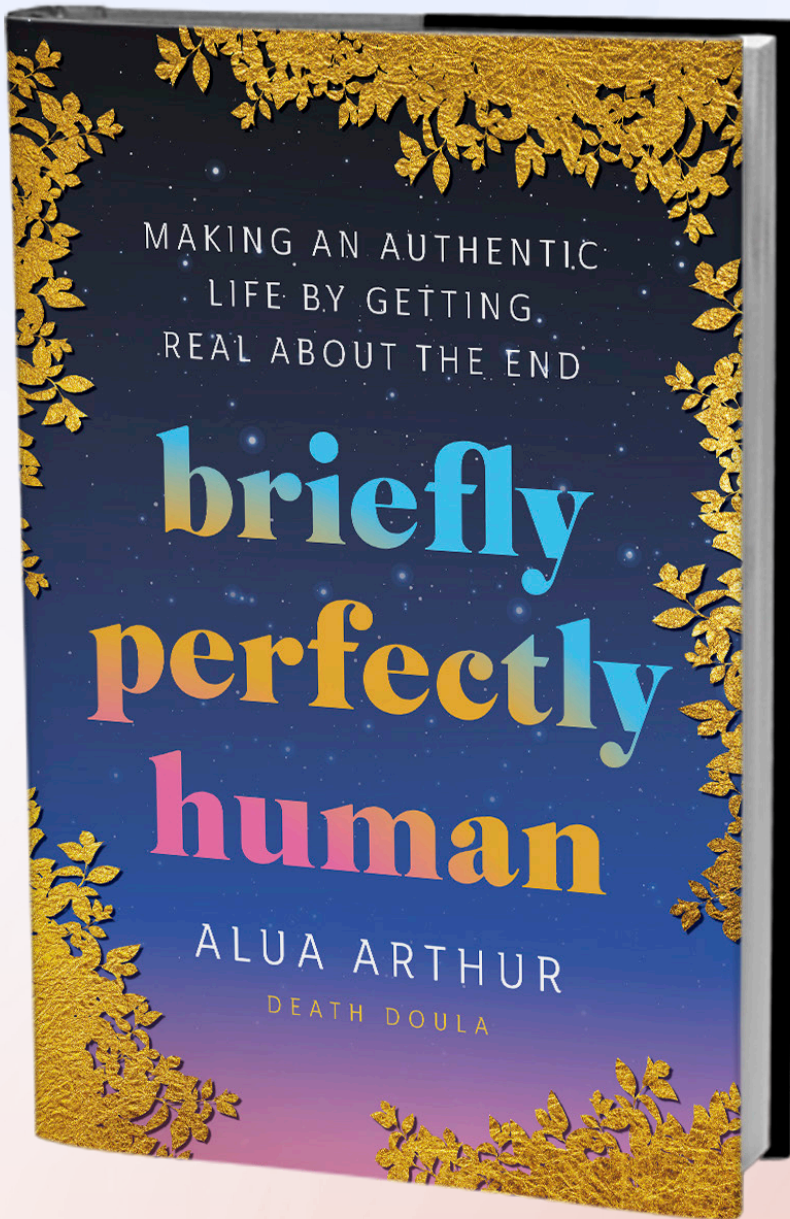


# Reader's Guide

Materials to Foster Reflection and Discussion



# Briefly Perfectly Human

A deeply transformative memoir that reframes how we think about death and how it can help us lead better, more fulfilling and authentic lives, from America's most visible death doula.

**“A truly unique, inspiring perspective on the time we have, what we do with it, and how we let go of this world.... There is no one I'd trust more to guide me through an understanding of death, and how it informs life.”**

**– Jodi Picoult,**

*New York Times* bestselling author of  
*Mad Honey* and *The Book of Two Ways*

**“*Briefly Perfectly Human* is a beautiful, raw, light-bringing experience. Alua's voice is shimmering, singular, and pulses with humor, vulnerability, insight, and refreshing candor.... Be prepared for it to grab you, hold you tight, and raise the roof on the power of human connection.”**

**– Tembi Locke,**

author of *From Scratch: A Memoir of Love, Sicily, and Finding Home*

For her clients and everyone who has been inspired by her humanity, Alua Arthur is a friend at the end of the world. As our country's leading death doula, she's spreading a transformative message: thinking about your death—whether imminent or not—will breathe wild, new potential into your life.

Warm, generous, and funny AF, Alua supports and helps manage end-of-life care on many levels. The business matters, medical directives, memorial planning; but also honoring the quiet moments, when monitors are beeping and loved ones have stepped out to get some air—or maybe not shown up at all—and her clients become deeply contemplative and want to talk. Aching, unfinished business often emerges. Alua has been present for thousands of these sacred moments—when regrets, fears, secret joys, hidden affairs, and dim realities are finally said aloud. When this happens, Alua focuses her attention at the pulsing center of her clients' anguish and creates space for them, and sometimes their loved ones, to find peace.

