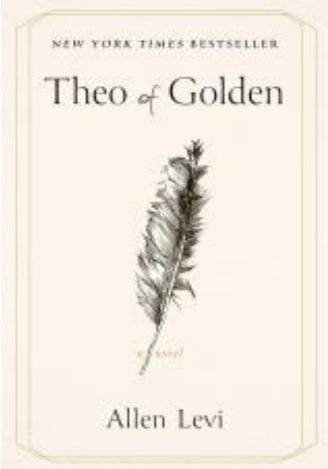
Theo of Golden

by Allen Levi



About the Book

One spring morning, a stranger arrives in the small southern city of Golden. No one knows where he has come from?or why.

His name is Theo. And he asks a lot more questions than he answers.

Theo visits the local coffeehouse, where 92 pencil portraits hang on the walls --- portraits of the people of Golden done by a local artist. He begins purchasing them, one at a time, and putting them back in the hands of their ?rightful owners.? With each exchange, a story is told, a friendship born, and a life altered.

A story of giving and receiving, of seeing and being seen, THEO OF GOLDEN is a beautifully crafted novel about the power of creative generosity, the importance of wonder to a purposeful life, and the invisible threads of kindness that bind us to one another.

Discussion Guide

1. What was your overall impression of the book? Strengths and weaknesses?

2. Who was your favorite character? Why?

3. What was your favorite scene in the book? Why?

4. If there were a sequel to the book, focusing on one of the characters other than Theo, which character would you want it to be?

5. Of all the friendships that Theo forged in the story, which interested you most as a reader? Which revealed most of you about Theo?

THEME: PRESENCE/INCARNATION/ATTENTIVENESS

A) Theo insisted on personal presence and participation when he carried out his bestowals. Mrs. Gidley, you might recall, suggested at one point that he do them all at one time with a bit of fanfare. She was thinking efficiency and optimization.

In his conversation with Katherine (the news reporter), he further shared some of his thoughts on generosity.

Why do you think Theo was so insistent on doing it the way he did, in person, in secret, one at a time? What did that tell us about him and his perspective on giving?

B) Identify instances of Theo?s attentiveness. (For example, his listening to Kendrick and taking note of Lamisha?s birthday; his careful selection of Christmas gifts for his friends, indicative that he had paid attention to things they offhandedly mentioned in conversation; his notice of the picture of Gammy, Asher and Pearce --- when they were young boys --- at the Thanksgiving supper; others?)

He was attentive to people (specifically faces), birds, flowers, historical markers and music. Did he have specific practices that nurtured attentiveness?

How do we develop a habit of attentiveness? Are their benefits or pleasures that come with being attentive and present?

C) Did you notice that, with only a couple of very minor mentions, technology has no place in the story. Could Theo have engaged with people he met at the Promenade if he had used texting, Zoom or email? Would his invitations have been as well-received, or as intriguing, if they had been sent in some form other than handwritten letters?

THEME: SADNESS

A) Theo saw in Minnette?s portrait and spoke to Asher of something he called ?good sadness.? He also made a statement that ?(s)adness might be many things, but it is rarely stupid. The good sadness, I think, is all trying to tell us something very important.?(pp.46, 47, 223-225)

Discuss that phrase, and Theo?s statement to Minnette. What do you think Theo meant?

What role did "good sadness" play in Theo?s life?

And, if we could ask Theo what "bad sadness" is, what might he say?

THEME: GLADNESS/PLAYFULNESS

A) In his description of Theo, Father Lundy said,

?Theo was a playful man in the best sense of that word. But it seems more and more certain to me that his

lightheartedness was deadly serious and steeped in purpose. It was one more way in which he spoke to us the language of another place.? (pp.370, 371)

Identify occasions when Theo was "playful" (e.g. Tony?s birthday, the bike ride with Ellen, reading with Lamisha, others) and discuss what Father Lundy meant in his eulogy.

THEME: BEAUTY

A) How did Theo cultivate a love of beauty in his own life, whether unintentionally as a boy or intentionally as a man?

B) Identify moments when beauty (through music, nature, art) inspired him in some way.

C) Have you had moments like that in your life?

D) How can we encourage a sense of delight and love for beauty in the lives of our children?

THEME: CHANGE

A) Did the story of Theo?s life challenge or inspire you to change in any way? How? (And if it did, might I say in his behalf, thank you. That is the highest praise you could possibly pay him.)

A CHALLENGE

Do a kindness or act of generosity sometime in the next month or two and tell not a soul about it. Register your heart?s response.

Author Bio

Allen Levi --- attorney, judge, singer/songwriter, author --- lives on and cares for family acreage near a small town in middle Georgia. THEO OF GOLDEN is his first novel.

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