

# **Be Frank With Me Study Guide**

**Be Frank With Me by Julia Claiborne Johnson**

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# Plot Summary

*Be Frank With Me* (Kindle version), by Julia Claiborne Johnson, begins in June, 2009. Mimi, a writer who rose to fame at the age of 19 after the publication of her first and only novel (*Pitcher*), is calling Isaac (the editor of *Pitcher*). An investor has lost all of Mimi's money. Mimi needs to write another book to remain financially solvent. She would like Isaac to send someone who can assist her while she works on her novel. Isaac sends his assistant, Alice. When Alice arrives in Los Angeles, she finds out that Mimi has a son named Frank and that her job is to take care of him and the household duties so that Mimi can write.

Frank is an odd child who dresses in the same style he sees in the old movies he loves to watch, does not like people to touch his things, and has his own set of rules that Alice must learn in order to get along with him. He also has a mysterious piano teacher named Xander who is there from time to time, but is presently away.

In the beginning, Alice and Frank spend much of their time together in the house. She decides to take him out one day, though and after finding out that it is a bad idea to go to the playground, she takes him to an airport to watch vintage planes take off. While they were gone, a postcard arrives from Xander. Frank takes Alice to the garage, which has an upper floor that the previous owner of the house used to paint in, to show her other postcards he has from Xander. Alice nicknames the place the Barbie Dream House. While there, Frank detects that his mother has stopped typing. As she comes out of her house, he runs towards her and leaps into her arms with such force that she smashes into the sliding glass door and has to go to the hospital.

As the summer comes to an end, Frank starts to see a psychiatrist again. Frank and Alice spend time in places that Frank used to frequent with his mother. One day while Frank and Alice are at a museum, Frank swears that Xander is there, too. Alice has her doubts. However, to no avail, she joins him in the search for Xander. Xander does turn up soon afterwards in Alice's bedroom. He asks her why she is sleeping in his bed.

School starts, and it is a disaster for Frank. Alice has to pick him early on the first day because he lies down in the doorway and other students cannot get out without stepping over him. The teachers and school secretary understand him, though, and tolerate his actions until a new principal with a PH.D. in child psychology arrives. The new principal, Dr. Matthews, does not like Frank. When a new student named Fiona (whom Frank once thought could be his friend) bullies Frank, Dr. Matthews places the blame on Frank's mother for letting Frank dress the way he wants to dress. Dr. Matthews says Frank's clothes set Frank up to be bullied. In order for him to continue to go to school, Mimi has Alice buy him T-shirts, jeans, and tennis shoes. That does not work out well, either. One day Alice discovers that Frank has a letter opener that he is taking to school for protection. From that day on, he plays hooky with Alice.

While all of this is going on, Alice is having an affair with Xander. She starts to learn more about Xander and Mimi. Her knowledge about Mimi includes the fact that her best



seller is based on her brother Julian who committed suicide by jumping out of a window in her college dorm. Her mother had not been happy about her writing the book and had not spoken with her afterwards. Later, Alice learns that Xander has a similar story. His sister died in a car accident due to his reckless driving. His parents had not spoken to him since, but his younger sister Sara does. She even named her son after him.

Everything comes to a head on Frank's birthday when he accidentally sets the Dream House and the main house on fire. Mimi's concern is the book, which she rushes to finish so that she can spend time with Frank again. After the fire, Mimi is admitted to the hospital. Xander comes to the hospital and is arrested because he is driving without a license. Isaac manages to get out of New York in spite of a blizzard. He flies to Los Angeles. Everyone thinks the book is gone.

It turns out though, that Frank managed to save it and Mimi's old manuscripts as well. He gives the book to Alice and then gives the other manuscripts to Isaac, but not before Mimi leaves the hospital and disappears. Xander is also not around. She learns from Frank that Mimi had left him a note telling him that she had gone for a month to rewrite the book and if there was an emergency, Isaac would know where she was. As he thinks he can find his mother, his first concern is to find Xander whose whereabouts he really does not know. They find him through his sister, Sara. Later, Isaac realizes that he does know where Mimi is and they find her. Since coming to Los Angeles, Isaac has also discovered that he is Frank's guardian.

With her book completed, Alice goes back to New York, leaving Isaac who says that he will join her in a couple of days. Frank and Xander send her off.



# Section 1: Prologue and Part 1 (Prologue, Chapters 1-4)

## Summary

In the Prologue of Julia Claiborne Johnson's *Be Frank With me* (Kindle edition), Alice and Frank are going to the hospital to see his mother who is there for observation after a fire.

In Chapter 1, Isaac Vargas asks Alice whether she would like to go to California to help one of his clients, M.M. Banning (Mimi), get her new book written quickly by helping her use the computer and keeping the household running until she has completed the book. Isaac Vargas was the editor of Mimi's first book which she wrote years ago when she was 19 years old. The book was a smashing success and had been turned into an Oscar winning movie. For unknown reasons, the author has not written anything since then. She has also not been in contact with Isaac until she calls telling him that she is writing a new book. She must write the book quickly because she lost money due to an investor's dishonest scheme. Now, she is about to lose her possessions and the rights to her book as well. Isaac is excited to help because the publishing house has just been bought and he is afraid that he will lose his job.

Alice knows about Mimi's book because her mother had loved it. Isaac, though, asks Alice not to say anything to Mimi about her mother loving the book because she has a complicated relationship with her fans. Alice flies to Los Angeles, uses the code she has to open the gate, and goes to the door. There Mimi meets her, threatening to call the police unless she is the girl Isaac sent.

In Chapter 2, when Alice first sees Frank, he is outside hitting a peach tree with a t-ball bat. Alice comments on how he is dressed and the amount of energy he has. Mimi says that she goes to sleep and wakes up tired. Frank goes to play a new game and Mimi goes to see what he is doing. It is hard to open the sliding glass door and Alice comments on it. She knows she needs to have it fixed, but is waiting for the man who fixes things to return as she does not like having strangers in her house. There is also a crack in the glass that Alice suggests Mimi fixes as well. Alice thinks that an earthquake caused it, but finds out that Frank's head did it. Mimi calls for Frank to come in. It takes a while for him to do so. When he does he walks by Mimi and Alice as if he does not see them. Mimi talks to him about his game outside and then introduces Alice. Mimi sends him upstairs to wash his hands. While he is gone, they talk about him. Then Mimi goes to find Frank.

