

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close

A novel by Jonathan Safran Foer

OSKAR SCHELL

INVENTOR, JEWELRY DESIGNER, JEWELRY FABRICATOR, AMATEUR ENTOMOLOGIST, FRANCOPHILE, VEGAN, ORIGAMIST, PACIFIST, PERCUSSIONIST, AMATEUR ASTRONOMER, COMPUTER CONSULTANT, AMATEUR ARCHEOLOGIST, COLLECTOR OF: *rare coins, butterflies that died natural deaths, miniature cacti, Beatles memorabilia, semiprecious stones, and other things*

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Who is Oskar Schell?

An individual of many and varied interests, as shown on his card at left.

He's only nine years old.

Foer's controversial novel follows Oskar as he interviews people all over New York City. He is searching for information about a mysterious key left behind by his beloved father, who died on September

11, 2001. The precocious, inquisitive, and highly imaginative boy brings startlingly original insights to everything he encounters and describes. He also can be annoying.

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Jana Comerford,
AC Librarian.

The novel unfolds in first-person accounts. Oskar's adventures are interspersed with narratives by others, including his grandparents who lived through the devastating bombing of Dresden, Germany, during World

War II by U.S. and British forces. A description of the suffering of the Japanese people of Hiroshima after the atomic bomb was dropped is a brief but horrifically memorable interlude in the novel. Also compelling is the slowly revealed "love story" between Oskar's grandparents. The novel has received mixed reviews. Read it, and see what *you* think!

Author: Jonathan Safran Foer



Foer photo by David Shankbone.

[Biography](#). From *Newsmakers*. Vol. 2. Detroit: Gale, 2010. Reproduced in *Student Resources In Context*. Web. 21 July 2011. **AC login required. Audio provided.**

[The Master of Illumination](#). By L. Grossman. (2005). *Time*, 165(11), 59-62. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database. **Abstract:** "This article profiles Jonathan Safran Foer, author of the book *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Right now Foer is young, preternaturally mature, enviably well compensated, and coming off a

Jonathan Foer on Oskar:

“I am not really writing a nine-year-old kid. That’s not what I am doing. Or not in a realistic way. In fact, that is something that sometimes when I talk to people about the book or in reviews they say. ‘It’s not quite realistic, what he does.’ And I think, ‘Yeah of course not. We can agree on that.’ That wasn’t my intention. My intention was to create something that was believable. Something that you could really empathize with, someone whose journey you wanted to be along for.”

—Interview by Robert Birnbaum, *The Morning News*, no date.

wildly successful rookie season. In *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, Foer takes on death, love, sex, pain, war and Sept. 11. Foer's rendition of the Allied bombing of Dresden, in a flashback involving Oskar's grandfather, Thomas, has the punishing, visceral vividness of the battle scenes from *The Red Badge of Courage*.” [AC login required. Audio provided.](#)

[Jonathan Safran Foer Page](#). Authortrek.

[“Wunderkind in the Classroom.”](#)

Introduction: “Novelist Jonathan Safran Foer discusses fiction—and how to teach it.” By Catherine Fata, *NYU Alumni Magazine*, Spring 2009.

Other Biographies

[Professor Stephen Hawking](#). Biography from his Web site. [Quotes](#) from Hawking.

[Jane Goodall](#). This article calls her “the world’s foremost authority on chimpanzees.” From the Women’s International Center Web site. [Quotes](#) from Goodall.

Bombing of the World Trade Center, September 11, 2001



FEMA photo at left. Public domain.

[September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attack](#)

Overview of event from Student Resources in Context database. [AC Online login required. Audio provided.](#)

[September 11, 2001](#). Article from the Gale Encyclopedia of World History. 2009. Excerpt: “The terror attacks of September 11, 2001, by Islamic radicals against the United States are arguably the most significant military and historical event since the end of World War II. The attacks by nineteen al-Qaeda operatives who hijacked four commercial passenger jets set in motion a new worldwide political dynamic that will shape world events for decades to come.” [AC Online login required. Audio provided.](#)

Bombing of Dresden, Germany, during WWII



Photo at left by Christian Denis Mueller, 2006.

