and how a mere, insignificant object can cause such a fascination in a pensive ending.

A 2014 Pulitzer-Prize-winning book, *The Goldfinch* artfully describes the grounds of real life, rather than being encompassed within the cookie cutters of mainstream genres. It realistically portrays the emotions and actions of a grieving teenager, for the plot, isn't about the plot itself. Theo is a three-dimensional character, who, rather than following media stereotypes, stands as his own, flawed character. The setting of the book switches from the crowded streets of Manhattan to the barren Las Vegas deserts and the inklings of whispering, poignant Amsterdam. Donna Tartt's threshing, engulfing, magnificently beautiful writing style tells a story of the realities of life, and has an almost tumultuous tinge of juvenile intertwined within the plot, and the book throbs with nostalgia. The plot itself is intriguing, and it portrays the almost grotesque journey of Theo becoming the image of his absent father, charming on the outside, but nothing but a husk of a person on the inside. Theo's character goes from good to bad to the blurred line between, and the novel demolishes the black-and-white cliches of being morally right and wrong.

Though this book is my current favorite, I still manage to find a fault in it. The pacing is fishy, and there are many events repeated again and again that could have been cut off, since this is an incredibly long book. This book is targeted towards adults, therefore it delves into mature themes such as alcohol and drug use, and it is almost four times the size of an average novel, spanning nearly eight hundred pages. A certain character also tends to say profanities almost every time he appears. Personally, I would recommend this book to ages 15 and up, because the plot at the beginning has a charming tinge of childishness to it akin to that of nostalgic books like *Harry Potter*, which would definitely interest teenage readers. *The Goldfinch* is a heart-touching novel that weaves in real people, real personalities, into a thrilling plot, accompanied by a wonderfully poetic writing style that really shows that this book is different, a book that befittingly claims its spot as one of the greatest novels of the twenty-first century.

Recommended Titles:

The Secret History by Donna Tartt

The Orphan Master's Son by Adam Johnson

The Little Friend by Donna Tartt