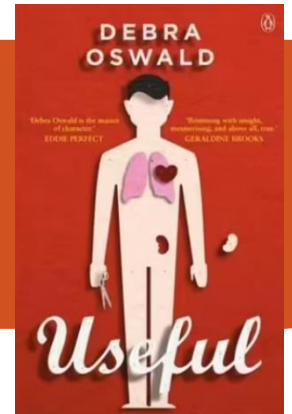




Useful

Debra Oswald



Author Background

Debra Oswald is an Australian writer for film, television, stage, radio, and fiction for adults and children. She created and was head writer of the highly successful television drama, *Offspring*, for which she won the 2011 NSW Premier's Literary Award and the 2014 AACTA Award for best TV screenplay.

Debra studied at the Australian National University and the Australian Film Television and Radio School.

Her first adult novel, *Useful*, was published in 2015, followed by *The Whole Bright Year* in 2018 and her most recent book, *The Family Doctor* was released in 2021.

Debra lives in Sydney with her husband, author and ABC radio personality, Richard Glover. They have two sons.

Book Summary

Sullivan (Sully) Moss is useless. Once a charming underachiever, a lazy, unemployed alcoholic, he's now so hopeless that he even fails his attempt to end it all. After a life of regrets, Sully wants to do one useful thing. If he can't make something of himself, maybe someone else can. He's going to donate a kidney to a stranger.

As he scrambles over the hurdles to become a donor, Sully almost accidentally forges a new life for himself. Sober and employed, he makes new friends and begins to patch things up with old ones. But altruism is not as easy as it seems. Just when he thinks he's got himself together, Sully discovers there are more temptations than ever to fall apart.

Useful is a fast-paced read with great character insights, a wry, moving snapshot of one man's search for meaning in life.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ *Useful* raises questions about what we have achieved in life; have we achieved enough; could we have done more, and what does it mean to be a good person? How would you answer these questions?
- ❖ What do you think of Sully's decision to donate a kidney, to fulfill his desire of not being a total screw-up? Is it foolish or is his benevolence admirable?
- ❖ The novel is strewn with a cast of memorable and diverse characters who cross paths with Sully. Do they have their lives under control or are they also looking for meaning and fulfillment like Sully? Discuss.
- ❖ Do you recognise yourself, family or friends in these characters? How so?
- ❖ How did you feel about Sully? Did you like/dislike him? Could you understand why he wanted to end his life? Did you feel pity or empathy for him? Why?
- ❖ What is the idea of usefulness Debra Oswald is trying to convey? Do you feel an obligation to be useful, to be a good addition to humanity? Have you devoted your life to things of true value?

References

- ❖ Written by Sime: <https://writtenbysime.com/2015/02/08/review-useful-by-debra-oswald/>
- ❖ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debra_Oswald
- ❖ Readings: <https://www.readings.com.au/review/useful-by-debra-oswald>
- ❖ Books+Publishing: <https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2015/01/07/32019/useful-debra-oswald-viking/>
- ❖ Angus & Robertson: <https://www.angusrobertson.com.au/books/useful-oswald-debra-debra-oswald/p/9780670077823>