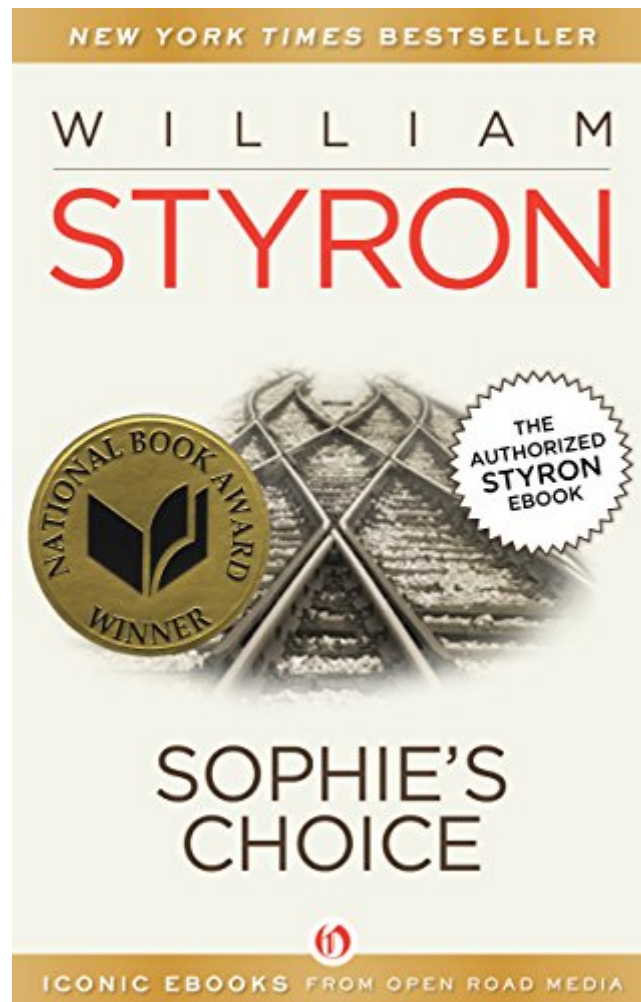


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# Sophie's Choice (Open Road)



## Synopsis

This award-winning novel of love, survival, and agonizing regret in post-WWII Brooklyn belongs on that small shelf reserved for American masterpieces • (The Washington Post Book World). A Winner of the National Book Award and a modern classic, *Sophie's Choice* centers on three characters: Stingo, a sexually frustrated aspiring novelist; Nathan, his charismatic but violent Jewish neighbor; and Sophie, an Auschwitz survivor who is Nathan's lover. Their entanglement in one another's lives will build to a stirring revelation of agonizing secrets that will change them forever. Poetic in its execution, and epic in its emotional sweep, *Sophie's Choice* explores the good and evil of humanity through Stingo's burgeoning worldliness, Nathan's volatile personality, and Sophie's tragic past. Mixing elements from Styron's own experience with themes of the Holocaust and the history of slavery in the American South, the novel is a profound and haunting human drama, representing Styron at the pinnacle of his literary brilliance. This ebook features an illustrated biography of William Styron, including original letters, rare photos, and never-before-seen documents from the Styron family and the Duke University Archives.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In *Sophie's Choice*, William Styron does a masterful job of telling a horrific tale in a bearable way. Sophie is a Polish Christian who survived 18 months in Auschwitz before the camp was liberated by the Allies. Of course her story is heartbreaking. But Styron unfolds the tale in a way that allows the reader to take it all in without being crushed by the sadness of it. First, instead of marching out the story of Sophie's capture and imprisonment in chronological order, Styron layers it on, each layer building on the next. When the 22-year-old narrator, Stingo, a Southerner who moved to Brooklyn to write novels, first meets Sophie in the summer of 1947, she gives him only the briefest of versions of her experience in the war. It is only as they grow closer as friends that Sophie, through a series of drunken encounters, provides more details to Stingo, each time admitting that she had lied to him before in earlier versions of her tale. By presenting the horrifying particulars bit by bit, Styron seems mindful of the warning, and even quotes Stalin as saying, that a "single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." The reader sees the tragedy of Sophie's experience because, by offering just a little at a time, Styron allows the reader to digest her story, along with a great deal of information about the Holocaust in general. If Styron had presented her story in full from the beginning, the awfulness would be numbing. Also, Styron balances Sophie's tragic past with her tragic present in Brooklyn. In love with Nathan, a brilliant drug addict subject to violent fits of jealousy, Sophie has no chance of building a "normal" life in America. But, given her experiences in the concentration camp, it is impossible to imagine how she could.

*Sophie's Choice* almost lost me in the first thirty pages or so, but thank goodness I hung in there. A tragic yet surprisingly non-depressing story (at times humorous, at times sad, but always compelling and riveting) of three people, Stingo (the narrator, a Southern youth yearning to be a writer living in the utterly strange world of New York), Nathan (Sophie's lover, brilliant, fascinating, and troubled) and of course Sophie, the beautiful Polish Auschwitz survivor who utterly captivates Stingo's imagination, who become, as Stingo quotes Sophie, "the closest of friends." And the friendship this lonely Southern young man develops with these two exotic (to him) individuals is at the heart of this compelling novel. Styron's story actually weaves together two stories: that of Stingo's journey of self-discovery "in a place as strange as Brooklyn" and that of Sophie, a "bruised and battered child[ren] of the earth," whose gently playful personality struggles to survive her guilt about her past and her passionate but difficult and sometimes shocking relationship with Nathan. Styron accomplishes the difficult task of making the reader appreciate, understand, and even admire the character of Nathan by telling his story through Stingo's eyes, so despite Nathan's flaws, and indeed Sophie's as well, the love Stingo feels for them both is believable and moving. The gradually

revealed tale of the concentration camp is grim and realistic, and Sophie's telling of it illuminates the source of the guilt which is destroying her : her choice, or choices--for there are many choices, although the one referenced in the title stands starkly, horrifying alone.

Often compared by literary critics to Toni Morrison's 1987 *Beloved*, for the choices women and mothers are forced into under the most desperate of circumstances and conditions, William Styron's 1979 novel *Sophie's Choice* is a non-stop textual tugging at the heart. In spite of the long passages replete with narrator Stingo's onanistic details (he hasn't gotten any, so the irony is, of course, that he lives in a place called the "pink palace"...hmmm...what's that a euphemism for?), this novel of a Holocaust survivor is not easily put out of one's memory. There are few books I internalize and metaphorize and carry around with me; this is one of those books. The humorous description of the McGraw/Hill publishing offices in Manhattan in the late 40s is a superbly hilarious way to open this novel. We are then introduced, at a rooming house in Brooklyn, to Sophie Z. and Nathan Landau, two of the novel's central characters. We learn that Sophie is a Catholic Pole who survived Auschwitz, but is still haunted by a "choice" she was forced to make while there. I agree with my fellow critic who states that the scene of Sophie's choice (set in the novel on April 1st, nonetheless, echoing, I would assume, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*) is so dramatically underplayed that I had to re-read it three times to make certain I didn't miss some critical nuance. Styron's choosing to portray the scene from which the novel's title comes as quietly and near the end as possible is a stroke of literary brilliance and keeps the reader page turning without end to find the answer to the question: What was the "choice"? Of course, in the course of the novel, Sophie Z.

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