



BOOK CLUB MEETING PACK

THE MIDNIGHT TRAIN

Matt Haig

Printable meeting plan + discussion questions + activities

Meeting date:

Host:

Location / link:

Tip: Start spoiler-free. Only use the spoiler pages if everyone has finished the book.

Welcome

Wilbur is 81, and has just hung up the phone after a brief, bittersweet call with Maggie — the love of his life he hasn't spoken to in years. Minutes later, he dies. What meets him is a ghostly steam train, and a guide named Agnes, who takes him on a single journey back through his own life — every choice, every stop, every place it went right or wrong. He can watch. He is not allowed to interfere. A companion novel to ***The Midnight Library***, this one is smaller in scale and quietly devastating: a book about ambition, grief, and the ordinary ways we let love slip away.

How tonight works

- 0–10: Warm-up (3-word vibe / which moment in your own life would you want the train to stop at?)
- 10–50: Spoiler-free discussion
- 50–70: Spoiler zone (optional)
- 70–80: Mini activity — Stops Along the Line (each member maps one memory they'd want to revisit, and what they'd want to say)
- 80–90: Ratings + vote for next month

House rules (optional but helpful)

- No spoilers until the group agrees to enter the spoiler zone
- Disagree with ideas, not people
- It's OK to sit with big feelings — this book earns them

Content note: this book touches on bereavement, wartime loss, miscarriage, and family estrangement. If any of these might be difficult for members of your group, it's worth flagging before the meeting and agreeing together which questions to skip.

Quick Guide (No Spoilers)

Themes to watch

Regret and the myth of the “one perfect moment” · ambition versus love · grief passed down through a family · fate versus free will · the cost of chasing security · nostalgia for the present, not just the past

Main characters (cheat sheet)

Wilbur

our narrator; a Sheffield boy who builds a bookshop empire, and spends his whole life quietly haunted by what — and who — he lost along the way.

Maggie

the love of Wilbur's life; sharp, artistic, and the emotional centre of the book even in the chapters where she barely appears.

Agnes Bagdale

the ghost of the woman who ran the Sheffield bookshop of Wilbur's childhood; his guide on the train, and the keeper of its one unbreakable rule — watch, don't interfere.

Dougie

Wilbur's older brother, whose recklessness after their father's wartime death casts a long shadow over the whole family.

Charlie Applewood

Wilbur's oldest friend, eventually a casualty of Wilbur's drive to succeed.

Edith

Wilbur's mother, widowed young and left with nothing; her grief hardens into a resentment Wilbur spends his life trying not to repeat.

A couple of hosting notes

The warm-up question about which moment your own “train” would stop at is a gentle way in — it gets people talking honestly within a couple of minutes, and sets the tone for the bigger questions later. The Stops Along the Line activity works well for this book specifically because it mirrors what Haig is doing structurally, and it tends to open up a much more personal round of conversation than the discussion questions alone.

Discussion Questions (Spoiler-Free)

1. Describe the book in three words— then compare answers.
2. Wilbur's life “flashes before his eyes” as a slow train journey rather than a flash. Why do you think Haig chose that structure?
3. The book opens with Wilbur's final phone call with Maggie. How did knowing where the story was heading change the way you read what came before?
4. Agnes tells Wilbur he can watch but not interfere. Did you find that rule frustrating, comforting, or both?
5. Wilbur's family history — his father's death, his mother's resentment, Dougie's path — shapes everything that follows. Which of those early scenes stayed with you most?
6. Wilbur chases wealth and security as a way of protecting himself from more loss. Where did you see that instinct pay off — and where did it clearly cost him?
7. What did you make of the bookshop as the thread running through Wilbur's whole life?
8. Which supporting character (Dougie, Charlie, Edith, Agnes) mattered most to you — and why?
9. If your group has read *The Midnight Library*, does turning “what if” into “what was” change how the story lands?
10. Who would you recommend this book to?

Notes

Spoiler Zone

Only use this page if everyone has finished the book.

1. Wilbur ultimately breaks Agnes's rule and interferes with his own past. Did that choice feel earned, or did it let the story off the hook?
2. How did you feel about the way Wilbur and Maggie's relationship unravelled — not through betrayal, but through Wilbur's slow retreat into ambition?
3. What did you make of the ending — Wilbur waking back in Venice, young again, with the memory of the train intact?
4. Does the ending suggest Wilbur gets a genuine second chance, or is it something more ambiguous?
5. How does the novel's take on regret differ from *The Midnight Library's*, if you've read both?
6. What do you think the book is ultimately arguing: that the past can be redeemed, or only understood?

Notes

Mini Activity: Stops Along the Line

Wilbur's train doesn't stop everywhere— only at the moments that shaped him. If your own life had a Midnight Train, where would it stop? Give each member 5 minutes to fill this in quietly, then take turns sharing (as much or as little as feels comfortable).

Stop 1 — The happy one

A moment you'd want to sit in a little longer.

Stop 2 — The hinge point

A moment that quietly changed everything — that you didn't recognise as important at the time.

Stop 3 — The one you'd want to warn yourself about

Like Wilbur, you're not allowed to interfere. But if you could leave one sentence for your younger self at this stop, what would it be?

Wrap-Up: Ratings + Vote

Quick ratings

Overall rating (1–5): 1 2 3 4 5

Tear count (1–10): 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Nostalgia hit (1–10): 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Discussion score (1–10): 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would you recommend it? Yes / No / Depends

Vote for next month

Option A:

Option B:

Option C:

Wildcard: