

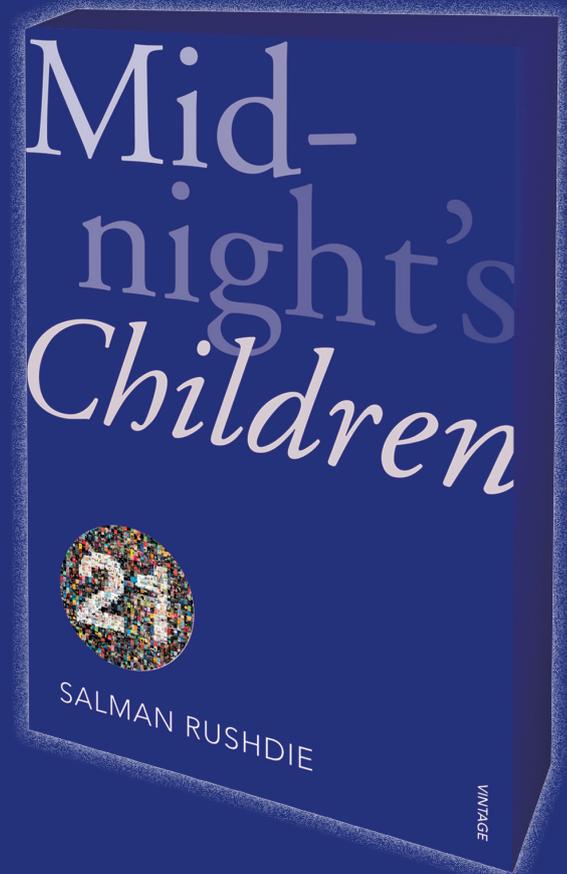
Midnight's Children

by SALMAN RUSHDIE

SYNOPSIS

Born at the stroke of midnight at the exact moment of India's independence, Saleem Sinai is a special child. However, this coincidence of birth has consequences he is not prepared for: telepathic powers connect him with 1,000 other 'midnight's children' all of whom are endowed with unusual gifts.

Inextricably linked to his nation, Saleem's story is a whirlwind of disasters and triumphs that mirrors the course of modern India at its most impossible and glorious.



‘Huge, vital, engrossing... in all senses a fantastic book’
Sunday Times

STARTING POINTS FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

Consider the role of marriage in *Midnight's Children*. Do you think marriage is portrayed as a positive institution?

Do you think *Midnight's Children* is a novel of big ideas? How well do you think it carries its themes?

If you were to make a film of *Midnight's Children*, who would you cast in the principle roles?

What do you think of the novel's ending? Do you think it is affirmative or negative? Is there anything you would change about it?

What do you think of the portrayal of women in *Midnight's Children*?

What is the significance of smell in the novel?

Midnight's Children is narrated in the first person by Saleem, a selfconfessed 'lover of stories', who openly admits to getting some facts wrong. Why do you think Rushdie deliberately introduces mistakes into Saleem's narration? How else does the author explore the theme of the nature of truth?

What do you think about the relationship between Padma and Saleem? Consider the way that Padma's voice differs from Saleem's. Does language have an important role to play in *Midnight's Children*?

Consider the reaction of Saleem and his parents to the discovery that he is not their son. Do you think Amina and Ahmed are good parents? Why does Saleem refer to India as 'Mother India'? Does Rushdie's portrayal of the family challenge your views of Indian society in any way?

Throughout his narration, Saleem uses the images and language of Bollywood to describe the actions unfolding. How effective do you think this technique is? Discuss the ideas of perspective, illusion and reality raised by the novel.

An extended image of the radio is used to describe one of the central events of the novel: the first appearance in Saleem's head of the other midnight's children. Why do you think Saleem uses modern media forms as a way of understanding what is happening to him? How well does this square with his use of myth and legend? Do you think the blend of the ancient and the modern works in *Midnight's Children*?

Saleem veers between the past, the present and the future. What do you think Rushdie is trying to achieve by rejecting a more straightforward chronological structure? Compare Saleem-the-child with Saleem-the-adult. Would you agree that both are convincing characters?

How are the personal and the public linked throughout the novel? Discuss the ways in which the Midnight's Children Conference reflects the make-up of India after the Partition.

Discuss Saleem's belief that his life influences the fate of his nation. Why do you think he feels guilty and responsible?

Midnight's Children was written in 1981. How relevant do you think it is to 21st century debates about fanaticism?

Why do you think the final chapter is entitled 'Abracadabra'? How successful do you think the use of magic is in terms of furthering your understanding of the novel?

In 2008, *Midnight's Children* won the Best of Booker award. Why do you think this novel has been singled out for this award?

RECEPTION & REVIEWS

'One of the most important books to come out of the English-speaking world in this generation' *The New York Review of Books*

'India has produced a great novelist...a master of perpetual storytelling' V.S. Pritchett, *New Yorker*

'Salman Rushdie has earned the right to be called one of our great storytellers.' *Observer*

'The literary map of India has been redrawn... *Midnight's Children* sounds like a country finding its voice.' *New York Times*

'A brilliant and endearing novel.' *London Review of Books*

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2008/jul/10/bestofbooker> *Guardian*

BIOGRAPHY

Salman Rushdie was born in 1947 into a middle-class Muslim family in Bombay. His grandfather was an Urdu poet, and his father a Cambridge-educated businessman. He was sent to school in England at the age of thirteen, at which point he had already decided to become a writer. He continued his studies at King's College, Cambridge, reading history. After graduating in 1968 he left for Karachi, Pakistan, where his family had moved in 1964. He tried to start a career in television but the censorship he came up against inspired a move back to the UK.

By 1970 he was living and working in London as a freelance copywriter, writing fiction in his spare time. He published his first novel, *Grimus* – a sci-fi satire – in 1975. *Midnight's Children*, published in 1981, won the Booker Prize and the James Tait Black Prize, and brought Rushdie international fame. It also marked his first brush with controversy – his unflattering portrayal of Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay prompted libel charges and forced Rushdie to revise the novel and issue an apology. *Midnight's Children* was followed by *Shame* in 1983, which won the French Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger, and a work of non-fiction, *The Jaguar Smile*, based on his travels in Nicaragua.

In 1988 Rushdie won the Whitbread Prize for *The Satanic Verses*. The novel, with its unconventional portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad, caused outrage across the Muslim world. On Valentine's Day in 1989 the former spiritual leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa that condemned to death Rushdie and all involved in the publication of his book. The fatwa forced Rushdie into hiding, but he continued to write, producing a children's book, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990); *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), a book of essays and criticism; a work of film criticism, *The Wizard of Oz* (1992); a book of stories, *East, West* (1995); and three novels, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), and *Fury* (2001). A book of literary criticism, *Step Across this Line* (2003), and two novels, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), have followed since. A sequel to *Haroun*, called *Luka and the Fire of Life*, was published in 2010. He lives in New York.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Grimus
Midnight's Children
Shame
The Satanic Verses
Haroun and the Sea of Stories
East, West
The Moor's Last Sigh
The Ground Beneath Her Feet
Fury
Shalimar the Clown
The Enchantress of Florence
The Jaguar Smile
Imaginary Homelands
Step Across This Line
The Vintage Book of Indian Writing

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Brick Lane by Monica Ali
A Passage to India by E M Forster
The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro
The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy
A Suitable Boy by Vikram Seth
White Teeth by Zadie Smith
One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez

