



As its title might suggest, Christopher Higgs's *As I Stand Living* takes a couple of cues from Faulkner, including the constraint under which it was written. But Higgs takes the narrative of this self-described "radical memoir" to some decidedly non-Faulknerian places, including ruminations on the LA Lakers' playoff chances, black metal, the role of experimental poetry in life, and the fantasy epics of Terry Goodkind. The big questions of life sneak up on you as you read it, from the role of art in life to the experience of parenthood. Out of the smallest details can come revelations.

– TOBIAS CARROLL, author of *Reel* and *Transitory*

TEACHING GUIDE

AS I STAND LIVING

by Christopher Higgs

978-1937865801 / 146 pages / \$15.95

Recommended Classes:

- Creative Writing
- Creative Nonfiction & Memoir
- Composition
- American/Contemporary Literature
- Experimental Writing

Keywords:

Memoir / Autobiography / Essay / Criticism / Literary / Constraint-Based / Conceptual Writing / Experimental / Self-Help / Journal Writing / Fatherhood / Documentation / Faulkner / Pop Culture / Gossip

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you notice about the structure of *As I Stand Living*? How does the structure contribute to the narrative or your reception of the narrative?
2. How does the diarist writing style affect the way you read the book? How would you describe the various emotions that the book provokes?
3. How would you characterize the author and his relationship to writing and the world at large?
4. Higgs states, "I want readers to read my work because I don't want them to read it (23)," and then: "Of course, the likelihood that anyone is ever going to read this is probably zero (24)." Do you believe him? What do these statements reveal about the author's emotional state and ideas on the role of writing? Why do you think Higgs decided to write (and consequently, publish) this book?

5. At one point in the book, Higgs questions the validity of the project itself, asking “How is this even a book?” What’s your response to this question? What is a book?
6. At one point Higgs says, “I want to cultivate an audience that finds nourishment in my dislike for audiences.” How do you respond to this pronouncement? What do you think Higgs means when he says that he doesn’t want to write for an audience?
7. How would you describe the representation of fatherhood in the book? How do the author’s feelings about fatherhood color the rest of the book? How might you describe the tonal shift before and after the birth of his son?
8. What does the book have to say about an individual’s relationship to culture? The book features many popular media references – what role to these references play in the narrative of the book? Do they fix the book in a certain time period?
9. What role does gossip play in the book? And what does the text have to say about the contemporary literary scene?
10. Higgs jumps from thought to thought, similar to the process of consciousness. How does this structure influence understanding and narrative momentum?
11. As a documentary work of everyday life, what does the text tell us about race, class, and gender? What biases and prejudices do you notice? What forms of privilege do you see enacted or resisted? Where in the text do you feel a sense of intimacy with the author, and where do you feel a sense of distance or discomfort?
12. How does the author’s self-imposed constraint create a frame for the book? How does it influence the overall narrative?

Possible Assignments:

- Similar to the constraint used in *As I Stand Living*, over a certain duration (a week, month, or semester), in the evenings, without planning or editing, sit down for a designated time period and type whatever comes to you.
- Make a list of the various media you consume (for Higgs it was most often music, movies, books, and the Lakers). From your list, see if you can draw connections that might offer a starting point for a story, poem, or essay.
- In *As I Stand Living*, Higgs shares intimate and vulnerable personal details. Consider two or three aspects of your life that would make you feel vulnerable if you wrote about them, and push yourself to explore those vulnerabilities in your writing.