

***Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi: Book Chat Overview**

About the book:

Theo of Golden follows Theo, an elderly, mysterious man who arrives alone in the small Southern town of Golden with no explanation of why he's there. At a local coffee shop, he becomes captivated by ninety-two pencil portraits of townspeople and quietly begins buying them, tracking down each person to return their portrait as a personal gift. Through these encounters, Theo weaves himself into the lives of Golden's residents, easing burdens, inspiring hope, and transforming the community with his hidden generosity—until a sudden tragedy reveals the deeper, long-kept secret about who he really is and why he chose Golden in the first place.

About the Author:

Allen Levi is an American author, former attorney, and longtime singer-songwriter from Georgia whose first novel is *Theo of Golden*.

- He grew up in Columbus, Georgia, studied English and law at the University of Georgia, and practiced law for about a decade.
- In the 1990s he left law to study literature in Scotland, then became a traveling Christian-leaning musician and storyteller, recording over twenty albums while living on family land in Georgia.
- He later turned to writing books drawn from his faith, family, and small-town life, which eventually led to the breakout success of *Theo of Golden*. (2003: *Oliviatown*, a children's story adapted from one of his songs and 2014: *The Last Sweet Mile*, a memoir about the final year he spent caring for his brother Gary and their close friendship.
- He has mentioned working on a follow-up novel entitled *Ellen of Golden*, continuing the Golden story.

Book Chat Questions

Theo was attentive to people (specifically faces), birds, flowers, historical markers and music. **QUESTION:** How do we develop a habit of attentiveness? How can we help our grandchildren learn this habit?

Theo cultivated a love of beauty in his own life. Here are a few kinds of moments where beauty moves Theo. See question after the following examples.

1. ****Seeing the portraits in the coffee shop****
 - a. Theo is first stirred by the beauty of the ninety-two pencil portraits hanging in the local coffee shop—their tenderness and attention to ordinary faces awaken his sense of calling in Golden.

Theo of Golden by Allen Levi: Book Chat Overview

- b. That visual beauty doesn't just please him; it launches his whole "mission" of buying the portraits and returning them to their subjects as gifts.
2. ****The act of giving art back****
 - a. Each time Theo takes a portrait to its "rightful owner," he treats the drawing as something sacred, using it as an occasion to see and name the beauty in that person's life.
 - b. The art becomes a mirror, and Theo seems repeatedly inspired by how people react—tears, laughter, wonder—when they see themselves rendered with such care.
3. ****Everyday beauty around Golden****
 - a. Descriptions of the novel emphasize the town's small-scale, everyday loveliness—front porches, local shops, natural surroundings—and imply that Theo is continually nourished by this kind of ordinary beauty as he walks, observes, and listens.
 - b. That background of simple, Southern small-town life is part of what keeps renewing his energy to keep finding people, telling stories, and quietly blessing them.

QUESTION: have you had moments where beauty moved you in your life? How can we encourage a sense of delight and love for beauty in the lives of our grandchildren?

QUESTION: Did you notice that, with only a couple of very minor mentions, technology has no place in the story? Could Theo have engaged with people he met at the Promenade if he had used texting, Zoom or email? Would his invitations have been as well-received, or as intriguing, if they had been sent in some form other than handwritten letters? What are your thoughts about handwritten correspondence?

QUESTION: Theo weaves himself into almost every corner of Golden. Of the main characters listed below, who is your favorite and why?

- Asher Glissen (artist, Golden native) – Deep, lifelong-level bond tied to art, family, and a major secret about Theo's past.
- Tony (Verbivore bookshop owner) – Honest friendship built around books, war stories, and hard conversations about guilt and forgiveness.
- Ellen (unhoused, highly educated woman) – Tender, persistent friendship in which Theo sees and protects her dignity when most people don't.
- Simone Lavoie (music student) – Mentor-like relationship; he encourages her talent and shows up for important musical milestones.
- Kendrick Whitaker (university custodian) – Trust grows slowly from suspicion into mutual respect; they walk together through Kendrick's trauma and his care for Lamisha.

***Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi: Book Chat Overview**

- James Ponder (consultant, landlord) – Business tie that becomes a rare, candid friendship; Ponder is one of the few who knows Theo’s true identity and later guards his legacy.
- Shep and Addie Carlile (owners of The Chalice coffee shop) – First local connections; they help him quietly buy and remove portraits, and their café becomes home base for his mission.
- Basil Cannonfield (street guitarist) – Warm, art-centered friendship; through Basil’s music and story, Theo practices his intuitive way of naming people’s hidden worth.
- Minnette Prentiss (CPA, Asher’s niece) – He helps her see herself as “strong and brave and kind,” nudging her toward a more authentic life.
- Derrick (Minnette’s husband) – Included in holiday gatherings and family moments where Theo’s presence subtly reshapes the household’s priorities.
- Lamisha “Scooby” Whitaker (Kendrick’s daughter) – Hospital-bed friendship; he brings cake, flowers, and art supplies and writes/illustrates a story just for her.
- Father Lundy (priest at St. James) – Spiritual ally; they share a reverent, steady approach to disruptions and to the town’s griefs.
- Mrs. Ocie Van Blarcum (church matriarch) – Mutual respect as they help defuse a tense moment at church and care for the congregation’s emotional temperature.
- Anita Gidley (Ponder’s secretary) – Practical ally who facilitates many of Theo’s behind-the-scenes plans.
- Dr. Goodson “Dr. Good” Ikande (physician) – Brought in (via Ponder) to care for Lamisha; linked to Theo through this act of provision.
- Theo (protagonist) – the elderly, quietly wealthy Portuguese man whose defining traits are attentiveness, generosity, and a deep, almost artful kindness.