

“Striking emotional power...an enticing
blend of richness and charm.” —LOUISA LEAMAN,
author of *The Second Chance Boutique*

Same Time, Same Place

a novel



DAVID M. BARNETT

Reading Group Guide

1. At first glance, Daisy and Nate couldn't be more different. Whom did you relate to more? Did that change throughout the book?
2. Describe Daisy's relationship with Rosie. How does their mother impact the way they think about each other?
3. Do you think Nate is a good father? What challenges does he face while trying to relate to Ben?
4. What did you think of the museum's efforts to rebrand? Do you think Seema's strategies reflected the actual value of the exhibits?
5. Nate thinks of history as the "stories we tell ourselves" about the past—true or not. Do you agree with his definition? How does thinking of history as the stories we tell rather than the events that occurred change our understanding of the past?

6. How does Daisy react when her routine is disrupted? Why does she feel so strongly about doing things the proper way?
7. Daisy wonders if she would be better off knowing less about the progression of her mother's cancer. Do you prefer to know more or less about anxiety-inducing situations?
8. How did you feel about the way Nate handled Ben and his "gang"? How can parents balance punishment and support when children struggle and behave badly to cope?
9. What did you think of Daisy's knife incident initially? What did you think about it after finishing the book? Do you think she should have forgiven her mother so easily?
10. What did you think of Harold's involvement with the disappearing artifacts? Do you think the solution was fair to everyone?
11. The book points out the importance of embracing the past for what it was but not letting it dictate the future. How do Daisy and Nate manage this? How would you apply that lesson to your own life?

A Conversation with the Author

**Where did you get your inspiration for *Same Time, Same Place*?
How do you get started on a new book?**

I like a quirky backdrop to a novel. *Calling Major Tom* was set half in space, half in the blue-collar industrial town in the north of England where I grew up; *The Growing Pains of Jennifer Ebert* was located in an elderly nursing home; and *Things Can Only Get Better* took place in a graveyard. The origins of *Same Time, Same Place* actually began in another idea I was kicking around that I ended up not writing, but I liked the idea of the two museum security guards who played a minor part in that abandoned idea, so I built a fresh novel around that concept.

For me, writing a novel is like taking a road trip. I know where the characters are and where they end up—I like to know the ending before I start writing. So it's like saying, maybe...OK, I'm in New York, and I want to get to San Francisco. I roughly know the route, and I know three or four stops I'll be making on the way, but the rest of it...let's throw the map out of the window and see what happens on the journey!

How did you get into Daisy's and Nate's heads? Did you notice any surprising differences between their perspectives?

Daisy and Nate more or less appeared to me fully-formed—they were absolute gifts as protagonists. Writing pretty much alternate chapters between them was fun, and it was like basically just changing clothes as I started each of their scenes. I never like to do written character studies for people in my novels—I think it's too constricting, and it's also pretty impossible... If you asked three or four of your friends and family to write a character sketch of you, they'd possibly all come up with slightly different ones. We show different faces to different people, even if we don't realise it. So I just inhabited either Nate's or Daisy's heads for the duration of their chapters and seemed to know instinctively what they would do or say in any given situation.

The Manchester Museum of Social History is a quirky setting for this story. What do museums, even small, niche ones, add to our lives? Do you have a favorite museum in the real world?

Museums are wonderful places, because they aren't just full of items and exhibits, they are repositories of stories. Every broken pot, every painting, every piece of jewellery or sword or pair of shoes... They aren't just material artefacts, they're physical evidence of lives lived, stories told, people who are lost to time. They give us an understanding of the past and therefore help us to handle the present a little better and maybe give us guidance for the future. My favorite museum is a tough one... I do like the quirky, little ones (not far from where I live, there are museums devoted to both pencils and lawnmowers!). But I do love the V&A (Victoria and Albert) Museum in London...

Always has fascinating insights into life through fashion, art, and culture.

Nate thinks a great deal about how to be the father *he* wants to be, even when he's not sure how to act. Have you had similar experiences as a parent?

I think every father has at least one moment where they think, "Am I doing this right? Am I doing enough? What, in fact, should I be actually doing anyway?" Fathers often feel the weight of responsibility that's passed down along the male lineage... *Am I as good a father as my own father was? What about his father before him? What mistakes did they make? Am I making the same ones or worse ones?* That said, I think this overthinking is perhaps the luxury of fatherhood. Mothers tend to not have time to worry about this sort of stuff because they're too busy just getting on with the task at hand. So maybe fathers should stop thinking too hard about what kind of father they are or want to be and just roll up their sleeves and get on with it.

Daisy thinks of all of her responsibilities as atonement for the knife incident. How did you approach her guilt and the way it had become the bedrock of her life?

The difficulty I thought I'd have with Daisy was trying to get across the fact that this thing had overshadowed her entire life, without giving away to the reader what had actually happened until the time was right. But as I started writing, it didn't feel too hard at all. Very often when we have trauma in our lives, we blank out, or at least don't dwell, on the details. The event itself is a big, black cloud that hangs over us. Because the incident happened

when Daisy was young, it had become part of her DNA, in her way. She accepted that it was part of her and who she was. So in a way, when the truth came out, that was more of a shock for Daisy than her belief for decades in what she thought had happened. It turned her world upside down, and the problem she had then was reconciling the fact she had lived her life according to something she thought had happened with the news that things had happened differently, and that maybe her life would have taken a different path if she'd known the truth.

Daisy, Nate, and Harold all reflect different kinds of loneliness. Do you have recommendations for other people who are feeling lonely and trying to reconnect with those around them?

It's funny. We live in a world that has never been more interconnected, thanks to social media and technology, and yet that hasn't really alleviated the problem of loneliness. The last couple of years, especially, have heightened the issue of isolation as many of us were forced to work from home and cancel social events. That said, people can feel lonely in a crowded room; it's not just about having other people around you, it's perhaps having other people around you who understand you. And I think we've all been guilty of not noticing when even the people closest to us have been struggling at times. So it's a two-way street; we shouldn't just put the onus on people who feel lonely and isolated to "get out there" and do stuff. We should be a little more aware of those we work with, those on our streets, even those in our own households, who might just need to be asked, "Hey, how are you?"

One theme that really stands out is our ability to embrace the past without recreating it. What do you hope readers take away from Daisy's and Nate's negotiations with their pasts?

With Daisy, something that happened in her past has totally defined her. With Nate, he's terrified of history repeating itself through his relationship with his father and how he parents his son. It kind of depends on your viewpoint, really. Many people are consumed by the past and find it difficult to move forward from events. Personally, I am of the opinion that the past is Immutable; what's done is done and we can't change it. But we can learn from it. For good or ill, the things that have happened in our lives define us one way or the other, and at some point if we are to move forward, we have to accept them and realise that what matters is who we are now, right now, at this moment, not who we were or who we hope to be.