

STEPHEN KING

DIFFERENT SEASONS

ABOUT THE BOOK

IN BRIEF:

Different Seasons is a collection of four novellas: 'Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption' (filmed as 'The Shawshank Redemption'), 'Apt Pupil' (also a film), 'The Body' (filmed as 'Stand by Me') and 'The Breathing Method'. All four stories are among King's most powerful, described by the author in the afterword as 'stories about an off-beat prison break, an old man and a young boy locked in a gruesome relationship, a quartet of country boys on a journey of discovery, and an off-the-wall horror story about a young woman determined to give birth to her child no matter what.'

IN DETAIL:

'Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption' is narrated by Red, a prison fixer who can get you anything you want inside, from green milkshakes to movie posters, although he has his principles about what he'll sell you. When he becomes friends with Andy Dufresne, the two men form a bond that sustains them through years of incarceration.

In 'Apt Pupil', a high-achieving schoolboy named Todd discovers that his neighbour Dussander is a Nazi war criminal. Rather than turn him in, he starts visiting his house and getting him to tell him everything about the camps. The two form an unusual relationship, with Dussander even going to Todd's school to stop his parents finding out about his poor grades. But Dussander is nursing a sickness in Todd, and soon the two of them will find new outlets for their darkness.

'The Body' is a nostalgic coming-of-age tale about the kind of friends people have when they are twelve, narrated by Gordon, a bestselling author looking back on his life. But the sweetness of the story is deliberately balanced with the nature of the boy's quest: they are on their way to look at a corpse. In trying to find out about death, the children actually discover the beauty of life.

'The Breathing Method' begins as a story-telling competition in a gentleman's private club. But the story told is anything but traditional, concerning a doctor who encourages his patient to use the breathing method of childbirth, a lesson that she clings onto even when it seems she will not survive.

QUOTES:

'Not since Dickens has a writer had so many readers by the throat' *Guardian*

'He's never written anything that seems so polished and finished. Each of the first three novellas has its hypnotic moments, and the last one is a horrifying little gem' *New York Times*

'He creates people who are so alive, you can almost sense them' *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

According to the afterword, *Different Seasons* was, in some ways, King's response to being 'typed' as a horror writer. While he was happy to accept the tag, deciding he could be in worse company than writers such as H.P. Lovecraft and Shirley Jackson, he was clear that horror was not *all* he was writing. Looking at King's career now, it seems a long time since he has been thought of exclusively as a horror writer rather than an author who marries his enormous literary skills to an ability to entertain a mass readership. But this collection was published in 1982. And King writes entertainingly about how he persuaded his then-American editor, Alan Williams, to accept four novellas, 'most or all of them just sort of ordinary stories' by promising that one story would have a horror element and that his next novel (the brilliant *Christine*) would be about a haunted car.

What once might have seemed a risky bet, however, has proved one of King's most enduring collections. As well as being the source for three movies, it can be seen as the beginning of a more realistic strand of King's fiction which reached full bloom in his masterpiece *Hearts in Atlantis*. These 'ordinary stories' are in fact anything but, and remain among his most significant achievements.

In an interview in 2008 on the *Today Show* (US), in response to a question about which of his characters he most resembles, the author answered 'if any of them are like me, it's probably Gordie, the boy who narrates 'The Body'.

STARTING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. *Different Seasons* is a collection of four novellas. How would you define a novella?
2. Which is your favourite of the four novellas in the book, and why?
3. What is the significance of the title of the first novella, 'Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption'?
4. Are there any similarities between the endings of 'Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption' and 'Apt Pupil'?
5. Do you feel sympathy for any of the characters in 'Apt Pupil'?
6. Why does Stephen King include Gordon's story 'Stud City' in 'The Body'? What does it tell you about Gordon?
7. 'The only reason anyone writes stories is so they can understand the past and get ready for some future mortality' writes Gordon in 'The Body'. What do you think about this statement?
8. What is the significance of King's use of an exclusive men's club as the setting for 'The Breathing Method' and how does it connect to the story told there?
9. How are the four novellas connected? Are there any links between them?
10. If you've read any other Stephen King novels, how do they compare to this collection?
11. In the afterword King describes his prose 'as the literary equivalent of a Big Mac and a large fries from McDonald's.' What does King mean by this, and does it seem overly self-deprecating from a writer with his gifts. Is popular and literary fiction mutually exclusive?