Alice is sitting at the piano when Frank appears, and he joins her on the piano bench. They are talking and seem to be getting along when Alice moves her hand to touch the piano keys. Mimi shouts, spurring Alice to move her hands in time to avoid them being smashed by the keyboard cover that Frank is about to slam on them. Frank is upset



because she was going to touch the piano. Mimi comments that she does not know the rules yet and Alice tries to recover his trust, but it does not work at first. She finds out that Frank can take her hand, but she cannot touch him. He is different with his mother though, because she is his mother.

She manages to connect with him again and he tells her that she can call him Frank. They talk about what people call his mother and the name Mimi comes up, but Mimi says that Alice cannot call her that. Alice apologizes to Frank, but now he is only interested in knowing whether she is a natural blond.

In Chapter 3, when Alice retires in her bedroom that evening, she writes Isaac an e-mail to tell him about Frank. Isaac had wondered whether or not Frank was Mimi's biological son. She tells him that due to his looks, she does not think that he was adopted and that he is handsome. After writing the word "but," she cannot finish the sentence. She takes the handsome and "but" out of the email and sends it. She is a bit nervous because Mimi has told her that she locks everything up at night because Frank sleepwalks. She locks her door and sleeps. She wakes up in the middle of the night and, as there is no TV in her room, she looks at Fred Astaire on her cell phone.

Alice wakes up the next morning and finds Frank outside of her door. He had tried to get in her room. He says that he was worried about her. She tells him that he is not to walk into her room. She he thinks that it is best to set boundaries. He has a photo album to show her. In it are family members who are all dead. When they finish looking at the pictures, Alice wonders about Franks' father and, as if on cue, Frank tells her that there are pictures of him somewhere, but his mother says that he is not part of the family. Also looking at the pictures make his mother sad.

Frank suggests making waffles which he says he is good at doing. When he goes to get the waffle iron, Alice tries to help and Frank has a fit because she tried to touch his waffle iron. Mimi comes into the kitchen as all of this is happening and tells Alice that she is not to touch Franks's things. She gets mad at Alice for not following the rules they have and tells her that if she cannot do so, she should leave. She continues to call her Penny instead of Alice. She leaves and slams the door behind her. Frank gets the waffle iron and drops the carton of eggs. He says that it must be their lucky day because none break.

In Chapter 4, Alice has been there for 10 days. They do not go out much because there is no reason. School is out, and everything is delivered to the house. Alice writes in her book that Frank is special and she never sees Mimi. She thinks that this is because she hates her, but she does not write that in the book. Mimi plays with Frank, but does not talk to Alice much. Alice thinks that she and Frank are getting along okay, though. She makes the mistake of touching his clocks one day, though, and he throws a fit which entails hitting his head on the desk. When he stops, they discuss why he behaves that way. She has other things to remember, but they get a routine and she enjoys seeing what he chooses to wear, but has a hard time getting him to hang up his clothes afterwards. She also finds out that it is hard for him to keep information he knows to



himself. They watch old Hollywood movies together and as they talk, she finds out that Frank knows about the notebook she keeps.

Frank has no problem leaning against Alice, even though Mimi does not like it. She says that he needs to learn how to respect personal space. Alice does not mind though because she knows he misses his mother who stays in her office most of the day. One day she finds him banging his head outside her door. His face has chocolate on it. Alice manages to get him to stop by saying they will write a book, too. He lets her clean his face.

Alice and Frank write his book. Frank talks about the fact that whenever he does something wrong his mother tells him about what his future will be like. He calls Alice by name as he asks a question - making Alice feel good. Then, he tells her that she can take the book he wrote to replace the one his mother is supposed to write and leave. Alice realizes that they are not getting on as well as she had thought.

Mimi does not seem to be writing anything. When Alice tells Isaac this, he tells her to be patient.

## Analysis

A prologue serves as an introduction to a story. In most instances, a prologue sets the tone for the narrative, gives a bit of background, and provides a peek into the narrative. Prologues occur in an out of time sequence and are usually told by one of the characters.

The prologue that opens *Be Frank with Me* (Kindle edition) fits this description. It takes place in the future, which is outside of the sequence of the rest of the novel. Through the voice of Alice, readers meet the characters of the narrative: Frank, the protagonist, his mother Mimi and Alice herself. Alice's voice relays a tone of competence. In spite of the fact that she is in a bus going to see a boy's mother after a fire and people are staring at him, she talks about the events calmly. She focuses on the bus trip, not the fire. Alice only mentions the fire at the beginning to explain why they are on the bus. "Because the station wagon blew up in the fire, Frank and I took the bus to the hospital" (1). Then, she focuses on the fact that she is going to have to wash Frank's clothes. Even though Frank is worried about his mother. Though Alice does not know what they will find when they get to the hospital, she manages to calm Frank down when he worries about people looking at him. While calming him down, Alice remembers not to touch him.

Readers immediately see the contrast Alice presents between herself and Frank's mother, Mimi. The picture she paints of Mimi is that of an eccentric person. The tone is almost harsh and condescending with a dash of sarcasm. Mimi is "the famous literary recluse" (2). She wrote a book that has become a classic when she was 19. However, since then she has not written "another word as far as anybody knew" (2). Alice could



have just as easily said that Franks's mother is a recluse and has not written another book as opposed to "another word."

Alice's description of Frank is kinder. Mounting evidence indicates that he is different. He will not take a taxi with her, which would be faster and more comfortable than the bus because Alice is not his mother. She has to be careful not to touch him, and he is dressed like someone from an old Hollywood movie in clothes that do not fit the season. In spite of this, he wonders why people are staring at him. Closing his eyes so that he cannot see people staring at him calms him. In talking about Frank, Alice raises the issue of labeling people and making judgements. "Seasonally inappropriate is what mental health factotums call his way of dressing, while people into fashion call it style" (1).

