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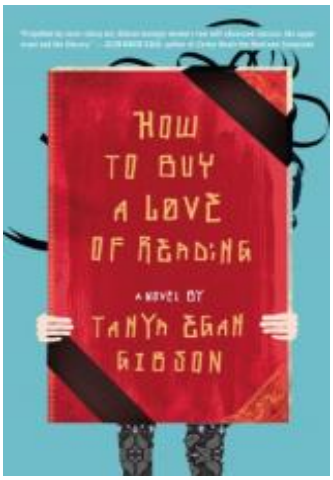
How To Buy a Love of Reading

by Tanya Egan Gibson



About the Book

Fall in love with reading all over again.

To Carley Wells, words are the enemy. Her tutor?s innumerable SAT flashcards. Her personal trainer?s ?fifty-seven pounds overweight? assessment. And the endless reading assignments from her English teacher, Mr. Nagel. When Nagel reports to her parents that she has answered ?What is your favorite book? with ?Never met one I liked,? they decide to fix what he calls her ?intellectual impoverishment.? They will commission a book to be written just for her --- one she?ll have to love --- that will impress her teacher and the whole town of Fox Glen with their family?s devotion to the arts. They will be patrons --- the Medicis of Long Island. They will *buy* their daughter The Love Of Reading.

Impossible though it is for Carley to imagine loving books, she is in love with a young bibliophile who cares about them more than anything. Anything, that is, but a good bottle of scotch. Hunter Cay, Carley?s best friend and Fox Glen?s resident golden boy, is becoming a stranger to her lately as he drowns himself in F. Scott Fitzgerald, booze, and Vicodin.

When the Wellses move writer Bree McEnroy --- author of a failed meta-novel about Odysseus? failed journey home through the Internet --- into their mansion to write Carley?s book, Carley?s sole interest in the project is to distract Hunter from drinking and give them something to share. But as Hunter?s behavior becomes erratic and dangerous, she finds herself increasingly drawn into the fictional world Bree has created, and begins to understand for the first time the power of stories --- those we read, those we want to believe in, and most of all, those we tell ourselves about ourselves. Stories powerful enough to destroy a person. Or save her.

Discussion Guide

1. At the beginning of the novel, we are shown a handout Carley filled out for her English teacher (p. 16). Later, we?re also shown a ?Manifesto? she writes for Bree (p. 121). How did these documents color your initial impressions of her?

Did your interpretation or understanding of her responses change once you read the entire book?

2. Early in the novel, Carley ?never knows the right thing to say? and claims not to understand situations until long after they have passed. How does she grow in this respect during the course of the novel? At which moments do we witness her seizing the moment instead of looking back over her shoulder at it?

3. Every section of this book begins by giving you an invitation to a party. Why might the author have included these invitations?

4. According to Bree?s e-mail to Carley (p. 139), what is ?meta-fiction? Is **How To Buy a Love of Reading** a meta-novel? What is **HTBALOR**?s attitude about the notion of ?meta?? Does it, in the end, undermine meta-fiction or validate it?

5. For a book that is supposed to be about the love of books, this novel pays a considerable amount of attention to fictional television shows, including *The Arion Annals*, *Bouncy House*, *The Frog Princess*, and *Caveman Land*. How do aspects of these shows resonate with the action in **HTBALOR**? What does Glory of *The Arion Annals*, have in common with Carley and/or Bree? What might Gibson be implying about storytelling?

6. Why do you think Carley finds herself using Bree?s ?devices? (pages 186-193) when she finds Hunter passed out in his room? How do they help her cope? Why does she ultimately reject them after having ?tried them on? this way?

7. How do **How To Buy a Love of Reading** and the novel Bree writes for Carley, Dark Ages, echo and/or undercut each other? Are Jules and Buck merely doubles for Carley and Hunter, or is there something different going on within their narrative?

8. References to **The Great Gatsby** appear throughout the book. What is **How To Buy a Love of Reading**?s attitude towards that classic?

9. From the Long Island Sound to ponds, fountains, pools, and the ocean, water is everywhere in this novel. How does it function as a symbol? How do Carley?s and Hunter?s relationships to water help define them and their abilities to survive Fox Glen without ?drowning??

10. During a criticism of Bree?s work on *Dark Ages*, Carley asks, ?Aren?t people the point of stories?? When Bree corrects her by saying, ?Characters,? Carley responds, ?Same difference? (pp. 288-289). What does Carley mean by this?

11. Bree calls backstory ?lazy? (p. 234). Carley?s English teacher says it?s ?messy, clotty stuff.? So why does **How to Buy a Love of Reading** include so many sections of it? And why does Carley think it is important?

12. What do you think Carley means, in the epilogue, when she says, ??[T]he tanks are lit from within to minimize reflection. That?s my kind of story. That?s the kind of story this is?? (p. 385)

13. Why might the novel be organized into parts named for literary terms?Setting, Plot, Devices, Backstory, Theme, Time and Tense, and Point of View? In what ways might this novel be teaching the reader, throughout the narrative, how to read it?

14. Carley?s English teacher and his literary terminology lessons are characterized as ridiculous. Why would the author do this?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage Tanya Egan Gibson, a fresh and funny new voice in the world of fiction."

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