This has had a profound effect on Alua, who was already no stranger to death's periphery. Her family fled a murderous coup d'état in Ghana in the 1980s. She has suffered major, debilitating depressions. And her dear friend and brother-in-law died of lymphoma. Advocating for him in his final months is what led Alua to her life's calling. She knows firsthand the power of bearing witness and telling the truth about life's painful complexities, because they do not disappear when you look the other way. They wait for you.

*Briefly Perfectly Human* is a life-changing, soul-gathering debut, by a writer whose empathy, tenderness, and wisdom shimmers on the page. Alua Arthur combines intimate storytelling with a passionate appeal for loving, courageous end-of-life care—what she calls “death embrace.” Hers is a powerful testament to getting in touch with something deeper in our lives, by embracing the fact of our own mortality. “Hold that truth in your mind,” Alua says, “and wondrous things will begin to grow around it.”





# Meet Alua Arthur

America's Most Visible Death Doula





[Watch Alua's TED Talk](#)


“By envisioning who I want to be on my deathbed, I invited life in.”

— Alua Arthur

Alua Arthur is the most visible and active death doula working in America today. She is a recovering attorney and the founder of Going with Grace, a death doula training and end-of-life planning organization. Her TED Talk titled, “Why Thinking About Death Helps You Live a Better Life,” went online in July 2023 and has already received 1.5 million views. A frequent guest on TV and radio, Arthur has been featured on CBS's *The Doctors* and in Disney's *Limitless* docu-series with Chris Hemsworth, as well as in national print media outlets, such as *Vogue*, *InStyle*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Cut*, *The New Yorker*, and the *New York Times*. She has appeared on dozens of podcasts, and a Refinery29 video feature on Arthur and her work received ten million views across social platforms. In non-pandemic times, she travels the country and world as a keynote speaker, addressing audiences of several hundred to several thousand people at medical and end-of-life conferences, universities, seminaries, senior citizens' communities, and more.

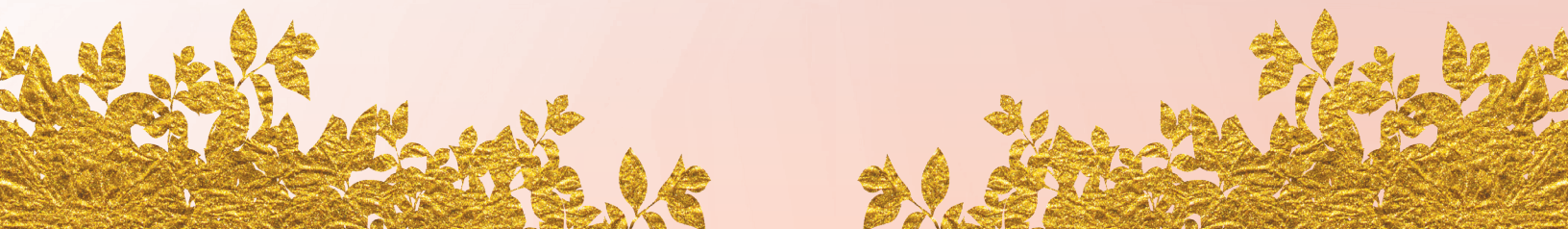
 @alualoveslife  
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# Discussion Questions about *Briefly Perfectly Human*