The contrasts in Alice's world continue throughout the remainder of the section as well. Alice leaves New York, a place where she works in an office and has a boss who treats her like a second daughter to enter a place that her boss calls "paradise on earth" (10). It is different and without boundaries and as soon as Alice walks through the gates, she walks into another world, much like Alice in the novel *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice is young with long blond hair and is an accountant by training. Mimi is a writer. Her ponytail is a greyish brown color and she is middle-aged. Their temperaments are also different. Alice has the attitude that she knows better in some cases. For example, she has found that saying "no worries," works with difficult people. In doing so, she is patronizing them. She keeps on trying to help with the door and tries to show Mimi what to do. Then, she goes on to lecture her about getting the cracked glass pane fixed. When she finds out that Frank's head, not an earthquake, cracked it, she advises Mimi not put stickers on the door. Mimi bluntly tells her how much she does not know. "Since you know so much about what I ought to be doing, will these stickers of yours keep Frank from pounding his head against the glass when the door has jumped the track and he's frustrated because it is hard to open?" (18). Even then, Alice has a solution. She will have to show him how to get it back on track and then everything will be fine. Mimi knows better and quickly figures out that Alice is not from New York due to her Pollyanna attitude.

The exchange between the two women highlight the theme of how easy it is to think that you know best until you have lived in the situation yourself. Alice is young like Mimi was at one point. However, Mimi has lived life and knows that things are not so simple.

The section also delves further into the idea of labels and judgements. Frank is different. He dresses differently. He has a penchant for old movies, but Alice does not label him. When she tries to describe him to Isaac, she stops and, in the end, only says that she thinks he is Mimi's biological son. She begins to look forward to his choice of outfits .

One final motif that appears in this section is the parent/child relationship. In the prologue, Frank tells Alice that she is not his mother, implying that no matter how close the two may get, she will never replace his mother. He loves his mother and she loves him. When they are talking about the hand-holding rule, she says "I hold his hand, of





course. I'm his mother" (24). She says this in a tender manner that surprises Alice and lets her see the Mimi whom Isaac likes.

## Discussion Question 1

Mimi has a strained relationship with her fans, but now she needs those fans to save her family from ruin. How typical do you think this is of artists? What does it say about fame?

## Discussion Question 2

If you had to finish Alice's sentence in her email describing Frank, what would you say and why?

## Discussion Question 3

Is it fair for Mimi to be so angry with Alice? Why or why not? Why do you think she treats her this way?

## Vocabulary

practicalities, transfixed, shellacked, factotums, recluse, navigate, trove, gravitas, inconvenient, swindled, carousing, famished, interspersed, sauntering, cadence, julienne, eternity, notoriously, rabid, miraculously, oblivious, obnoxious



## Section 2: Part 2 (Chapter 5-8)

### Summary

In June (Chapter 5), Alice decides that it is time for her to take Frank out. She leaves a note for Mimi to ask if she can borrow the car keys. When Mimi comes out of her office after lunch, Frank rushes to hug her. Alice's plan to take Frank to the playground gets dashed when both Frank and Mimi tell her why that is a bad idea. Then she says that they can just go for a drive. After convincing Mimi that she will not get lost, learning that there was someone called Xander that used to be around, and convincing Mimi that she has not read her book, Mimi agrees that she can take Frank out. She writes down emergency phone numbers and gives Alice her phone in case she needs to call someone. As they leave she thanks her, calling her Alice and not Penny.

Once they get in the car, it does not start. Alice finds out that Frank and Mimi take taxis when they go out. Alice gets a mechanic to come to the house to get the car running and they leave. As she drives, she notices Frank leaning out of his window with his scarf waving behind him. She warns him to be careful, telling him that Isadora Duncan died because her scarf got entangled in the wheels of her car. It works. They decide to go to the airport to look at the antique planes take off. When they get there, Alice thinks that she should take a picture of Frank with Mimi's phone. She also looks at Mimi's list of contacts. She sees a lot of emergency contacts, finds Isaac's name, and the name Xander. When Frank asks her what she is doing, she shows him the picture she took of him. They agree that he looks like the Little Prince. She compares herself to Harriet the Spy.

In Chapter 6, they leave the airport and Frank tells Alice more facts and they talk about school. He says he wants to go home and sleeps in the car. When they get to the house, they hear Mimi typing. Frank rushes to the house and sits, rocking outside of Mimi's door. Alice lets him stay there and then goes to transfer the emergency numbers from Mimi's phone to hers, so that she will never have to touch her phone again. She sorts through the mail and finds a card addressed to Frank. It is from Xander.

Frank comes in to eat. He is sad because his mother is still in the room working. Alice tells him that he has a postcard. He does not notice it at first as his attention is elsewhere, but when he does, she finds out who Xander is. He is his piano teacher when he is around. Frank does not really like to play the piano, but his mother says he should because he has a gift and Xander is his friend. Xander has a key to the house and can come in and play at any time. He also stays there when he is in town. Frank keeps Xander's postcards in the garage. They go there and Alice is shocked by how nice it is. The previous owner, an old lady had used the upstairs portion to paint and had died when she fell off the ladder to go up there once. Alice says it looks like Barbie's Dream House. Alice finds out that Frank is really not to be up there, because his mother thinks it is dangerous.



Alice says that she wants to meet Xander, but Frank says that he will only disappoint her and that Mimi says that he is too good at too many things to be good at anything. Then, Frank realizes that Mimi has stopped typing. He runs outside. Mimi has just stepped outside the glass door when Frank jumps into her arms with such force that Mimi loses her balance and falls into the glass door.

In Chapter 7, Alice and Frank wait in the emergency room. Frank holds Alice's hand tightly and Mimi wakes up. She tells Frank to check her for brain damage and Frank shows the nurse what to do. The nurse plays along. He tells the nurse that she looks like Tinker Bell. For her part, the nurse thinks that Mimi is Frank's grandmother. After the nurse leaves, Mimi tells them that they should go home. Alice does not want to leave her and Frank is surprised that Mimi has to stay, but they convince him to leave. Mimi tells Frank that she loves him, but he does not answer.

After Mimi gets out of the hospital, the next evening, Alice calls Isaac to tell him what happened. Mimi comes in while she is on the phone wonders who she is talking to. She tells her and Mimi takes the phone, Alice leaves the room to get an ice pack for Mimi. When she comes back Mimi is off the phone and crying. She asks where Frank is and finds out that he is sleeping. She confides in Alice about worrying about Frank given her financial situation.

