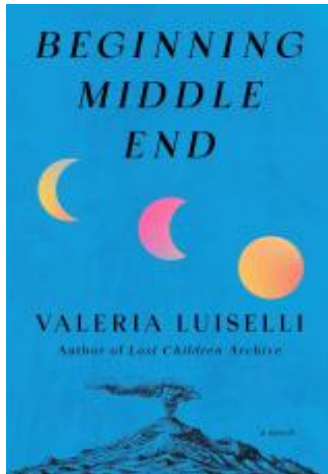


# Beginning Middle End

by Valeria Luiselli

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## About the Book

**From the beloved, award-winning author of the modern classics *LOST CHILDREN ARCHIVE* and *TELL ME HOW IT ENDS* comes her most powerful and page-turning novel yet: the tale of a mother and a daughter starting over, searching for a new story.**

This story begins when a mother and her daughter take off on a trip. It is a summer of rapidly changing winds, volcanic rumbles and sudden tempests. They've landed in Sicily, near the ancient ruins where the mother's grandmother worked long ago on an archaeological dig. The narrator's marriage has collapsed, her mother is losing her memory, and her daughter is on the threshold of adolescence, starting to ask difficult questions and form complex memories. *How do you begin again?* the narrator wonders, pondering her family line. *How do you begin again if you got the beginning wrong?*

While the mother tries to figure out how to reconstruct their lives as a duo --- cooking meals side by side, reading out loud to each other, playing chess, bickering and making up --- her daughter takes the reins of the story, and their journey soon becomes a quest for origins, not just to the familial past across continents, languages and generations, but also farther back, to a mythical and even geological past.

*BEGINNING MIDDLE END* evolves into a road novel of exquisite tenderness, spanning four generations of women. In their travels through Sicily, mother and daughter cross paths with the island's migrants, storekeepers and elders, and also its volcanoes, its winds and its waters. Weaving myths, ancient philosophy and natural history with fleeting moments of contemporary life, the unforgettable characters in this novel take us on a journey across time and confront some of life's primary questions: How do stories shape our children's memories and imagination? How do we situate ourselves deeply in the world while accepting our transience in it? How are a family's memories made, and what happens when they disappear?

Warm, funny and poetic, this novel is an ode to imagination and possibility in dark times.

## Discussion Guide

1. How does BEGINNING MIDDLE END explore the way that children make sense of the world and its stories and what the world's future will look like?
2. And how does BEGINNING MIDDLE END reflect on what we (the children's parents or adults more generally) do tell them about that same world? What things are we perhaps wrong about, and what things might we make right?
3. What is it like to be a parent in a world that seems to be collapsing, a world where the future seems so fragile, perhaps even uninhabitable?
4. Is this a book about time travel? How so?
5. How are both foreshadowing and hindsight used in the novel?
6. How does this novel explore the notions of beginnings, middles and endings? What were some of the reflections about these three notions that you felt most touched a fiber of your own experience?
7. Throughout BEGINNING MIDDLE END, the intuition emerges that life may not be clearly divided into beginning, middle and end, but rather that we always live in a changing "middle." This "middle" is also the moment when the complexity of time becomes most visible: Our children begin their own journeys while our parents age. How do you interpret this "middle" the novel speaks of? Is it a moment of crisis, awareness or transformation? What does it mean for you to inhabit this intermediate point in life?
8. The narrator constantly reflects on the act of writing: how to find a beginning, how to shape experience, how to write about fear or loss. How does writing appear in the novel: as an attempt to order experience, as a form of resistance against fear, or as a search for meaning amid uncertainty?
9. BEGINNING MIDDLE END repeatedly returns to the origin and meaning of certain words, almost as if understanding the birth of language also helps us understand the human experience. Why do you think the novel insists on this search for the origin of words? Can language help us look at the world in a more attentive or conscious way?
10. BEGINNING MIDDLE END draws on classical mythology and ancient ways of imagining the cosmos at various points. These tales from the past seem to engage with the characters' contemporary questions about time, change and the meaning of life. Why do you think the novel returns to myths? What can these ancient stories offer us today for understanding our own experience of the world?

## Author Bio

Valeria Luiselli is an acclaimed writer of both fiction and nonfiction. She is the author of the essay collection SIDEWALKS; the novels FACES IN THE CROWD, THE STORY OF MY TEETH, BEGINNING MIDDLE END and the international bestseller LOST CHILDREN ARCHIVE; and TELL ME HOW IT ENDS: An Essay in Forty Questions. She is the recipient of a MacArthur "Genius Grant," and the winner of two *Los Angeles Times* Book Prizes, an American Book Award, the Folio Prize, and the 2021 International Dublin Literary Award. Her work has been translated into more than 30 languages. She lives in New York City.

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