

# A Reading Group Toolkit

## An Introduction to Allan Gurganus: A Brief Biography

“Yes, I believe in the afterlife called Literature. Literature, rolling on forever in its Eden, constitutes my own ideal kind of perpetual tent-preacher’s route; and you get to keep the circus tent. To welcome others into your stories years after you’re just so much fog on a coffin lid, that surely constitutes as sweet a state of grace as I can imagine. The moral of all my stories? The moral weight and transforming joy of the story itself. To the holiness of ‘Once Upon A Time,’ yes, I say daily, ‘Amen, amen.’ “

Allan Gurganus, the novelist and short story writer, has been called the heir to Faulkner and Welty. Born on June 11, 1947, the oldest of four boys of M. F. and Ethel Gurganus, Gurganus hails from Rocky Mount, North Carolina where his family has been shabby-genteel for four generations. Gurganus originally trained as a painter, and his oils and watercolors are represented in public and private collections. The Vietnam War interrupted his studies, and he spent four years in the U.S. Navy. While on his tour of duty on the aircraft carrier USS Yorktown, Gurganus read 1200 books, enough to earn two years of liberal arts credits at Sarah Lawrence College.

Gurganus continued his studies at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop under Pulitzer Prize-winning author John Cheever. Cheever, impressed by his work, submitted the short story “Minor Heroism” to *The New Yorker*, and the story became Gurganus’s first published work and was later included in his collection of stories, *White People*.

His honors include the National Magazine Prize, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Southern Book Prize, and the Sue Kaufman Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His stories have been published in *The Atlantic*, *The Paris Review*, and *The New Yorker*, and his short fiction is seen in the *O’Henry Prize Collection*, *Best American Stories*, and *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. *White People*, his collection of stories and novellas set in the fictitious Falls, North Carolina, was a Pen-Faulkner finalist and was awarded the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize.

Gurganus himself has followed in Mr. Cheever's footsteps as a teacher, having worked at Duke, Stanford, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and Sarah Lawrence College. He has been inducted into the Fellowship of Southern Writers and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.