[Encyclopedia Britannica Online entry for Dresden.](#)

Excerpt: “Before World War II, Dresden was called ‘the Florence on the Elbe’ and was considered one of the world’s most beautiful cities owing to its architecture and art treasures. During the war, however, it was

almost completely destroyed by massive bombing raids that took place on the night of February 13–14, 1945, by an Anglo-American force. The raids obliterated much of Dresden and killed thousands of civilians; various postwar estimates placed the death toll between 35,000 and 135,000 people, but in the early 21st century an official German commission concluded that up to 25,000 had perished. The city continued to be bombarded in raids lasting until April 17, 1945, but little was achieved militarily.”



Photo at left is from the German Federal Archive (public domain).

[“British Anger at Dresden Portrayal.”](#) Much controversy exists surrounding the Allies’ reasons for bombing Dresden so late in the war. In fact, the war ended three months later. In this article, the reasons for the bombing and its timing are explained.



Dresden on September 17, 1945, after numerous bombings by Allied Forces.

Photo credit: Deutsche Fotothek.

Bombing of Japan during WWII



Public domain photograph of Hiroshima bombing victim.

[Hiroshima and Nagasaki.](#)

From Student Resources in Context database. [AC Online login required.](#) Audio provided.

Excerpt: “What is certain is that the main reason for using the bomb was the goal of a

quick surrender of Japan, which would eliminate the need for an invasion of the home islands. Such an invasion was to begin in November. After the bloodbath on Okinawa, the prospect of fighting two million determined Japanese defending their homeland, backed by 5,000 or more kamikaze fighters, motivated the Americans to avoid an action that would likely result in millions of deaths and total Japanese casualties in the tens of millions.”

Book Reviews and Literary Criticism



[Watch the AC Library's tutorial](#) that explains the difference between book reviews and literary criticism.

—Book Reviews

[A Boy's Epic Quest, Borough by Borough](#). By Michiko Kakutani. (2005, March 22). *New York Times*. Retrieved from ProQuest Historical Newspapers database. [AC Online login required](#).

[The Rescue Artist](#): "In his new and irreverently comic novel Jonathan Safran Foer tells the story of a 9-year-old boy searching for a way to understand his father's death in the World Trade Center attack. But what is the author looking for?" (2005, February 27). *New York Times*. Retrieved from ProQuest Historical Newspapers database. [AC Online login required](#).

[Review from New York Times](#). By Walter Kirn. Published April 3, 2009.

[Reviews](#). Amazon.com contains reviews from a number of sources, including prominent publications such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist*.

—Literary Criticism



["An Extremely Loud Tin Drum: A Comparative Study of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close* And Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*."](#) **Abstract excerpt:** "In this article the author presents a comparative study of the books *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, by Jonathan Safran Foer and *The Tin Drum*, by Günter Grass. He highlights the similarities in the lead characters . . . and the similarities in the posttraumatic background of the stories." Click PDF Full-Text link to view article. Click "PDF Full Text" link to view article. [AC Online login required](#).

["Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close."](#) **A work analysis. Abstract:** "A precocious nine-year-old boy wanders New York City hoping to unlock a mystery surrounding his father's violent death at the World Trade Center." [AC Online login required](#).

["Boroughs and Neighbors: Traumatic Solidarity in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*."](#) **Abstract:** "This article reports on solidarity and friendship in the novel *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer. The book's nine-year-old protagonist travels around New York City, New York by himself and bonds with strangers over the death of his father in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. The article discusses issues of believability related to the character, as well as how

trauma affects senses of identity and community.” Click “PDF Full Text” link to view article. [AC Online login required. Audio provided.](#)