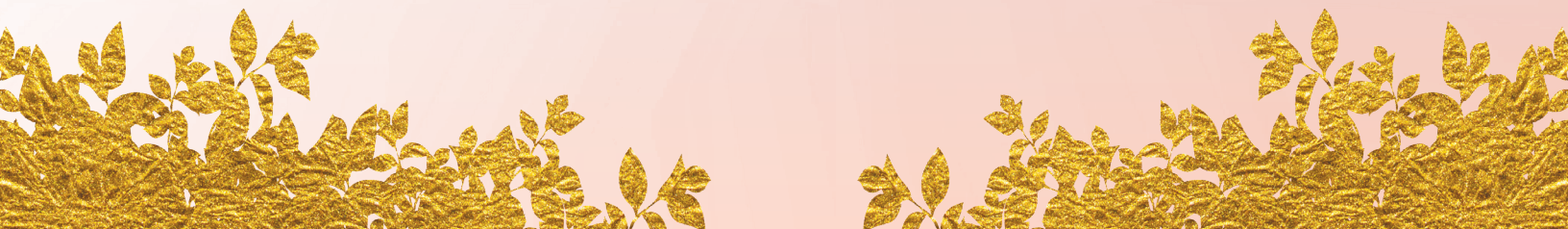
1. How does Alua Arthur's perspective on her own life evolve over the course of the book? What roles do wandering and wonder play in that evolution?
2. Can you pinpoint a time when Arthur's thinking about her own death begins to shift? Why does it?
3. Which stories from Arthur's work as a death doula stood out to you most? Discuss the range of reactions you had to these diverse death experiences.
4. Arthur dedicates *Briefly Perfectly Human* "To the too much, to the not enough, to the wanderers, to the aching dreamers, to the perpetual seekers of nothing to be found." Where do you see yourself among these?
5. How does Arthur's own experience inform the way she interacts with her clients?
6. Arthur's life and identity sometimes align with her clients' and sometimes differ. What did you notice about the outcome of either scenario?
7. In an ideal world, what role do you think death doulas should play? How would you imagine working with one?
8. Reflect on the attitudes around death you brought to your experience of reading *Briefly Perfectly Human*. Have you ever witnessed a death? Has your perspective on dying shifted? How?
9. Imagine your own death. What emotions and sensations arise? Do you feel you're living in a way that will end in the death you've imagined for yourself?



# Five Prompts to Prepare You for Death

These prompts are based on the questions death doulas use to support folks as they ponder their mortality and are a taste of what journeyers will receive in Alua's training course *The Living Practice: 30 Days of Your Life to Think About the End of It*. They are questions that ask you about your wishes and dreams, your body, your emotions, your fears, your end-of-life plans, and your life as a whole and are designed to deepen your relationship to your life, and ultimately, prepare you for death.

- 1.** Who are you? Answer without job, body, relationships, characteristics, accomplishments, possessions, or anything external to you. Begin the answer with I AM.
- 2.** When do you feel the most alive? Write the experience of feeling most alive as thoroughly as you can—fill in sensory details like the time of day, the position of the sun, what you are wearing, what it feels like in your body. Feel it as you write it. Feel alive in THIS moment. Which stories from Arthur's work as a death doula stood out to you most? Discuss the range of reactions you had to these diverse death experiences.
- 3.** What are you grieving today? We often think of grief as an experience that only exists in relation to a death. Yet we grieve every time there is a shift in identity, when circumstances change (even joyfully), or even when we must shift our belief system and structure. We grieve relationships, ideas, and dreams also. What are you grieving today?
- 4.** I want to live as long as I can...Finish this sentence at least five times. When you are complete, you will see that your values of living are embedded within your answers. For example, I want to live as long as I can enjoy cake. That does not mean that as soon as I cannot eat cake anymore, I want to die. Instead, I can understand that one of my values is in the enjoyment of food. I can use this information as a compass for how I live my life.
- 5.** How do you hope people remember you after your death? This can be a confronting question. Not only must you think of yourself as no longer being alive, but you must also think about the experience of those you love living without you. Yeouch. Take your time with this one. Consider your personality traits, the things you love, phrases you say, items you've made. What do you hope they remember you by? How would you like to be remembered after you die?





# Briefly Perfectly Human Playlist

“Someone I love once mentioned that I live like music— here are the songs and some of the artists that have inspired my book, my life, and thus, my death. Many are featured in the book and I hope you notice a few of your favorites here too.”

- Alua Arthur

- “Use Me” by Bill Withers
- “International Thief” by Fela Kuti
- “Soldier of Love” by Sade
- “Hopeless” by Dionne Farris
- “Renee” by Lost Boyz
- “I Wanna Dance with Somebody” by Whitney Houston
- “Again” by Janet Jackson
- “Possibly Maybe” by Bjork
- “House of Cards” by Radiohead
- “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” by Nina Simone
- “The Way You Make Me Feel” by Michael Jackson
- “Don’t Stop ‘Til You get Enough” by Michael Jackson
- “Man in the Mirror” by Michael Jackson
- “P.Y.T.” by Michael Jackson
- “michael & the force” by A Race of Angels
- “I Got a Story to Tell” by The Notorious B.I.G.
- “1999” by Prince
- “Thong Song” by Sisqo
- “Back that Azz Up” by JUVENILE
- “Independent Women, Pt. 1” by Destiny’s Child
- “Flaws and All” by Beyonce
- “Love on the Brain” by Rihanna
- “Lonely’s the Only Company” by Maxwell
- “Silencio” by Ibrahim Ferrer
- “Glitter in the Air” by Plnk
- “7” by Prince
- “maybe” by A Race of Angels
- “Doomed” by Moses Sumney
- “I Choose You” by Willie Hutch
- “I Was Here” by Beyonce
- “As” by Stevie Wonder

