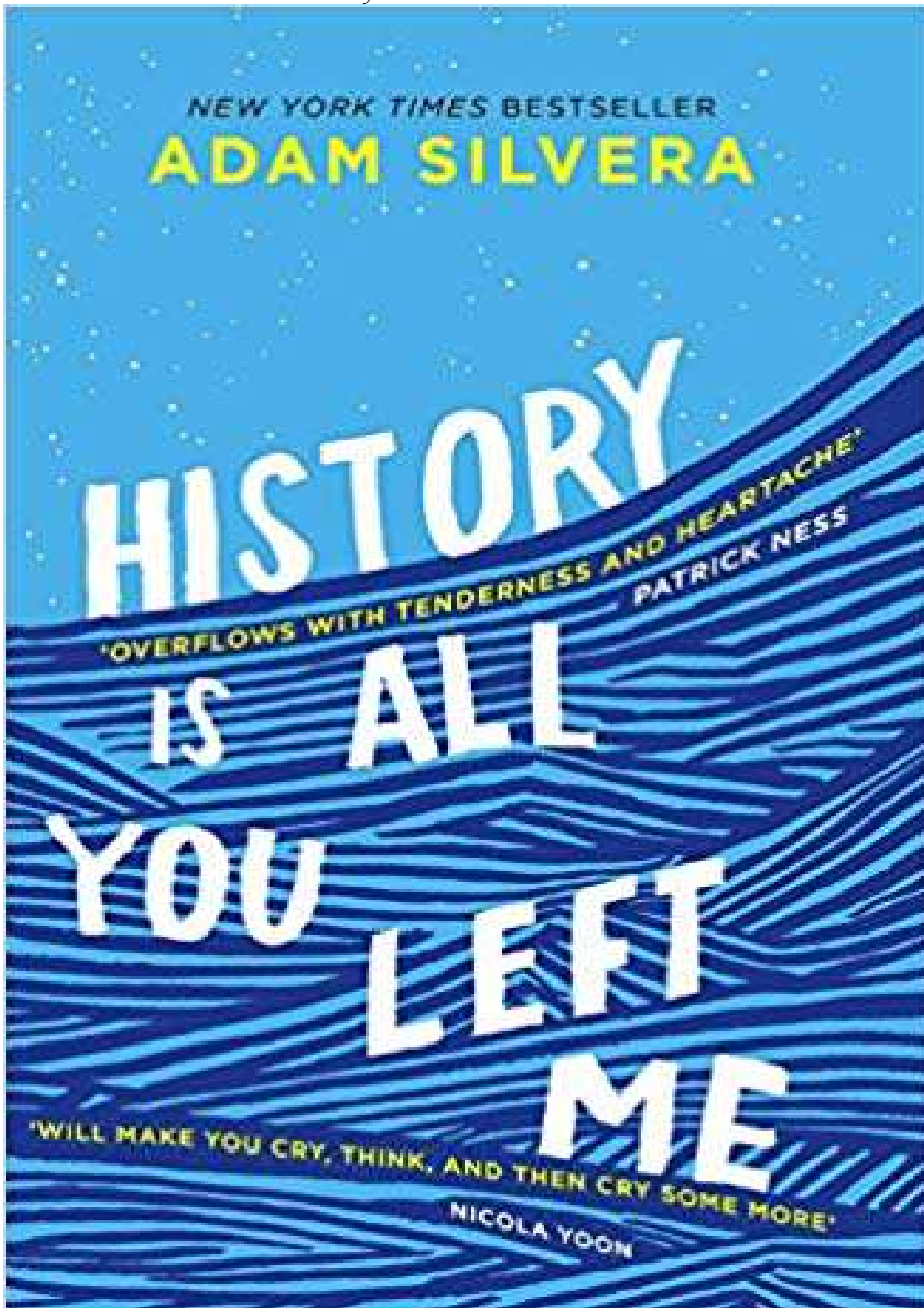


Book Talk
by Jack Schoenecker



<https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51-KCmh2OhL. SX326 BO1,204,203,200 .jpg>



The Author:

History is All You Left Me was written by Adam Silvera.

Adam Silvera was born and raised in the Bronx. He has worked in the publishing industry as a children's bookseller, community manager at a literary development company, and book reviewer of children's and young adult novels. He's the New York Times bestselling author of *They Both Die at the End*, *More Happy Than Not*, and *History Is All You Left Me*, and all his novels have received multiple starred reviews. He is tall for no reason and writes in New York City.(adamsilvera.com)

<http://www.adamsilvera.com/>

Apart from this small blurb that appears on Silvera's website, and every other site that offers a biography of him, not much information about the author's life has been put into writing. Silvera has a Youtube channel where he discusses his work and the work of other authors and friends. He injects himself and his experiences into his books, especially in *History is All You Left Me*; Silvera deals with anxiety and OCD, and he has struggled with suicide on multiple occasions. He has more recently been silent on social media, but he always has new books in the works. Most notably, a book he co-wrote with Becky Albertalli, *What If It's Us*, is set to release in October.