Alice asks whether there is anyone she should call. Mimi says that all of her family is dead and calling Frank's father is not an option. She confides that she bought the house for the views and she thought her mother would hate it. She hates it and she stayed because she did not want to give her mother the satisfaction of being right. Then she complains that the ice pack is leaking, throws it at Alice and goes to her room. Alice lets her go.

It turns out that the evening alone with Frank had not gone as smoothly as Alice had made out that it had (Chapter 8). They had smoked chocolate cigarettes and talked about their fathers. Frank does not know anything about his and Alice's left when she was 8 year old. Then she had waited for him to get undressed so that she could soak his clothes. While waiting, she had fallen asleep. When she woke up she found Frank in the tub with his clothes on. She had thought he was dead. He had gotten out, changed into his pajamas and asked Alice to do the same so that they could have a pajama party. During the evening, they had decided to cover the hole in the door with dry cleaning bags. Frank had rolled in them like he rolls in his comforter, making Alice feel nervous. Then he had tied his hands together with the tape. It had still been cold and Alice had suggested starting a fire, but they did not know where anything to light it was located because Mimi keeps everything away from Frank. Finally he had lit a fire. Alice had thought that he was a genius for doing so. He had told her that he does it in his room all the time. He had gotten her up at 4 o'clock in the morning and they had watched a movie.



## Analysis

The main element to note in this section is its emphasis on the parent/child relationship. It becomes even clearer that Frank loves his mother and his mother loves him. Mimi does what she can to protect him from a world that he feels uncomfortable in. Part of this means that she does not take him to places that upset him. Thus, when Alice suggests that she take him to the playground, Mimi agrees with Frank that this is not a good idea because it is not healthy for Frank. It causes him anxiety which causes him which causes him to hurt himself. One might think that she is spoiling him by giving in to his whims, however she really is worried about his safety. She lets him go with Alice, because she knows it is good for him to get out, but she makes sure that Alice has all of the emergency numbers in case something happens to him.

After the accident that sends her to the hospital she does not show anger towards Frank. She may be calm because she has drugs to help dull her pain, but she may be calm for another reason as well. She knows that Frank did not mean to hurt her. An unfortunate accident caused her current state, not malice, and she knows exactly what to do to make sure Frank knows that she loves him and does not hold him responsible. She calls him by her pet name for him, Monkey, and she asks him to check her brain for damage, something that she knows he will enjoy doing. This, indeed, does manage to divert attention from the fact that he is the one who placed her in the hospital.

Later, she tells Alice that she worries about what will happen to Frank if something happens to her, especially if she does not have money to pass down to him. "When I had money, I did not worry so much about Frank. Someone will always take in a rich kid, even if he's weird" (78).

She also worries about her place in Frank's life as his mother. There are indications that she worries that Alice may be moving in on her territory. When Alice tells her that she cannot complain about her night alone with Frank, Mimi starts crying even more than she was before.

Frank though, loves his mother. He spends that day with Alice and has a good time, but as soon as he gets home he runs "for the house like an electrified rabbit with a live greyhound at its heels" (65). When Alice gets back in the house, she finds him "crouched outside Mimi's bedroom door, rocking in a little chair..." (65) He says that he just wants to sit there with her, his mother, for a while. He knows that while she is working on the book, this is as close as he can get. When she finally does come out, he cannot contain his excitement, thus causing the accident. "She smiled at Frank as he hurtled across the yard. Frank launched himself into her arms" (72).

Even though Mimi does her best to show that she loves Frank (she tells him that she loves him when she is in the hospital) he still has a sense of abandonment. He does not know who his father is and his father figure, Xander, disappoints him. At this point, readers may remember what Alice says about Frank and his manner of dress in the Prologue. "out in the world, Frank needed to be 100 percent buttoned up, buckled down and helmeted..." (1) His outfits are his armor to protect him from a world in which he



does not feel as if he fits, due to the fact that he thinks he has been abandoned by two father figures - his biological father and Xander. This is part of his coping mechanism.

Readers also begin to see that Alice is a lot like Frank. Her father had abandoned her as a child and, even worse than Frank, she her mother is dead. She, like him, has developed a coping mechanism. She tries to be perfect, in control, organized, and keep the Pollyanna view that everything will turn out okay.

Mimi's relationship with her mother contribute to her peculiarities. She buys the glass house hoping that it will make her mother mad and she stays there, even though she does not like it, because she does not want her mother to know that she was right in not liking the house.

Another important element is the motif of labels and judgements. Seeing Frank at the airport brings back memories of Alice's days of teaching kindergarten children. "On the days kids brought their favorite books to class, you could see the Pippie Longstockings and Cats in the Hat and Corduroy Bears coming from a mile away. Bedtime Story as Destiny..." (62). Frank was The Little Prince, a 9 year old boy "just visiting our world from a small, eccentric planet of his own" (62). When Mimi calls him weird, Alice says that he is just different. What is weird versus just different? The chosen label can lead one down two different paths in life and may not even be correct.

Readers see how people can give others the wrong label in the hospital when the nurse calls Mimi's Frank's grandmother. She does that based on appearances only without knowing the facts.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss your views of giving in to Frank's wish not to go to the playground. Is it the best thing for him, or the best thing for the adults who have to deal with his actions? How do you determine the difference between the two? Where do you draw the line? Support your opinion.

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Alice was tempted to look at Mimi's list of contacts?

## Discussion Question 3

Mimi oscillates between being nice to Alice and rude to her in this section. Why?

## Vocabulary

accumulated, testament, incentive, lunatic, underfoot, disquisition, abject, capitulation, camouflaged, vintage, oblivious, eccentric, carnage, velodrome, retrospective, immaculate, lacerating, emblazoned, plume, mesmerized



## Section 3: Part 3 (Chapters 9-13)

### Summary

In Chapter 9, Frank goes to his psychiatrist. Alice waits with Mimi in the waiting room. The psychiatrist asks Mimi about her bruises, but she lies about the cause saying that it is not of the psychiatrist's business. When he comes out, Frank tells his mother that Xander was one of the things he talked about during the session.