[“Melancholy and Mourning in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*”](#). **Abstract:** “Whereas melancholy (or ‘acting out’) entails a complete repression of all trauma-related memory, mourning (or ‘working through’) is an endeavor to remember the traumatic event and fit it into a coherent whole. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, these two ways of reacting to and dealing with trauma are embodied respectively by the protagonist’s paternal grandfather and by his paternal grandmother, both survivors of the Allied firebombing of Dresden in 1945. Foer ties up this ‘old’ trauma with a fresh one – 11 September 2001 – by having the Schells lose their only son, the protagonist’s father, in the attacks on the World Trade Center. Aspects of both acting out and working through are in turn synthesized in the protagonist himself – Oskar Schell. In his behavior, the boy displays characteristics of both a melancholic and a mourner.” Click “PDF Full Text” link to view article. [AC Online login required.](#)

[“‘Stuff That Happened to Me’: Visual Memory in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*”](#). **Abstract:** “In the following essay, [the author] probes the evocation of collective memory and national trauma brought about by imagery and visual media in Foer’s novel.” [AC Online login required. Audio provided.](#)



AP Photo/Richard Drew/FILE

The Real Falling Man

Richard Drew’s famous photograph of the falling man has come to represent all the 911 victims who jumped or fell to their deaths. Drew’s poignant, shocking photograph reminds us that each individual who jumped was faced with a terrible choice. (This photograph is being used for educational, not commercial, purposes. The photograph used in the Common Reader was staged.)

[The most famous article about the photograph of the real falling man](#) is this 2009 article from *Esquire* magazine by Tom Junod. Many people jumped or fell from the Twin Towers, but this photograph attracted the most attention and discussion. **Excerpt:** “Do you

remember this photograph? In the United States, people have taken pains to banish it from the record of September 11, 2001. The story behind it, though, and the search for the man pictured in it, are our most intimate connection to the horror of that day.” The man in the photograph has still not been identified with certainty.

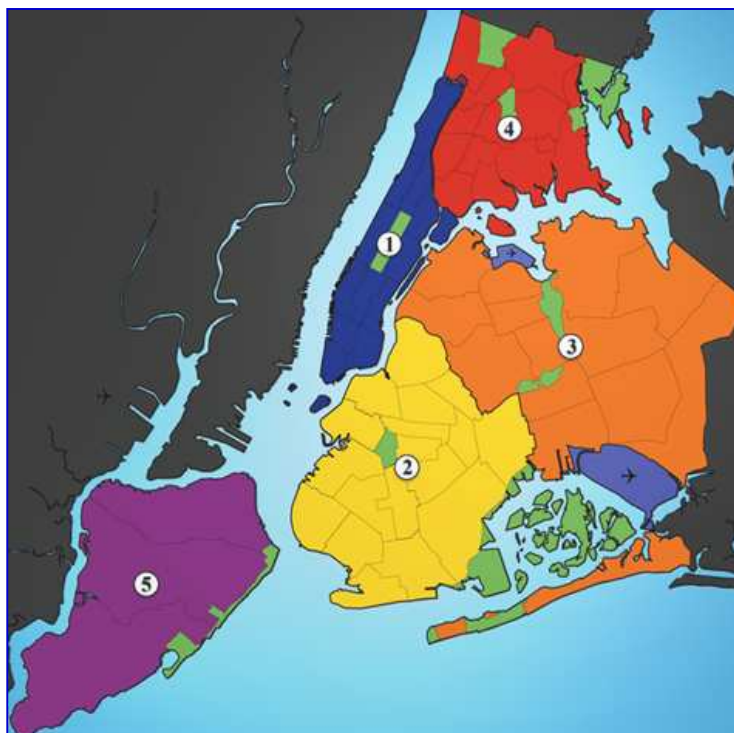
The Movie: *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*

[Internet Movie Database page](#) for the movie, which is scheduled for release in January 2012. The movie stars Thomas Horn as Oskar. His parents are portrayed by Tom Hanks and Sandra Bullock.

[“Twelve-year-old ‘Jeopardy!’ Winner Thomas Horn Joins Hanks, Bullock in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*.”](#) The precocious young Horn earned the title of Teen Jeopardy champ. This movie will be his first acting role.

