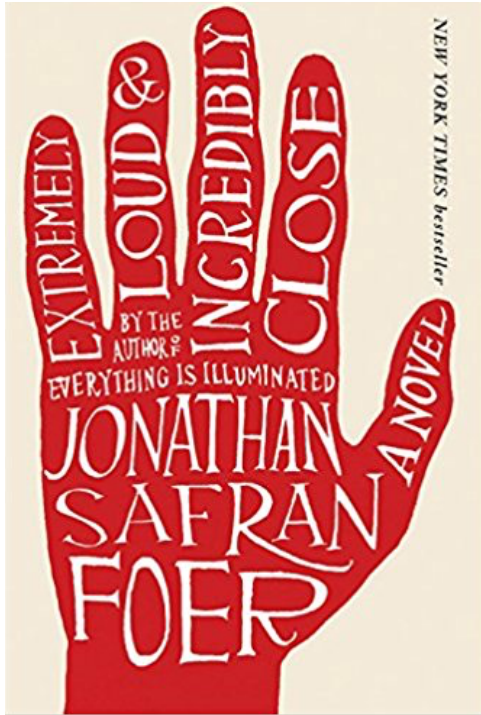


## Mind Matters Summer Reading Assignment



Welcome to Mind Matters, an elective in which we will investigate basic principles of how the mind works and some of the issues that can arise either when the structures, wiring, or chemicals in the brain do not function in what psychologists define as a “normal” way or something else happens to disrupt brain activity. The text you will read over the summer is *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer. It looks at the devastating impact of living through traumatic events in three generations of a family.

You have probably heard of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. From the NIMH website: PTSD is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Fear triggers many split-second changes in the body to help defend against danger or to avoid it. This “fight-or-flight” response is a typical reaction meant to protect a person from harm. Nearly everyone will experience a range of reactions after trauma, yet most people recover from initial symptoms naturally. Those who continue to experience problems may be diagnosed with PTSD. People who have PTSD may feel stressed or frightened even when they are not in danger.

As you read the novel, you will notice each of the 3 narrators is struggling to cope with his or her existence and trying to make meaning after extraordinary pain and trauma. Each of them reacts in differing ways to the events they face in life. You will also notice that each of these characters also had some struggles in his or her life before the traumatic event occurred.

### “Writing” Homework:

Please choose one of the narrators, Oskar, his grandfather (the man who lost his ability to speak), or his grandmother, to follow, thinking about what in their childhood experiences or their sense of self made the struggle to cope with their traumas more challenging for them.

- 1) Make some notes for yourself (a couple of pages) so you can speak (and eventually write) about what you see as your chosen character’s issues adjusting to his or her life.
- 2) **Do this before and as you read!!! Create an informal *Stuff That Happened To Me* journal of your summer to bring on the first day of class. Place mementos or photos or write or draw in it anything that is memorable to you this summer. Think about the reasons Oskar places items there. What emotions trigger your placement of items?**

**\*\*Note: You are welcome to watch the film version AFTER you finish reading the novel.**

I am providing some PTSD information from the NIMH website if you are interested in understanding more about the disorder.

### Signs and Symptoms

Not every traumatized person develops ongoing (chronic) PTSD. Not everyone with PTSD has been through a dangerous event. Some experiences, like the sudden, unexpected death of a loved one, can also cause PTSD. Symptoms usually begin early, and symptoms must last more than a month and be severe enough to interfere with relationships or work to be considered PTSD. The course of the illness varies. Some people recover, while others have symptoms that last much longer. In some people, the condition becomes chronic.

**To be diagnosed with PTSD, an adult must have all of the following for at least 1 month:**

- At least one re-experiencing symptom
- At least one avoidance symptom
- At least two arousal and reactivity symptoms
- At least two cognition and mood symptoms

**Re-experiencing symptoms include:**

- Flashbacks—reliving the trauma over and over, including physical symptoms like a racing heart or sweating
- Bad dreams
- Frightening thoughts

Words, objects, or situations that are reminders of the event can also trigger re-experiencing symptoms.

**Avoidance symptoms include:**

- Staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience
- Avoiding thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic event.

**Arousal and reactivity symptoms include:**

- Being easily startled
- Feeling tense or “on edge”
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having angry outbursts

**Cognition and mood symptoms include:**

- Trouble remembering key features of the traumatic event
- Negative thoughts about oneself or the world
- Distorted feelings like guilt or blame
- Loss of interest in enjoyable activities

Cognition and mood symptoms can begin or worsen after the traumatic event, but are not due to injury or substance use. These symptoms can make the person feel alienated or detached from friends or family members.