In August, Alice and Frank go to some of the places he used to go to with his mother. Alice agrees on the condition that she can hold his hand without him taking hers first. He agrees because she tells him that she gets scared at times.

Sometimes, when they leave, Alice and Frank run into a few of Mimi's fans waiting to see her, but dismiss them because they are "nobodies". Her fans terrify Frank and once, when Alice drops the sheet of paper with the code, she has to chase it to calm him down because he fears that a fan will find it and enter the house. Alice memorizes the code and eats the piece of paper it is written on. Frank thanks her.

When they go to the museum, Frank moves quickly because if he goes too slow, he wants to touch things. Alice finds herself keeping things in case of an emergency as Mimi does. Frank also takes things. His psychiatrist says that it is curiosity that causes him to do it. He had taken Alice's hairbrush early on because he had never seen her hairbrush before. This event caused Alice to make sure that she carried her notebook with her.

One night, Alice gets up after having a nightmare about losing Frank in a museum. When she does, she sees Mimi in the hallway with a large knife. They scare each other which makes Frank start howling. They both run to him. Mimi calms him down and explains that she was cutting her hair. She was using a knife because she did not know where she had hid the scissor to keep them away from Frank. Frank gets up, saying that he needs to go to the bathroom and comes back with a pair of scissors.

In Chapter 10, Frank and Alice are at a museum. Alice leaves Frank to go to the toilet and when she comes out, he tells her that Xander is there. She is not sure that he is telling the truth so she quizzes him as to where he is now. They go to look for him. Frank shows her the statue "In the Manner of Apollo" and says that Xander looks like him. Alice takes a longer look at the statue and starts to feel homesick. She lets go of Frank's wrist and he crashes to the floor. The guard rushes over, worried, but nothing is wrong with him. It is just Frank being Frank. He has a long conversation with guard because he likes the fabric of his uniform. The guard thinks that Alice is his mother and says that there should be more children like him.



When Alice finally does meet Xander, she thinks she is having a dream and that the statue is leaning over her, but it is Xander who wants to know what she is doing in his bed.

It is the first day of school in Chapter 11 and Frank notices that Alice is wearing a skirt. He reminds her that she is not his mother and he would rather that his mother or Xander take him to school. Alice blushes at the sound of Xander's name. She tells Frank that his mother is coming with them as well and he rushes to help her get dressed, knocking things over. This time she cleans it up without trying to get him to help.

When they go to the school, Mimi is wearing a head wrap that Frank says he made from one of her ex-husbands old t-shirts. He starts talking about him, but says he has never seen him except for on TV. He tells the story of why there are so many of his t-shirts there and says that he wished they had a goat so they could make money. Mimi comes in and gets upset because she cannot find her cell phone. She does not want to leave without it. They find it in Frank's pocket.

Alice drives Frank to school with Mimi sitting next to him in the back seat. When they arrive, Frank declares that he does not belong there. Alice is about to go with them, but Frank tells her to stay because she is only staff. Mimi tries to defend her, but Alice, though disappointed, agrees to stay in the car. Mimi is gone for almost an hour. When she returns, they talk about the other mothers, who Mimi does not like, and Frank. Then she tells Alice that she needs to be quiet. When they get back, she tells Alice that she is going to have to pick Frank up from school and goes into her office - making it clear that Alice is not welcomed there.

Alice decides to clean out Frank's closet. She stops to get water and notices that Mimi is no longer typing and that the car is gone. She resists the temptation to clean Mimi's office and goes back to cleaning the closet. Her phone rings. It is the school saying that she needs to come and pick Frank up. Mimi is typing again and the car is back, so Alice leaves lunch and a note for Mimi and goes to the school.

Once there, for a short time she thinks that he has broken a girl's arm, but finds out that is another incident. Frank has decided to lie down, blocking the exist of the classroom. He allows her to touch him to pick him up.

When they get back to the car, he says that he does not want to go home, yet. He does not want to worry his mother. Instead, he wants to go to the playground which is okay now that all of the other children are in school. They go and after Frank plays for awhile, they go back to the house. A breeze coming in making Alice realize that the protection she had put over the door with the broken glass was not longer there. She looks out and sees a man wearing a t-shirt working. Frank comes out and confirms that it is not Mimi's ex-husband. It is Xander. Alice realizes that Xander was the one who had taken the car and she is glad that she had not gone in to clean Mimi's office when she thought she had gone out. Xander sees Alice and gives her a compliment.





Alice has a text conversation with Isaac that she tries to hide from the others while Mimi, Xander and Frank play a game together (Chapter 12). She notes that Mimi is laughing - something that she has never been able to make her do. Isaac tells her that her job is to make sure Mimi does not get swindled again. She thinks that it was her job to help Mimi with her manuscript, which she has not yet seen. Frank interrupts her before she can make this comment to Isaac. She tells him a joke as Xander joins them. Xander laughs at it. Mimi has gone back to work and Frank is hungry. Xavier asks whether he can eat with them, too. She tells them to start as she has to fix lunch for Mimi. She and Xander pass each other and come into physical contact. Alice notes that this was too bad because now she could not be objective.

The following week, she returns after taking Frank to school and Xavier makes her talk to him. In the process she cries and he comforts her. This is the conversation that begins their relationship.

In Chapter 13, Alice sleeps with Xander in the Dream House. He tells her what he knows about her from Frank and what he knows from what he has discovered himself and then discusses Frank as a whole. She leaves because she has to make Mimi's lunch, and as she does, she realizes that she cannot tell how old Xander really is.

Alice hears Mimi typing and thinks that she has not noticed that she is running late, but she has. She also notices that Alice's hair is down. Frank wants to be picked up later because he has made a friend. Alice is happy to hear that and Mimi comments that one friend is all you need. She also tells Alice to call her Mimi. This makes Alice happy, but before she can respond Mimi closes the door in her face.

Alice finds out that Frank's friend is Fiona, the girl who broke her arm on the first day of school. That night Alice gets choked up looking at the names of the victims of the Titanic and hears either Xander, or the player piano, playing music.

