

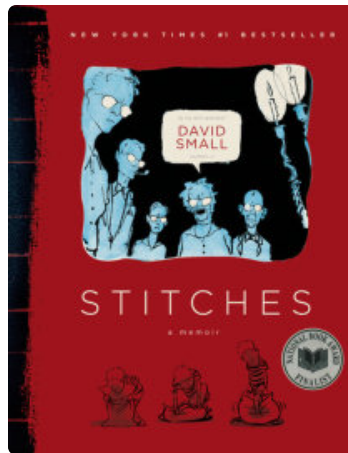


Penguin
Random House
Canada

Reading Guide

From *Stitches*

Author **David Small**



1. **Stitches** is the story of one man's attempt to understand and reclaim his past. How is the act of remembering - and memory itself - handled in the book? Discuss the effectiveness of the transitions between the book's "chapters."
2. Early on, David Small describes how each member of his family had his or her own "language." What does each family member's language reveal about them? How does David's "language" change over the course of the book?
3. Discuss the theme of silence. Which silences are forced, and which are self-imposed? Did you feel there were moments when Small's perceptive depictions of body language, facial expression, and suppressed emotion spoke more powerfully than words could have? What are the consequences when characters *do* speak up to tell the truth?

4. During the editing process, Small tried to "get rid of as many words as possible. That's what the book is about - not being able to speak feelings, and being kept silent." But he was also interested in the role language plays in a "largely wordless book." What are the repercussions of young David's use of the words *ain't* (p88) and *crazy* (p101)? Are there other highly charged words in the book? What significance do such sounds as *Whap!* and *Kkrraackk!* have in the story?
5. How would you describe the role that art and the imagination play in the book? Which images spoke most powerfully to you about the importance of art in David's life? How does young David's retreat into his imagination compare with how his parents deal with reality?
6. Discuss the significance of the fairy tales, daydreams, and nightmares that appear in the book.
7. In conceiving of the approach he would use to tell his story, Small was inspired by favourite filmmakers who could "tell a story visually, directly, simply, and, preferably, in black and white. Colour, they knew, often confused the issue." How might your experience of reading **Stitches** have been different if the book was in colour? Are there particular images that could only have been drawn in black and white? Do you agree or disagree with Small's comment that colour can "confuse the issue"? Which images have stayed with you most?
8. One of Small's visual influences for **Stitches** were the early films of Michelangelo Antonioni, who is known for the way he uses architectural and landscape shots to reflect his characters' inner lives. What do Small's depictions of architecture and landscape reveal about his characters?
9. **Stitches** has been widely praised for its "cinematic" style. Consider the extended wordless sequence where young David is roaming the halls of the hospital. How does Small control the tension within and pacing of this section? How do you think a familiarity with the visual language of movies

affected your reading of the book? Did **Stitches** call to mind other movies you have seen?

10. Small uses a variety of drawing styles throughout the book, ranging from the realistic to the cartoonish (pp68-69), to the abstract and expressive (pp180-181). How are these and other shifts in style revealing of young David's state of mind?

11. As a child, David falls in love with *Alice in Wonderland* - in particular, Alice's ability to travel to a magical land (p56). In the original story, it is while Alice is chasing after the White Rabbit that she unwittingly falls down a rabbit hole into Wonderland, an upside-down world where nonsense and confusion prevail. Consider how images of things falling and things inverted appear again and again in **Stitches**. What are some of the other ways in which Small alludes to *Alice in Wonderland*? Why do you think Small chose to portray his psychiatrist as the White Rabbit?

12. Consider the "mirrored" images that appear on the following pages: 192-193, 215-216, 294-295. How did Small's decision to pair these images together add to your appreciation of one or both of the images? Can you point to other examples of repeating images and/or scenes?

13. On p.174, there is a split image showing David and his mother as opposite sides of the same face. Discuss the significance of this image, especially in light of the dream that David has toward the end of the book.

14. The publication of **Stitches** has already had a profound impact on David Small's own life. After Small was encouraged to share an early copy of the book with his brother, from whom he had been estranged for many decades, the two men started talking again, brought together by a shared recognition of the troubled childhood they had both lived through. Discuss the reconciliations of a sort that occur within the book.

15. "Nobody heard her tears; the heart is a fountain of weeping water which makes no noise in the world." Why do you think Small is reminded of this line when he thinks of his mother at the end of the book?

16. What is the significance of the book's title? An earlier title for the book was **Burning Down the House**. What might be some of the reasons why this title was not used?

17. One early reader had this to say about the book: "If you have ever questioned whether graphic novels can be as poignant and powerful as traditional novels or memoirs, **Stitches** proves that they can. In fact, I don't think David Small's memoir could be told as powerfully in any other format." Do you agree or disagree? Why do you think the book has been called a "gateway book" to the graphic narrative form? Has **Stitches** changed the way you think of graphic narratives? Will you be recommending **Stitches** to friends?

