



From the cover of "On Division" by Goldie Goldbloom

CULTURE > BOOKS

This year's One Bay One Book pick is novel by Australian Hasidic author

BY LAURA PAULL | SEPTEMBER 6, 2019



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A novel about a 57-year-old Jewish grandmother unexpectedly pregnant with twins is Jewish LearningWorks' selection for its next One Bay One Book program.

"On Division," which will be published Sept. 17, was written by Goldie Goldbloom, a 54-year-old Australian-born author who had great success with her first novel, "The Paperbark Shoe" in 2011.

"On Division," set in the contemporary Hasidic community of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, explores the midlife awakening and empowerment of a married woman who didn't ask many questions about her life before her biological twist of fate.

Already the mother of 10 children and grandmother to 32, Suri Eckstein is embarrassed to share her pregnancy with her own husband, Yidel, much less with the deeply religious community in which they live.

As she navigates her situation, she starts working secretly in a maternity clinic and is exposed to ideas and realities outside of the domestic world in which she has existed. A reckoning with how the couple and the community treated their gay son is one of the results of her awakening.

"In this intimate novel of a woman at a crossroads, Goldbloom deftly portrays the relationships of individuals to a close-knit community, the impact of secrets and lies, and the persistence of our past experiences in shaping our lives," S.F.-based Jewish LearningWorks wrote in making the book announcement.

Goldbloom, who was born and raised in Australia and is Hasidic, has eight children and teaches creative writing at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University. "The Paperbark Shoe" was named the Literary Novel of the Year by ForeWord Magazine and was a National Endowment for the Arts Big Reads selection, among other honors.

The annual One Bay One Book program invites the public to join in book talks and other conversations around a single book and its themes. Events and discussions relating to "On Division" will take place at the Jewish Community Library and at synagogues and other venues around the Bay Area from September through June.

Howard Freedman, director of the library and the author of J's "Off the Shelf" book column, said, "The popularity of the [Israeli TV series] 'Shtisel' indicates a broad curiosity about lives that are off limits to most of us."

One of the strengths of "On Division," he said, "is that it's showing what's attractive in having an insular, close-knit community set apart from mainstream — and also what can be toxic or problematic about it."

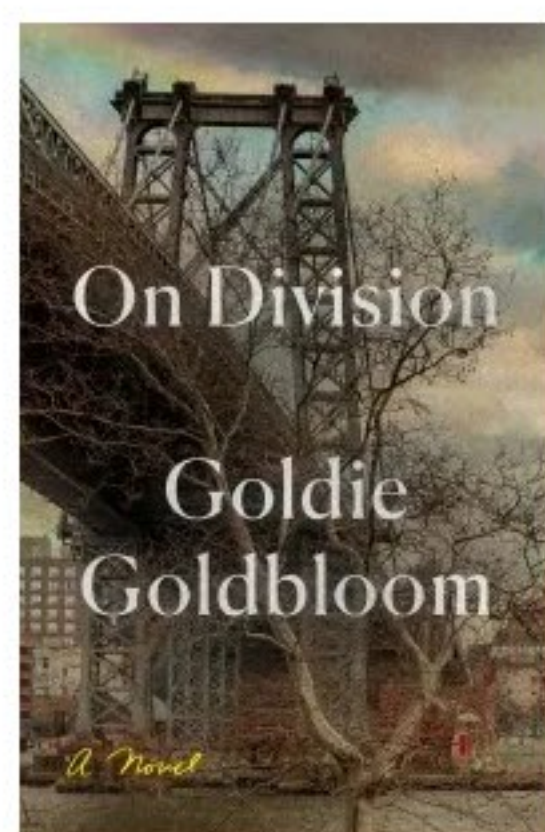
Freedman said he was drawn to this book "because it delves into the life of a woman in the midst of gaining insights about herself." While the majority of book club members tend to be women, he said, "I think it's important that men learn to grow out of our conditioning and be attentive to the inner lives of women."

The book for the 2018-19 program was Philip Roth's "The Plot Against America." Previous selections were "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" by Nathan Englander, "A Guide for the Perplexed" by Dara Horn, "The Betrayers" by David Bezmozgis, "The Periodic Table" by Primo Levi, "Moonglow" by Berkeley resident Michael Chabon and "The Septembers of Shiraz" by Dalia Sofer.

For more information about this year's book and related events, or to join the One Bay One Book mailing list, visit jewishlearningworks.org.



Author Goldie Goldbloom



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