Later, she finds out from Xander that Mimi's first book had been partly based on her brother, but when she told her mother about it she had dismissed it and been mad, thinking that they had suffered enough. He also does not think that Frank was adopted, but he is sure that her ex-husband is not his father. Finally, he tells her that Mimi does not hate her. She just hates how her life has turned out differently than she thought it would have when she was her age.

## Analysis

This section provides insight into why Mimi treats Alice the way she does. At the end of Chapter 13, Xander tells Alice, "It's not about you, you know. What Mimi hates is how her life has turned out. It isn't how she thought it would be back when she was your age and on the top of the world" (144). It is hard to live in a situation that you had only imagined before and as a writer who creates imaginary worlds, it is easy to see how Mimi could have painted a picture of what her life would have been, when she like Alice,



though that if you were perfect, then everything would turn out fine. Everything did not turn out fine for her, however. Fame had given her crazy fans. She had had a marriage that ended in divorce. Now she has a child who was a handful. What's more, she has thought that she was being smart by investing her money, and now it was all gone.

She lashes out at Alice because she is lashing out at qualities that remind her of herself when she was Alice's age. Xander says that Alice is perfect, but with her glamorous life, Mimi was more than perfect. Still, there had been problems with her brother and her mother had not been proud of her success with the book. The dream that she had imagined for herself had turned into trying times. Mimi does let her guard down at times. She talks to Alice about the other mothers at the school. As usual, though, her friendly nature is short-lived.

Another point to note is that this section reveals more of Alice's personality. Others may see her as perfect and she may try to give an air of composure and organization, but behind the facade is a person who needs approval and love. She tries to get love by being perfect. It does not work though. When Frank finds out that she is going to school with him, he tells her that he would prefer to go with his mother or Xander. He also reminds her that she is not his mother. "You're not my mother. I'd rather have my mother take me to school today" (1100). Then he adds, "Or Xander" (111). When they get to the school Alice, who was the teacher's pet also known as the perfect student, thinks that she is going in with Mimi and Frank. Frank stops her, though. "You heard her. My mother will walk me to class. You stay here" (115). Mimi is not perfect, but she has her son's love.

It is interesting to note that when she does break down and lose her calm, controlled composure, she makes friends with Xander. "For a second I was sure the inevitable earthquake Angelenos dread but try not to think about had come. But it was just me, crying...I felt as surprised by my tears as Xander looked" (133). In addition to comforting her, Xander leads her to the Dream House where she once again does something she rarely does - let her hair down. It is also in her imperfect state that Mimi calls her Alice instead of Penny and tells her to call her Mimi. This happens when she rushes in, late, after being with Xander to give Mimi her lunch. Mimi notices that Alice is flushed and that her hair is down and wet. "Alice...Ms. Banning sounds like some mean old lady who calls the police on the neighborhood kids if they cut across her lawn. Call me Mimi" (138).

This section also makes readers think about Frank's behavior. As Alice asks in the first section, who is Frank? Mimi tries to keep things such as scissors and matches that may cause Frank to harm himself. Yet, he knows where these things are anyway and has not used them to harm himself. He knows that his mother does not leave the house without her cell phone. Since he does not want to go to school, he hides it, thinking, like any child his age would, that this will keep him from going to school. While it could be true that he really does become overloaded as his teacher says he does, his actions do manage to get him out of a place where he does not want to be.



When he is in the museum, he also portrays strange behavior, but it is a coping mechanism he uses not to get in trouble. If he goes slowly, he will touch things. Thus he goes quickly so he cannot touch anything. When he is talking to the security guard, the guard touches him. His action worries Alice as she does not know how Frank is going to react, but Frank does not even notice it because the material of the guard's uniform interests him. He impresses the guard, who tells Alice, "You need to fill the house up with more like him. You need to fill up the world" (107). Could it be that in the right environment, places where he feels that he belongs, he can adapt to fit in? It is easier for him to do so in the world of artists than at school. This observation, along with the fact that he knows where dangerous elements are, indicate that maybe people worry too much about him.

Finally, the section supports the theme that perfection does not bring love by showing that: Frank loves Mimi even though she is not perfect; the security guard appreciates Frank even though he is not perfect; and people seem to like Alice better when she shows that she's not perfect, .

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Frank impresses the security guard at the museum?

## Discussion Question 2

What does this section reveal about Alice's character? Explain what has shaped your opinion.

## Discussion Question 3

How does this section explain Mimi's treatment of Alice?

## Vocabulary

sanctum, contemporaries, assimilate, brandishing, parsimonious, lorgnette, esplanade, intrigued, friction, exasperation, irate, extravaganza, illumination, spectacularly, resumption, harbored, levitation, inevitable, orchestrated



## Section 4: Part 4 (Chapters 14-16)

### Summary

In Chapter 14, the season is the fall/winter. Alice takes Frank to school and picks him up as part of her routine. She tries to get to meet Fiona and learn more about her, but even though she gets Frank to describe her a bit, she does not get to meet her. When he gets home, he plays piano with Xander until dinner time. Mimi types, but still has not shown Alice anything. Xander would hang around, finding odd jobs to do until Alice had finished her work around the house and then the two of them would end up at the apartment in the Garage. She asks Xander questions, but he never talks about himself. He does say that he met Mimi when she had the wall put up around the house. He was part of the crew and had stayed on to do handwork for her.

One day she is with Xander and Isaac texts her. He asks about Frank and wants to know whether Mimi has given her anything. At the end of the conversation, he tells Alice to ask Mimi for pages and when Alice says that it would be better for him to ask, he says that it would not be. Alice asks Mimi and gets a sarcastic answer.

Christmas time comes and Xander does several things that show that he is not perfect. One day, when he is there, Frank is playing the piano, and Xander is sitting next to him. Mimi has her hand on Frank's head in the way that mothers do and her other hand rests on the nape of Xander's neck.

Between Alice's Birthday and Christmas (Chapter 15), Xander is not around. Frank refuses to play the piano and Alice has to entertain Frank. He tells Alice that this is the disappointing part of Xander he had told her about. She decides to start drawing sketches of Frank in his outfits and he asks her to paint a portrait for him to give his mother as a Christmas present. She agrees.

