

# George Saunders Quotes

*Writing, Thinking, People, Book, Trying, Real, Mean, Stories, Believe, Reading,  
Ideas, Kindness, Fiction, Kids, Way, Years, Art, Feelings, Kind, Running*

I tend to foster drama via bleakness. If I want the reader to feel sympathy for a character, I cleave the character in half, on his birthday. And then it starts raining. And he's made of sugar.

~George Saunders

What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness.

~George Saunders

What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness. Those moments when another human being was there, in front of me, suffering, and I responded . . . sensibly. Reservedly. Mildly.

~George Saunders

Do those things that incline you toward the big questions, and avoid the things that would reduce you and make you trivial.

~George Saunders

Developing our sympathetic compassion is not only possible but the only reason for us to be here on earth.

~George Saunders

According to me, your life is going to be a gradual process of becoming kinder and more loving. Hurry up. Speed it along. Start right now.

~George Saunders

It's a big world, and I really like it.

~George Saunders

Character is that sum total of moments we can't explain.

~George Saunders

The generalizing writer is like the passionate drunk, stumbling into your house mumbling: I know I'm not being clear, exactly, but don't you kind of feel what I'm feeling?

~George Saunders

Kindness, it turns out, is hard - it starts out all rainbows and puppy dogs, and expands to include . . . well, EVERYTHING.

~George Saunders

I'm always aware of writing around things I can't do, and I've come to think that that's actually what 'style' is - an avoidance of your deficiencies.

~George Saunders

I wasted a lot of years working on my writing and very grandly saying, 'And now... My Novel!,' which would soon be reduced to a short story, then to a paragraph.

~George Saunders

When something really bad is going on in a culture, the average guy doesn't see it. He can't. He's average and is surrounded by and immersed in the cant and discourse of the status quo.

~George Saunders

We try, we fail, we posture, we aspire, we pontificate - and then we age, shrink, die, and vanish.

~George Saunders

Working with language is a means by which we can identify the bullshit within ourselves (and others).

~George Saunders

The best thing we can bring to any fight is a calm and compassionate mind.

~George Saunders

My heart goes out to him. Sort of. Because empathy depends on how

you've spent your day.

~George Saunders

Life is short, very short, and what are we doing here if not trying to become more generous and loving?

~George Saunders

It's funny with fiction - once you cut something, it hasn't happened anymore.

~George Saunders

So here's something I know to be true, although it's a little corny, and I don't quite know what to do with it.

~George Saunders

The idea of inclusion has become kind of a stone that we've passed our hand over so many times that it doesn't mean anything.

~George Saunders

So, good news/bad news: good news that I'm progressing; bad news that life is short and art is long.

~George Saunders

It really strikes me how much of your energy in America, especially if you're from a working back-ground, is spent just keeping your head above water. It really saps your grace and your strength.

~George Saunders

I actually believe that a lot of what people call originality has to do with persistence in the craft.

~George Saunders

...smile first, then speak.

~George Saunders

When you read a short story, you come out a little more aware and a little more in love with the world around you. What I want is to have the reader come out just 6 percent more awake to the world.

~George Saunders

Humor is what happens when we're told the truth quicker and more directly than we're used to.

~George Saunders

The Bush administration is a paragon of wisdom.

~George Saunders

Irony is just honesty with the volume cranked up.

~George Saunders

Goodbye. I'm leaving because I'm bored.

~George Saunders

Success makes opportunities and so many of those "opportunities" are actually exemptions - from hardship, from unfriendliness, from struggle.

~George Saunders

I think kindness is a sort of gateway virtue - having that simple aspiration can get you into deep water very quickly - in a good way.

~George Saunders

Goodbye. I am leaving because I am bored.

~George Saunders

One of the ideas that runs through this book [Lincoln in the Bardo] is this Buddhist notion that the mind is incredibly powerful; not the brain but the mind.

~George Saunders

Success is like a mountain that keeps growing ahead of you as you hike it... Err in the direction of kindness.

~George Saunders

I think people have come to expect that in artistic representation; that every work of art should be a work of extravagant hope.

~George Saunders

When I'm explaining something to you, if I'm being long-winded, and twisty in a non-productive way, I could make you feel vaguely insulted. And you'd have a right to be.

~George Saunders

Chekhov - shall I be blunt? - is the greatest short story writer who ever lived.

~George Saunders

I would say one thing writing this book [Lincoln in the Bardo] did for me was underscore the fact that this issue [all men are created equal] has never been properly addressed and it hasn't gone away.

~George Saunders

Whatever happens when we die, it would be really weird if it was what we had expected. Even if you were a lifelong Christian believer, it would be kind of weird if there actually were pearly gates.

~George Saunders

It's so ironic that you often hear these right-wing people talking about the Constitution.

~George Saunders

If you haven't read you don't have the voice. The lack of voice eliminates experience.

~George Saunders

So I may not have had a gothic childhood, but childhood makes its own gothicity.

~George Saunders

The artist's job, I think, is to be a conduit for mystery.

~George Saunders

It seems to me that there are certain thoughts and vignettes and attitudes that I have always had the desire to represent.

~George Saunders

Monologue is the most honest way to represent human beings.

~George Saunders

I understand what something short should be like. I understand beauty in that form. If I start extending, somehow I kind of lose my bearings.

~George Saunders

The contours of the coming disaster expanded to include the deaths of all present.

~George Saunders

Honestly, the choice is: I can be a cheerful person, more awake to correction, more of a force for good ... when I'm writing. Or I can be the opposite of all those things, when I'm not writing.

~George Saunders

The number of rooms in a fictional house should be inversely proportional to the years during which the couple living in that house enjoyed true happiness.

