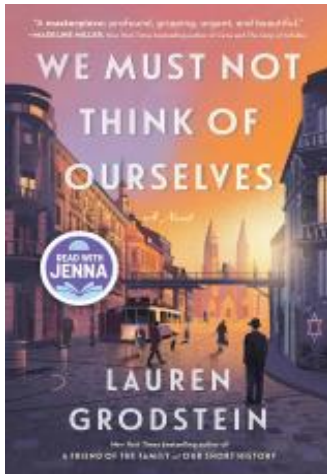


# We Must Not Think of Ourselves

by Lauren Grodstein

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## About the Book

**Inspired by a little-known piece of history --- the underground group that kept an archive to ensure that the lives of Jewish occupants of the Warsaw Ghetto in World War II were not lost to history --- this is a heart-wrenching novel of love and defiance that *People* calls "gripping, emotional, and against all odds, hopeful."**

On a November day in 1940, Adam Paskow becomes a prisoner in the Warsaw Ghetto, where the Jews of the city are cut off from their former lives and held captive by Nazi guards, and await an uncertain fate. Weeks later, he is approached by a mysterious figure with a surprising request: Will he join a secret group of archivists working to preserve the truth of what is happening inside these walls?

Adam agrees and begins taking testimonies from his students, friends and neighbors. He learns about their childhoods and their daydreams, their passions and their fears, their desperate strategies for safety and survival. The stories form a portrait of endurance in a world where no choices are good ones.

One of the people Adam interviews is his flatmate Sala Wiskoff, who is stoic, determined and funny --- and married with two children. Over the months of their confinement, in the presence of her family, Adam and Sala fall in love. As they desperately carve out intimacy, their relationship feels both impossible and vital, their connection keeping them alive.

But when Adam discovers a possible escape from the Ghetto, he is faced with an unbearable choice: Whom can he save, and at what cost?

Inspired by the testimony-gathering project with the code name Oneg Shabbat, *New York Times* bestselling author Lauren Grodstein draws readers into the lives of people living on the edge. Told with immediacy and heart, WE MUST NOT THINK OF OURSELVES is a piercing story of love, determination and sacrifice.

## Discussion Guide

1. Why did Emanuel Ringelblum create the Oneg Shabbat project? How did the project's goals change as the novel progressed?
2. Why do you think more people didn't try to escape from the ghetto?
3. Everything in the ghetto is a trade. What are some of the various economic systems that keep the Jews alive?
4. In what ways are the children at the heart of ghetto life?
5. What is Szifra's attitude toward her brothers? Why doesn't she abandon them?
6. Although Adam never had children of his own, he takes on various paternal roles throughout the novel. What kind of father figure is he to Szifra? To her brothers? To Sala's boys? What is he attempting to teach them through poetry?
7. What kind of man do you think Nowak, the guard who helped Adam, really is?
8. Midway through the novel, Adam encounters a fellow Oneg Shabbat archivist who tells him the ghetto has exposed the rot of Warsaw's Jewish citizens. What do you make of his speech, and of Adam's reaction to it?
9. If Kasia were alive, do you think she would have accompanied Adam to the ghetto? Would they have been able to escape before the war?
10. What role does Yiddish play in WE MUST NOT THINK OF OURSELVES? What does it symbolize? What is its power?
11. How did you feel about Henryk Duda, Kasia's father? Did he love Adam, or did he just want to use him for his own ends?
12. Is Sala and Adam's affair --- in the same apartment as her husband and children --- immoral, or do you think morality can take different shapes in certain circumstances?
13. What do you make of Adam switching out the photos in the kennkartes? Were you disturbed by his choice to do so, or do you think you might have done the same?
14. Do you think Sala's husband knew what was going on between her and Adam?
15. Have you ever been in a situation where every one of your options is a compromise, that there is no way to do right by everyone? How did that make you feel? Nearly every character in the novel finds themselves in this situation. In what ways did this story broaden your understanding of life during the Holocaust?

## Author Bio

Lauren Grodstein is the author of six novels, including the *New York Times* bestseller A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY, the *Washington Post* Book of the Year THE EXPLANATION OF EVERYTHING, and her latest, WE MUST NOT THINK OF OURSELVES.

Lauren's work has been translated into French, Turkish, German, Hebrew and other languages, and her essays and reviews have been widely published. She teaches in the MFA Program at Rutgers University-Camden and lives in New Jersey with her husband and children.

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