ABOUT THE FILMS:

Different Seasons has been the source for no less than three Stephen King film adaptations, including two of his most-loved, 'The Shawshank Redemption' (1994) starring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman, which was nominated for seven Oscars and is an enduring classic and *Stand By Me* (1986), starring the late River Phoenix which was also Oscar-nominated. 'Apt Pupil' (1998) is slightly less well-known, but features wonderful performances from Ian McKellen and the late Brad Renfro.

READ EXTRACT:

He looked like the total all-American kid as he pedalled his twenty-six-inch Schwinn with the ape-hanger handlebars up the residential suburban street, and that's just what he was: Todd Bowden, thirteen years old, five-feet-eight and a healthy one hundred and forty pounds, hair the colour of ripe corn, blue eyes, white even teeth, lightly tanned skin marred by not even the first shadow of adolescent acne.

He was smiling a summer vacation smile as he pedalled through the sun and shade three blocks from his own house. He looked like the kind of kid who might have a paper route, and as a matter of fact, he did – he delivered the Santa Donato Clarion. He also looked like the kind of kid who might sell greeting cards for premiums, and he had done that, too. They were the kind that come with your name printed inside – JACK AND MARY BURKE, or DON AND SALLY, or THE MURCHISONS. He looked like the sort of boy who might whistle while he worked, and he often did so. He whistled quite prettily, in fact. His dad was an architectural engineer who made \$40,000 a year. His mom was a housewife and a secretarial school graduate (she had met Todd's father one day when he needed a secretary from the pool) who typed manuscripts in her spare time. She had kept all of Todd's old school report cards in a folder. Her favourite was his final fourth-grade card, on which Mrs Upshaw had scratched: 'Todd is an extremely apt pupil.' He was, too. Straight As and Bs all the way up the line. If he'd done any better – straight As, for example – his friends might have begun to think he was weird.

Now he brought his bike to a halt in front of 963 Claremont Street and stepped off it. The house was a small bungalow set discreetly back on its lot. It was white with green shutters and green trim. A hedge ran around the front. The hedge was well-watered and well-clipped.

Todd brushed his blond hair out of his eyes and walked the Schwinn up the cement path to the steps. He was still smiling, and his smile was open and expectant and beautiful, a marvel of modern dentistry and fluoridated water. He pushed down the bike's kickstand with the toe of one Nike running-shoe and then picked the folded newspaper off the bottom step. It wasn't the Clarion; it was the LA Times. He put it under his arm and mounted the steps. At the top was a heavy wooden door with no window inside of a latched screen door. There was a doorbell on the right-hand doorframe, and below the bell were two small signs, each neatly screwed into the wood and covered with protective plastic so they wouldn't yellow or waterspot. German efficiency, Todd thought, and his smile widened a little. It was an adult thought, and he always mentally congratulated himself when he had one of those.

The top sign said ARTHUR DENKER.

The bottom one said NO SOLICITORS, NO PEDDLERS, NO SALESMEN.

Smiling still, Todd rang the bell.

IF YOU LIKE *DIFFERENT SEASONS*, YOU'LL LIKE:

Four Past Midnight

Skeleton Crew

Nightmares and Dreamscapes

OTHER BOOKS BY STEPHEN KING:

FICTION:

Carrie
'Salem's Lot
The Shining
Night Shift
The Stand
The Dead Zone
Firestarter
Cujo
Different Seasons
Cycle of the Werewolf
Christine
The Talisman (with Peter Straub)
Pet Sematary
It
Skeleton Crew
The Eyes of the Dragon
Misery
The Tommyknockers
The Dark Half
Four Past Midnight
Needful Things
Gerald's Game
Dolores Claiborne
Nightmares and Dreamscapes
Insomnia
Rose Madder
Desperation
Bag of Bones
The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon
Hearts in Atlantis
Dreamcatcher
Everything's Eventual
From a Buick 8
Cell
Lisey's Story
Duma Key
The Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger
The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three
The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands
The Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass
The Dark Tower V: Wolves of the Calla
The Dark Tower VI: Song of Susannah
The Dark Tower VII: The Dark Tower

By Stephen King as Richard Bachman

Thinner
The Running Man
The Bachman Books
The Regulators
Blaze

NON-FICTION:

Danse Macabre
On Writing (A Memoir of the Craft)

WEBSITE LINKS:

www.stephenking.co.uk
www.stephenking.com