~George Saunders

Err in the direction of kindness.

~George Saunders

If you could press a button and your ego investment was less, the toothache would be less. Or less tragic at least.

~George Saunders

In the moment of reading, the writer comes up to the surface and the reader comes up to the surface and they kiss, like two fish. That actually does happen.

~George Saunders

Social media sometimes feels like a vehicle for one-dimensional sniping, more than true criticism.

~George Saunders

If you bring forth what is within you, it will save you. If you do not bring it forth, it will destroy you.

~George Saunders

I'm not thinking in any big thematic or conceptual terms - especially in this book [Lincoln in the Bardo] when I was trying to make the voices more active, more energetic.

~George Saunders

My stories, I can understand them as a little toy that you wind up and you put it on the floor and it just goes under the coach. That I get. Beyond that, I'm a little lost.

~George Saunders

I'm not a natural criticizer - I prefer to like and praise and so on.

~George Saunders

He was a father. That's what a father does. Eases the burdens of those he loves. Saves the ones he loves from painful last images that might endure for a lifetime.

~George Saunders



I'm a control freak. I'm defensive. And I'm an egomaniac. That's true about me.

~George Saunders

I'm such a baby if I even get a flu.

~George Saunders

I watched a documentary about the immigrant crisis around the world. And it does make me blush at all the times I've stood up on the stage and given your speech about the healing power of fiction.

~George Saunders

Maybe you could even think 100,000 people are inside each human being. And you drop a novel on that person, and a certain number of those sub-people come alive or get reenergized for some finite time.

~George Saunders

I feel nervous because I revere [Zadie Smith] so much. I don't want to be stupid. If I say something stupid, just interrupt me.

~George Saunders

If you want to be good, all you've got to do is be good.

~George Saunders

I'm a big fan of the Russians: Isaac Babel is just an exquisite line-to-line stylist.

~George Saunders

Writing and reading and speaking with specificity and skill has never seen more important to me than it does at this moment. It's what's between us and chaos.

~George Saunders

I have this tendency to take a little bit of questionable knowledge and

riff on it.

~George Saunders

I always describe writing a story as throwing bowling pins in the air and then catching them.

~George Saunders

When you do something that's going to speak to people, it's going to be because you're really allowing all of yourself to the table in an accepting way.

~George Saunders

You can see a whole book as a series of creating an expectation and then delivering a skew on that expectation so it's not totally satisfied.

~George Saunders

I think when you see [Donald] Trump in person, my reaction is you kind of enjoy it. It's kind of an enjoyable night out.

~George Saunders

What once were two, are one

~George Saunders

We have not been energetic enough - white people haven't - in pursuing racial equity.

~George Saunders

While I'm doing [writing], I don't feel it. I don't think that's a failing. I think it's just a feature. Like, a feature of oneself.

~George Saunders

I believe that, when [meeting of writer and reader] happens and the reader goes out into the world the next day, there's some alteration that might possibly inflect the person positively.

~George Saunders

While writing this book [Lincoln in the Bardo], [idea of inclusion] occurred to me, you either believe in the Constitution or you don't. If you do, it's intense in what it wants of us.

~George Saunders

I don't know about transformation. But scientifically you can say: Well, it doesn't seem to hurt anybody. Personally I've been cheered by books at really critical moments. That much I believe.

~George Saunders

I think if someone could demonstrate to me that fiction did no good, I would still do it, because I think it does good for me.

~George Saunders

Even the written history [of Abraham Lincoln's times] is poorly understood by most people.

~George Saunders

The internet kind of feels like happiness sometimes, however. It feels like stimulation.

~George Saunders

In the absolute sense - kind of from the God's-eye view - God might feel like, "I made this thing that has all of that in it, all the horror and all the beauty."

~George Saunders

In a certain way, we're always toggling back and forth between the absolute and the relative, if that makes sense.

~George Saunders

I remember reading *The Bluest Eye* when I was a young parent, and

something opened in me. That's the highest aspiration.

~George Saunders

I have lunch, flirt with some local grandmothers, undercut my flirting by crotching myself on the corner of a table as I leave. -- "The Great Divider

~George Saunders

I don't feel like I have the intelligence to really inhabit a consistently high level of prose.

~George Saunders

What a powerful thing to know: That one's own desires are mappable onto strangers; that what one finds in oneself will most certainly be found in The Other.

~George Saunders

I watched a bunch of kids movies on Christmas. I was kind of joking with our family by asking, "Is anyone allowed to die in a kid's movie anymore?"

~George Saunders

Anyone can be shamed, but feeling guilt requires empathy within.

~George Saunders

I've had that my whole career. People were always hedging around the question of: Why are you so dark? What happened to you?

~George Saunders

When I write I know that I'm going to have to produce 40 percent more than I need.

~George Saunders

I think the wave of social media rejection is coming. I think there will be

a big reaction against it. It's just like sugar- - mean, I loved it as a kid.

~George Saunders

I don't really write beautifully naturally, unlike some people.

~George Saunders

Stay alert. The big moral crossroads in your life may not come labeled as such.

~George Saunders

At times, they're so Right and I'm so Left, we agree.

~George Saunders

Every step was a victory. He had to remember that.

~George Saunders

It was that impossible thing: happiness that does not wilt to reveal the thin shoots of some new desire rising from within it.

~George Saunders

Whole swaths of the book [Lincoln in the Bardo] are made up of verbatim quotes from various historical sources, which I cut up and rearranged to form part of the narrative.

~George Saunders

Realism is to fiction what gravity is to walking: a confinement that allows dancing under the right circumstances.

~George Saunders

As one gets older, this question of death, becomes more vexing and urgent.

~George Saunders

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