Mimi gets Irritated because Xander does not play the piano, which she likes to hear while she is working. Frank thinks that Xander will be back before Christmas. He has a presentation to give. He does not expect a lot of cheering, but he thinks that both his mother and Xander will be there. He does not want Alice to attend. He is restless the night before the presentation. He has a night light that he used as a child and Mimi talks about it and is in awe that Frank is almost 10. Neither she nor Xander go to the presentation. Alice tries to get Mimi to go, but she says she is working. Alice goes to the school with the brownies she has made. At the school, she runs into Fiona. It turns out that she does not know who Frank is at first, and when she finally makes the association she says that she thinks he is weird. Her comment makes Alice mad.

Frank's presentation does not go well. He says he stops when he sees that Mimi is not there. She finds out that Xander was with Mimi when she delivered Frank. The news rattles Alice. She tells Frank that she met Fiona. He explains how he had gotten up the nerve to talk to her, but it turned out that she was like the others.



In Chapter 16, the rains come, and Alice works on Frank's portrait. On Christmas day, he gives it to his mother. It makes her tear up, and she says that it captures Frank. Later that night, Mimi goes to Alice's room and chides her for taking everything that belongs to her.

The night after Christmas, Xander comes back and the sound of the piano wakes up Alice. She goes to the living room and asks what he is playing. He acts as if he has always been there, tells her the composer and says that it is called "What are you doing New Year's Eve." Alice blows him off and goes back to bed.

## Analysis

One point to note about this section is how content everyone is when Xander is around and how things fall apart when he is gone. This is in spite of the fact that he is not perfect. Alice makes a point of showing how imperfect he is. He offers to pick up Frank, but forgets. He disappears and then reappears. In addition, she finds Frank setting pieces of tissue on fire in the garage with Xander's blessings. Xander does not show up, or do any of the work for the surprise birthday party for Alice that he and Frank are supposed to be planning. Frank was so looking forward to him coming that he throws a tantrum when he is not there. Still, when he is there, she finds Mimi, Frank, and Xander all at the piano looking like a family. When Xander disappears Frank really misses him. "The sad part about this stretch of the story, after my birthday and before Christmas, was how much Frank missed" (156).

The family's treatment of Xander supports the theme that being perfect does not mean you will be loved. In contrast to Xander, Alice, who is perfect, does not receive the same love that Xander does. Frank prepares items for the party like the "elaborate fake candles...made of drinking straws fitted with crayon-drawn flames with glued-on sparkle" (154) more to impress Xander than for Alice. He tells Alice about his presentation, but he does not want her to come. Yet, he thinks that Xander will come and is looking forward to it. Frank and Mimi never include Alice the way they include Xander. She has to wait in the car, she is not privy to information, yet Xander sits at the piano, something that Alice cannot touch, like a member of the family. In fact, Mimi gets mad at Alice because Xander does not play the piano as often as he used to. Alice writes in her notebook, "Everything I do irritates Mimi" (159). She declares that was closer to the truth than the statement that "Everything irritates Mimi" (159). She goes to Frank's presentation, but that is not enough to help him finish it. Mimi does not even receive the painting Alice paints of Frank well. Instead of thanking her for it, she accuses Alice of taking everything that belongs to her.

This section also serves to further characterize Alice, Mimi, Frank, and Xander. Mimi has only two people in her life, Frank and Xander. Mimi probably suspects that something is going on between Xander and Alice. She does not say anything to Alice about it, but she does play with her by indicating that she has a romantic relationship with him. When Alice paints the essence of Frank, however, that is too much for her. Frank is all she has, and she is afraid of losing him.



For her part, Alice feeds her insecurities trying to show that she can do things better. Thus, even though she wonders whether Xander and Mimi had, or have, a romantic relationship, she sleeps with him. When Mimi does not go to the presentation, she goes to take her place.

More of Xander's mysterious past comes to light as well with the knowledge of the presence of another woman in his life, which continues to highlight what Alice thinks of as his imperfection.

Frank shows his creativity in the creation of the preparations for Alice's party. He also shows that like everyone else, he wants friends. In fact, he wants them so badly that he reaches out to Fiona, but continues to dream that the person he thought she was is his friend. He also looks for his parent in the audience like children do and feels disappointment when he does not see Mimi. When he talks about his father, readers can sense his feelings of abandonment: by a father he does not know, Xander and his mother. Thus, when he throws a tantrum when Xander does not come to the party, it is not because he is strange. It is because he has been abandoned once again. In this sense, Frank is like any other child. He simply expresses himself differently.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Frank pretend that Fiona is his friend? Why does he choose her instead of another child?

## Discussion Question 2

Does Alice want to take everything that is Mimi's? Is there a rivalry between the two of them? If so, what caused it? If not, why does Mimi think this?

## Discussion Question 3

Does Alice do the right thing by not falling into Xander's arms when she sees him? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

summoning, melodies, evolutionary, interim, ensconced, mimicked, vaguely, elaborate, execute, deluded, vigil, commission, irritates, surmised, entourage, coax, ovation, contemptuous, hoisted, jaundiced



## Section 5: Part 5 (Chapters 17-21)

### Summary

In Chapter 17, the rains end. Mimi's mood does not seem to improve with Xander around, and Alice stays away from him. Frank goes back to school. It is not long before the school calls Mimi due to an incident. This time, however, due to the arrival of a new principal, Dr. Matthews, Alice cannot get any information. Even Paula cannot talk to her. Frank cannot go back to school until Dr. Matthews speaks to Mimi. Mimi goes to talk to him and it turns out that Fiona bullied Frank, but the principal holds Mimi responsible because she allows Frank to be a target by the way he dresses. Alice overhears this. The ride back to the house does not go well as Mimi is aggressive as Alice tries to talk to her about what happened. She makes Alice stop the car and takes a cab home.

Later, at the house, she gives Alice her credit card to buy Frank t-shirts, jeans, and tennis shoes. The principal has said that if Frank cannot learn how to fit in, he will be kicked out of school. Alice protests, but Mimi is adamant. Frank has already been kicked out of a lot of other places. The next one may be worse than the present one.

