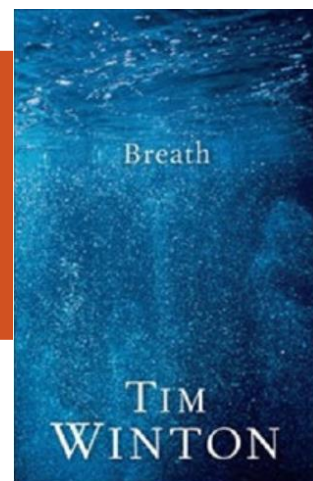




Breath

Tim Winton



Author Background

Tim Winton is one of Australia's most esteemed writers, having written novels, children's books, non-fiction books, and short stories. He has twice been shortlisted for the Booker Prize (*The Riders* and *Dirt Music*) and won the Miles Franklin Award four times (*Shallows*, *Cloudstreet*, *Dirt Music* and *Breath*). Some of his work has been adapted for stage, screen, and radio.

Winton is a champion of the Australian environment and conservation. He draws inspiration from the landscape in Western Australia, where he lives with his family. He grew up on the outskirts of Perth and now lives in Albany. A childhood spent amongst the Australian wildlife and in the water has inspired his writing and expresses a deep love of rural Australia.

In 1997 Winton was named a Living Treasure by the National Trust of Australia, and awarded the Centenary Medal for service to literature and the community. He is patron of the *Tim Winton Award for Young Writers* and Curtin University has named a lecture theatre in his honour.

Book Summary

A coming of age story about water, surfing and survival, *Breath* entices its reader from the very first page. We meet Bruce, a paramedic, who is called to attend the death of a teenager, an incident which causes him to reflect on a pivotal point in his own life: the summer when he surfed Old Smoky, the biggest, most dangerous wave on the Point, dodged a shark, fell in love, and found and lost friendship. The book looks back on his own tumultuous teenage years in a small mill town in Western Australia, many of which were spent in the water with his friend Loonie. It's while surfing that the boys meet Sando. Older and more worldly, Sando soon takes the boys under his wing, and teaches them to live life precariously and on the edge. The boys develop an obsession with the has-been 70's surfing guru and his angry, bitter young wife, and the tale follows the four characters across one hot summer of surfing.

Breath, is an extraordinary evocation of an adolescence spent resisting complacency, testing one's limits against nature, finding like-minded souls, and discovering just how far one breath will take you. It's a story of extremes—extreme sports and extreme emotions.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ The story of Pikelet's experiences with Sando and Loonie are framed by scenes from his life as an older man. How would you describe his attitude towards the young man he was back then, and toward the choices he made?
- ❖ Is Sando a good influence on the boys? Does he help them in any way? Do you think he has their best interests at heart?
- ❖ Pikelet and Loonie come together as friends over their shared fascination with risk. How do they ultimately experience surfing differently? What is it about them that leads their paths to diverge over the course of the story?
- ❖ What is Eva's attitude toward Sando's relationship with the boys? What feelings does it bring up about her own situation and her own history?
- ❖ What do you think draws Pikelet and Eva together? What does each of them get from their relationship? Do you think Pikelet bears some responsibility for what happens between them?
- ❖ Look at the scene where Sando, Loonie and Pikelet go to surf the Nautilus (p. 144-147). Why do you think Pikelet chooses not to surf that day? How does his refusal affect the course of his relationship with Sando and Loonie?
- ❖ Several times in the story characters mention a resistance to being an "ordinary person," and many of the risks they take are motivated by a desire to stand outside ordinary life. Is this a healthy impulse? Have you experienced it, or known people who have? How do people you know handle it?
- ❖ Later in the book we learn that Pikelet spent some time in an institution. What do you think happened in his mind to get him there? How did the surfing and the relationship with Eva affect him later in life?
- ❖ Do you think Pikelet and Loonie learn something of value from the risks they take? Are they better off for having endured the fear and surfed with Sando? Is it necessary to take these kinds of risks in order to feel alive?

References

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- ❖ Breath (Winton): <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/152-breath-winton>