

2024 One Book South Dakota Discussion Guide

Little and Often by Trent Preszler

1. The relationship between Preszler and his long-estranged father is at the heart of this memoir. Like many men of his place and time, Preszler's father never said "I love you" to his son. Why do you think he was so emotionally incommunicative? Did you perceive that he was expressing his love for his son in other ways? If so, how?
2. One of the strains on the father-son relationship was Preszler's sense that he could never live up to his father's expectations of traditional masculinity. What were those expectations? Do you think they are common in our culture? In what ways are they helpful and harmful? How do you define masculinity?
3. Preszler also reflects on his relationships with other family members, particularly his sister, Lucy, who died of a rare debilitating illness at age 25. The term "glass children" is sometimes used for the siblings of a person with a disability; it refers to the way people see right through the siblings as they focus on the person with the disability. Do you see any evidence of Preszler feeling like a "glass child"? How do you think he was shaped by his relationship with Lucy?
4. As a young gay man, Preszler found South Dakota inhospitable –even potentially dangerous. However, as an adult living in New York, he feels protective of his home state and its people when he encounters stereotypes and misperceptions among his urban neighbors. Have you ever felt a similar split between two versions of yourself? If so, describe that split.
5. Do you think Preszler's fear of coming out publicly was well-founded? Why or why not? Do you think South Dakota is more hospitable to LGBTQIA+ people today than Preszler perceived it to be in his youth?
6. Much of this memoir is a meditation on grief – in particular, grief for a lost loved one in a strained or conflicted relationship. In what ways does his long estrangement from his father complicate the grieving process for Preszler? Have you ever experienced or observed this situation in your own life or among your own family?
7. In a 2021 interview with [Northforker.com](https://www.northforker.com), Preszler says, "I hope that people know that no matter how far out their relationships get in life with their family or friends, that you can always reel it back in and make it matter again somehow, if it really matters enough to you." Do you agree? Why or why not?
8. Preszler calls the well-stocked and heavily-used toolbox that had belonged to his father his "only inheritance," and in financial or physical terms, it was. Can you identify any other types of inheritance he might have received? What have you inherited from your own family?
9. Preszler both shows and tells readers that, unlike his father, he had never felt comfortable working with his hands. Given his lack of experience, why do you think Preszler chose to build a canoe, rather than to use the tools in another way? Amidst his many setbacks and disasters, did you ever doubt that he would finish the job?

10. How did you react to Preszler emptying his house of nearly all his possessions? Why do you think he took such a drastic step?
11. The reason for the title *Little and Often* doesn't become apparent until Chapter 24, when Preszler describes his Rent-a-Kid job scraping paint off a giant brick barn. What makes this experience so pivotal in the story?
12. In a the Northforker.com interview mentioned above, Preszler quotes a line from the Pixar movie *Ratatouille* that he views as one of the "big truths" of his story: "Not everyone can be a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere." What do you think this means? Does it resonate for you in any way?
13. Preszler's language illustrates a deep connection to both the plains of South Dakota and the beaches of the North Fork of Long Island. What is your "place" – the landscape where you feel the greatest sense of belonging? Is it a place where you grew up, where you once lived, or where you live now? If it is none of these locations, how did you build a connection to a different place?
14. In his Author's Note, Preszler discusses the challenges of writing a personal story, including the fallibility of human memory and the potential bias of an imposed narrative structure. In your opinion, does he seem to have been fair to the people he discusses? Were there characters you wished you could hear from directly or episodes you wanted to know more about?
15. Preszler opens his book with these two epigraphs:
 - A man can be destroyed but not defeated. – Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*
 - Where no sea runs, the waters of the heart / Push in their tides. – Dylan Thomas, "Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines"Why do you think he chose each one? Where do you see these themes arise in the book?