[Movie and Book Promotion Trailers from YouTube.](#) YouTube features numerous trailers for the movie and the book.

New York City



A map showing the five boroughs of New York City, as well as airports and major greenspace.

1. Manhattan
2. Brooklyn
3. Queens
4. Bronx
5. Staten Island

Airports: North East: LGA South East: JFK West: EWR

Source: I created this image using various maps and images. Attribution: [Julius Schorzman](#)

The map at left showing the boroughs of New York City was created by Julian Schorzman.

[New York City.](#) Article from Student Resources in Context database. This article is about the development of New York City as a unique city. **AC login required.**

[Socio-economic Analysis of New York City Boroughs.](#) Shows each borough's breakdown of income and ethnic heritage. Located on the Web site of New York University. Data is from the New York City Data Mine.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Photo below: FEMA, public domain.



Photo at left uploaded to Wikimedia Commons by Nightscream.

[911: The Psychological Aftermath](#). From *Scientific American* magazine online. This November, 2001, article describes the immediate psychological and emotional aftermath of the event.

[National Center for PTSD](#) explanation of the disorder.

[10 Years and a Diagnosis Later. 911 Demons Haunt Thousands](#). By Anemona Hartocollis. *New York Times*.

August 12, 2011. Excerpt: “One measure of the psychological impact of 9/11 is this: At least 10,000 firefighters, police officers and civilians exposed to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center have been found to have [post-traumatic stress disorder](#), and in a kind of mass grieving, many of them have yet to recover, according to figures compiled by New York City’s three 9/11 health programs.”

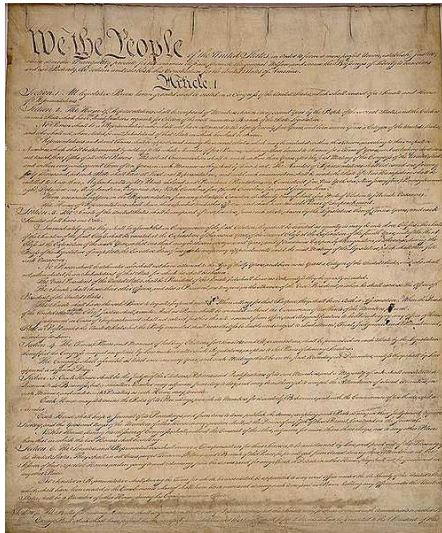
[The Aftermath of Disaster: Children in Crisis](#). **Abstract:** “This article uses examples from the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the hurricane disasters of Katrina and Rita to illustrate the impact of crisis in the lives of children and adolescents. The author reviews children's responses to loss and crisis. Therapeutic approaches that facilitate integration of crisis and loss are provided, including illustrations of self-care, comfort strategies, and developmental, traditional, and nontraditional methods.” [AC Online login required](#).

[Helping a Child Cope with the Death of a Parent](#). From Kidshealth.org.

Primary Sources



Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close contains eyewitness accounts of historical events. Such accounts are in the category of primary sources. “Primary sources were either created during the time period being studied or were created at a later date by a participant in the events being studied (as in the case of memoirs). They reflect the individual viewpoint of a participant or observer. Primary sources enable the researcher to get as close as possible to what



actually happened during an historical event or time period.” **Source: U.C. Berkeley Library**

At left: The U.S. Constitution itself is a primary document. An analysis of the Constitution would be a secondary document.

“Primary sources may include letters, manuscripts, diaries, journals, newspapers, speeches, interviews, memoirs, documents produced by government agencies such as Congress or the Office of the President, photographs, audio recordings, moving pictures or video recordings, research data, and objects or artifacts such as works of art or ancient roads, buildings, tools, and

weapons. These sources serve as the raw material to interpret the past, and when they are used along with previous interpretations by historians, they provide the resources necessary for historical research. **Source: American Library Association**

[View the AC Library tutorial on finding primary sources.](#)