



# Readers' Guide



## The Testaments

### Margaret Atwood

Chatto & Windus

Other novels by Margaret Atwood

*The Heart Goes Last* (2015)

*The Year of the Flood* (2009)

*The Blind Assassin* (2000)

*Alias Grace* (1996)

*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

[thebookerprizes.com](http://thebookerprizes.com)

## About the author

Margaret Atwood is the author of more than fifty books of fiction, poetry and critical essays. Her novels include *Cat's Eye*, *The Robber Bride*, *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy. Her 1985 classic, *The Handmaid's Tale*, went back into the bestseller charts with the election of Donald Trump, when the Handmaids became a symbol of resistance against the disempowerment of women, and with the 2017 release of the award-winning Channel 4 TV series. Atwood has won numerous awards including the Booker Prize, the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Imagination in Service to Society, the Franz Kafka Prize, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade and the PEN USA Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2019 she was made a member of the Order of the Companions of Honour for services to literature. She has also worked as a cartoonist, illustrator, librettist, playwright and puppeteer. She lives in Toronto, Canada.

## About the book

More than fifteen years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the theocratic regime of the Republic of Gilead maintains its grip on power, but there are signs it is beginning to rot from within. At this crucial moment, the lives of three radically different women converge, with potentially explosive results.

Two have grown up as part of the first generation to come of age in the new order. The testimonies of these two young women are joined by a third voice: a woman who wields power through the ruthless accumulation and deployment of secrets.

As Atwood unfolds *The Testaments*, she opens up the innermost workings of Gilead as each woman is forced to come to terms with who she is, and how far she will go for what she believes.

## What the judges thought

'It's a savage and beautiful novel that speaks to us today with conviction and power. The bar is set unusually high for Atwood. She soars'

## Discussion points

*The Testaments* takes place more than fifteen years after *The Handmaid's Tale*. What effect does this jump in time have, rather than setting the book immediately after the close of *The Handmaid's Tale*?

How do the three narrators offer contrasting perspectives on Gilead, both from inside and outside? How does this differ to *The Handmaid's Tale*?

A key message in the book is that "history does not repeat itself, but it rhymes". Atwood has said that everything that happens in this dystopia – especially the way women are treated – has already happened elsewhere in the world. What do you think inspired her, either from history or recent events?

Does learning about Aunt Lydia's past, and her actions in the novel, change how you feel about her as one of the main enablers of the regime?

The novel is a coming-of-age story for both Agnes and Daisy. Despite their different upbringings, what similarities can you see between them?

## Themed reading

Naomi Alderman *The Power*  
Louise Erdrich *Future Home of the Living God*  
Miriam Toews *Women Talking*  
Christina Dalcher *Vox*  
Yoko Ogawa *The Memory Police*

## Useful links

<http://margaretatwood.ca/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/10/the-testaments-by-margaret-atwood-review>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/testaments-margaret-atwood-heads-hollywood-review/>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/the-testaments-margaret-atwood-review-handmaids-tale-sequel-release-date-a9094986.html>

<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/books/2019/09/04/handmaids-tale-sequel-margaret-atwood-the-testaments-book-review/2209620001/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/20/margaret-atwood-moving-away-from-gilead-testaments>

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/09/16/margaret-atwood-expands-the-world-of-the-handmaids-tale>

@TheBookerPrizes

#FinestFiction #BookerPrize2019

THE  
READING  
AGENCY

The  
Booker  
Prize  
Foundation