



Half a Life

A Memoir

By *Darin Strauss*

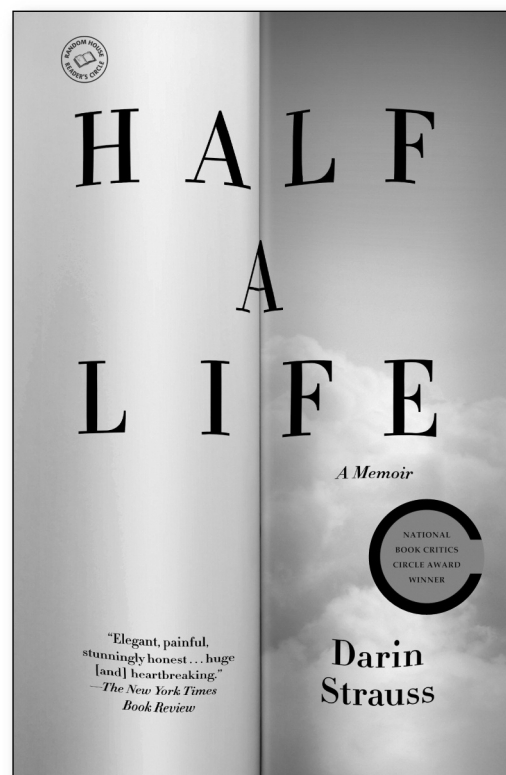
WINNER, NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS
CIRCLE AWARD (AUTOBIOGRAPHY)

“Elegant, painful, stunningly honest . . .
huge [and] heartbreaking.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Darin Strauss has spent a good part of his adult life reliving, regretting and reflecting on a single, split-second incident. *Half a Life* is a starkly honest account of that fateful moment and his life thereafter . . . penetrating, thought-provoking.”

—*The Washington Post*



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Audio Book Download: 978-0-307-98860-7 | \$12.00
e-Book: 978-0-679-64382-1 | \$9.99

Reading Level: 9th Grade

• Note to Teachers

The inclusion of *Half a Life* in high school curriculum is supported by the Common Core State Standards at a variety of grade levels. The themes of loss, death, grief, guilt, and tragedy make this memoir an ideal companion to several novels typically taught at the 9th and 10th grade level such as *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, *Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. Since the Common Core State Standards place an increased emphasis on the use of informational texts in 11th and 12th grade courses, *Half a Life* is an excellent selection for use in contemporary literature and senior-level courses. At any high school level, a study of *Half a Life* will provide a framework that students can use to reflect on a significant moment in their own lives and compose their own works of narrative writing.

The Common Core Standards classify memoir as an informational text. Standards for both grades 9-10 and 11-12 are included in this guide. A Reader's Guide with prompts that can be adapted for discussion and writing is included in the paperback edition of the book, and a more comprehensive Teacher's Guide can be found on the Random House High School site (www.tinyurl.com/ch53efc). A complete list of the Common Core State Standards can be found at <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>.

• Reading—Informational Text Grades 9–10:

Key Ideas and Details

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
- Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

• Writing—Grades 9–10:

- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
- Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

• Reading—Informational Text Grades 11–12:

Key Ideas and Details

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

Craft and Structure

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
- Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

• Writing—Grades 11–12:

- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.
- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

• **Writing—Grades 11–12 (continued):**

- Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).
- Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
- Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

• **Language Vocabulary Acquisition and Use—Grades 11–12:**

- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
 - a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.
 - b. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

• **About this Guide’s Writer**

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