

Gold

By: Chris Cleave
(Discussion Questions)

Author:

Chris Cleave was born in London and spent his early years in Cameroon. He studied experimental psychology at Balliol College, Oxford. He lives in London with his wife and three children. Chris Cleave enjoys dialogue with his readers and invites all comers to introduce themselves on Twitter; he can be found at www.twitter.com/chriscleave or on his website at <http://www.chriscleave.com>

His debut novel, *INCENDIARY*, won a 2006 Somerset Maugham Award, was shortlisted for the 2006 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and is now a feature film. His second novel, *LITTLE BEE*, is a New York Times #1 bestseller with over 2 million copies in print. *GOLD* is his third novel.

Questions:

1. Discuss the opening scene of *Gold* where Kate and baby Sophie are watching Zoe win the gold at the 2004 Olympics. What did you learn about Kate's personality as a wife, mother, and athlete in this one scene? How does this scene set the stage for the rest of the novel?
2. According to Sophie, "You could play boys' games like Star Wars that had fighting and spaceships and made you look tough, even if you weren't tough enough to ride a bike." Consider Sophie's obsession with Star Wars. What attracts her to these movies? What does she have to prove by playing "tough" boys' games?
3. Consider Tom's first impressions of his two star athletes: "Bit by bit, race by race, year by year, a girl like Zoe would stay afloat in the sport while Kate slowly sank under the weight of real life. Tom had seen it a hundred times." How well does Tom predict their career successes and failures? In what ways does he underestimate Kate?
4. When Tom watches his group of teen recruits, he notices "Kate's latent strength, and Zoe's perfect flow, and Jack's incandescent energy." Compare Kate, Zoe, and Jack's athletic strengths to their personalities. How do Kate's strength, Zoe's flow, and Jack's energy help them face everyday life off the track?
5. Compare how Zoe and Kate handle the costs and benefits of being Olympic athletes. How does the press treat each of them? How do Zoe and Kate handle the media attention? What could they learn from the other about fame?
6. Discuss Zoe and Kate's competition for Jack's attention. Why does Zoe pursue Jack when he is in the hospital? Do you think it was just another opportunity to compete? Were you surprised by Jack and Zoe's relationships?
7. If you were in Kate's situation, would you forgive Jack for his affair with Zoe? Would you be able to raise Sophie as your own, knowing about the affair? Explain your answer.

8. Zoe realizes, "It was ordinary days now that frightened her—the endless Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoons of real life, the days you had to steer through without the benefit of handlebars." How does Zoe handle real life? What is she afraid will happen to her when her racing career is over?
9. Discuss the lasting impact of Adam's death on Zoe. Why hasn't she forgiven herself for her brother's accident? How does she punish herself? How does she finally come to terms with his death?
10. When Jack decides to let Kate race Zoe without knowing that Sophie is in the hospital, "He smiled because he had given her something rarer than gold: an hour outside time." Did you agree with his decision? In what ways have these characters been racing against time their entire life?
11. During their final race, Zoe waits for Kate after Kate crashes on the track. How is that decision out of character for Zoe? Would you expect Kate to do the same for Zoe, if the situation were reversed? Why or why not?
12. At the end of the novel, Zoe's role is as Sophie's coach, not her mother. What kind of coach do you imagine Zoe to be? What kind of mother do you think she would have been to Sophie? Do you think she could have handled Sophie's illness?
13. After winning gold in Athens, Zoe realizes, "Gold came out of the ground, and she had felt the weight of it dragging her back down there." What does "gold" mean to Zoe, Kate, Jack, and Tom? What other types of gold (besides Olympic medals) do each of these characters strive for? Do they achieve it?

Other Information

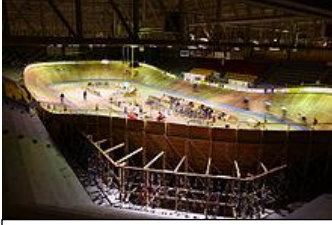
1. Visit the website of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society at www.lls.org/#/waystohelp/ to find out more about research efforts and how you can get involved.

Track Cycling information:

- Track Cycling has been around since at least 1870.
- With the exception of the 1912 Olympics, track cycling has been featured in every modern Olympic Games. Women's track cycling was first included in the modern Olympics in 1988.
- Bicycles for velodromes have no brakes. They employ a single fixed rear gear, or cog, that does not freewheel. This helps maximize speed, reduces weight, and avoids sudden braking while nevertheless allowing the rider to slow by pushing back against the pedals.
- Track Cycling events fit into two broad categories, Sprint races and Endurance races.
 - Sprint races are generally between 8 and 10 laps in length and focus on raw sprinting power and race tactics over a small number of laps to defeat opponents.
 - Endurance races are held over much longer distances. The length of these races varies from 12–16 laps for the Individual and Team Pursuit races, up to 200 laps for a full length Madison race in World Championships or Olympic Games.



Velodromes:



London



Australia



Manchester

References:

- http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/detail/index.cfm/book_number/2732/gold
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velodrome>