Sources:

- https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjN5IUzLYi9LAR1_pUieWLQ/feed
- <http://www.adamsilvera.com/>
- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/features/becky-albertallis-next-book-wont-be-based-in-simonverse/articleshow/64399591.cms>

A Cursory Glance:

History is All You Left Me, by Adam Silvera, tears into the heart of love. Griffin, the 17 year-old protagonist, waits: for the love of his life, for his compulsions to stop, and for his pain to go away. He is stuck trying to piece together the scattered puzzle that is his late ex-boyfriend, Theo. Griffin discovers that the pieces of Theo he holds onto do not complete the picture. Instead, he finds pieces of Theo, good and bad, in the history he made with others, and Theo does not belong to him alone. Silvera distills beautiful, ugly, unabashed love into every line of his work, and he demonstrates how “people reveal different parts of themselves to different people”(258).

A Few Important Quotes:

“You're still alive in alternate universes, Theo. . . It's because I know I'm not done yet.”(Silvera, 1-2)

The opening of the book introduces readers to Griffin's struggle. He is processing not only the loss of his first love but the loss of their “endgame”. He's drowning in his sorrow, but he's also trying to come to terms with the fact that Theo is not his alone to mourn. The narrative is addressed to Theo because little pieces of him surround Griffin all the time. Silvera uses inside jokes and memories between the characters to draw the reader in, eventually teaching readers why a zombie-pirate puzzle can bring young Griffin to tears. He also uses the narrative focus as a confession and lets Griffin apologize for all of his mistakes to a man that can no longer hear him. The book itself is set up as Griffin's ultimate closure within the first two pages.

“I turn back to the door and grab the doorknob. . . You were finally able to speak to me, Theo, and I don't like everything you have to say.”(117-118)

This passage defines the crisis Griffin faces with Jackson. Jackson introduces a side of Theo to him that he never got to see, which means that Theo is not really his to monopolize. This moment forces this hard truth into Griffin's purview and breaks his heart all over again. However, this moment also represents a new stage in Griffin's relationship with Jackson. He now sees that Jackson suffers from the same heartache he does, and in shared misery there is comfort. This moment foreshadows a lesson the young, grieving kid learns while coming to terms with his loss; every relationship is unique.

“Wade Smirks. . .It's like I still have the fatigue that got me to quit the song in the first place, but I don't mind being woken up to it for a little bit.”(270-272)

This passage represents growth for the protagonist, and it sets Wade and Theo up as foils of each other. Theo has always loved Griffin's “quirks”, which encouraged Griffin to hold onto them. Wade, however, tries to help him break his OCD habits. Though Theo made Griffin feel comfortable with his disability, he also enabled it. Despite listening to music on shuffle, Griffin finds himself able to relax and lose himself. There are little pieces of history in everything he does, but the memories Wade inspires do not hurt the way Theo's do. Griffin finds he can live outside of his comfort zone, and he is encouraged to break those habits by someone who genuinely cares about his mental health and emotional growth.

How hard is it?

Lexile Level: HL820L

Lexile gives *History is All You Left Me* a High-low rating with a value of 820L. The text complexity of this book is low because the narrator is a 17 year-old boy speaking casually. I would, however, disagree with the 820L score. The narrative uses an unconventional structure that aligns its themes of death and rebirth along two time-lines, and the structure adds a depth of complexity to the work that would be missed by less advanced readers. The book also switches narrative direction from Theo to the reader depending on these time-lines, and it could be hard to follow for students that have less experience with varied perspectives. From a qualitative standpoint, the book should not be read by students younger than high school age. It includes sex and graphic language, as well as vividly depicted trauma. Though any student who has suffered extreme loss would find value in this book, regardless of age.

ATOS: Book Level – 5.5, Interest Level – 9-12

ATOS recognizes the ages readers should be introduced to the book, but also believes the narrative elements are simple enough for mid-term fifth graders to understand. This score is fair, and falls in line with my assessment of its Lexile level, though some elements of the narrative structure require a higher reading level to understand.

Dave-Chall: Grade 7, Reading Level – Fairly Easy, Age – 11-13

Grade 7 is closer to the text complexity this book deserves, and the reading is fairly easy. The age range is off, though. Students 11-13 should not read this book unless they have parental permission, but otherwise the book would help young people who are dealing with loss and heartache.

Why Teach It?

I would happily introduce this book to a high school classroom, especially in tandem with classic works like *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, by Lord Alfred Tennyson, or *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf. The common thread of grief links these works together, and they expose students to homo-romantic relationships whose problems do not revolve around the stigma of queer isolation. I might build a unit of study on the trauma of loss and ask my students to find aspects of the works they identify with. A creative writing exercise could get them to engage with the book's underlying themes, and I would love to have my students attempt to write two stories in unison whose time-lines link together. For some, these stories might seem like “forbidden material,” which matches the Stage of Literary Appreciation this book falls into. High School is a perfect time to introduce a book that forces the readers to venture outside themselves, and they can follow Griffin on that journey.