Frank goes to school the next morning with the new clothes. He is not happy. Xander carries him to the car and rides with them to school. Alice suggests that he go alone with him saying that Frank will let that better, but Xander says that is ridiculous. He walks him in when they get there. When he returns he says that what is happening is not a good idea. He also says that Mimi is lucky that he could drop everything and come when she called. He wondered what she would do without him. Even though her book is not finished, Alice tells Mimi that she is leaving. Mimi tells her to go and laughs when Alice tells her that she has Xander so she does not need her.

In Chapter 18, Alice packs and is trying to write Isaac when her cell phone rings. She ignores it, but feels guilty and thinks that if Mimi needed her to pick up Frank, she would do it one last time. Then Xander comes in because he has found out that she is leaving. She tells him that they do not need her with him around. He asks if she had thought that he would miss her and he says that the others like her as well. She asks whether he is Frank's father, but he never really says whether he is or is not. When Alice says she is curious, he says that she is selfish and leaves.

Later Mimi says she needs her. Frank has had a seizure and is in the hospital. The school also suggests that Mimi get in touch with Alice, who they call her partner. On the way to the hospital, Mimi tells Alice about her brother. He had not been good at school and was a bit strange, but was good at baseball. She had done his homework for him and he had gone to college. The house was calm without him there and she liked it. She had gone to college and had never told anyone that she had a brother. He had shown up one day though and was upset because he needed his parent's signature to start playing baseball professionally. They would not sign because he has faked out of





college and they do not think it is the appropriate career for him. She had told him that he would be okay and returned to her book. He had humped out of the window in her dorm.

Alice and Mimi get to the emergency room even before the ambulance does.

In Chapter 19, Alice realizes that Frank is faking that he had a seizure. It turns out that the principal had called the ambulance even though his teacher had told him that it was not necessary. Alice talks to the paramedic about the situation. He suggests that Dr. Matthews wanted to teach Frank's mother a lesson. When Alice tells Mimi that Frank is okay, she goes back to work saying that she will see Frank at the house.

Frank notices that his mother is not there, and Alice says that she has gone to work on the book. Neither one of them wants to go back home, so they go to see an old movie. Alice walks out to call Isaac to tell him that Mimi has almost finished the book. He tells her that all she needed was patience. When they go back home, Alice finds Xander in her bed. He defends himself by saying that he thought she had left. She gets in bed with him and tells him about Frank. He stops her and says that Frank could not wear his armor today. He uses facts as protection.

In Chapter 20 Alice has a nightmare with Frank saying that he does not belong here and Mimi saying she is near the end. Xander wakes her up. She tells him to leave and that what happened and never happened.

Alice takes Frank to school, but when she finds out he has a knife, she takes him to the park instead. He got the knife from Mimi's office when she was asleep on the floor. Alice goes to see Dr. Abrams with Frank. She does not discuss much with her as she is not his mother. Afterwards, she takes Frank back to the playground and calls Paula. She calls back and says that the new principal does not like Frank and it would be best to find another school for him. Paula may not stay much longer herself.

Alice confides in Xander and they decide that they cannot bother Mimi with this now, so Frank will look like he is going to school, but all hang out until it is time for him to come home. Xander explains it all to Frank and handles the situation well.

One evening Alice asks Xander if he thinks that Mimi has almost finished the book. He does not give her a definite answer. Then she asks about his sister who died and he still does not give a definite answer. He gets up to play the piano. After the first day of the cutting of class, Xander disappears. Alice has to come up with excuses as to why she is with a child during school hours. One day, when they are going back to the house, they see a woman and her son are there. They give her a package from Xander. Alice looks at the boy. He looks just like Xander.

In Chapter 21, Alice puts the present in the garage and looks at one of the pictures Xander brought back with him. She sees the woman and the child in one of the pictures. Alice goes with Frank to get his birthday present. He asks what happened to the box from Xander. She distracts him by letting him play with the present she got him. He plays with it in the car and the roof gets stuck. Alice takes it in for an estimate and due





to the cost, decides that it can wait and they can put it in the garage as the rainy season was coming.

She asks Frank one day when his birthday is exactly and he tells her she knows. He says that his mother will take care of everything and that he wants a chocolate cake.

## Analysis

This section presents another view of how to deal with personalities like Frank's and raises the question of whether or not advanced degrees increase a person's level of social intelligence. Thus far, the characters have tended to tolerate Frank's behavior. Alice has tried to make him follow some rules, but in general they follow his. While doing so tires everyone else out, their treatment of him has allowed Frank to adopt a coping mechanism to move along in life thus far. He even manages in a place that he hates: school. There the teachers understand him and know how to deal with him. He has lunch with the school's secretary who loves him. It is a messy system as his actions disturb the other students at times and someone often has to come and pick him up before the school day is over, but he still moves forward. In fact, as Fiona's broken arm shows on the first day of school, he is not the only child who creates stress at the school.

All of this changes, however, when the new principal comes. Once he comes, Paula cannot tell Alice about what has happened to cause her to have to pick up Frank. Paula even uses official sounding language to tell her Alice what she cannot do. "Since you are not his custodial parent, I'm not allowed to release that information to you" (175). She then goes on to describe the principal, Dr. Matthews, in a whisper as she is expressing her real view now. "He's big on protocol and accountability. Insists we call him Dr. Mathews because he has a PH.D. in child development. Doesn't have kids on his own, so he's an authority. In his opinion anyway" (175). His method, of blaming Frank and Mimi for making Frank a target for a bully causes an unnecessary trip to the hospital and incites Frank to take a letter opener to school for protection. If he had not told Alice that he had it, the consequences could have been much worse. In addition, it interrupts Frank's school education. His technique also causes competent people like Paula, who really care about the children to consider quitting.

He, like Mimi before she had Frank, and Alice, imagines how to deal with children. He thinks he knows best. It is much harder to live in a situation that you have only imagined before, though. His treatment of Frank is in direct contrast to the way the security guard in the museum responds to him. Frank also falls on the ground in front of the security guard. He worries that Frank may be having a seizure, but when he finds out that he is not, he attributes his actions to the fact that boys will be boys, advises Alice to not be so hard on him, and then goes on to describe Frank as smart and polite. He thinks there should be more children like him. Even the paramedic knows more about what is going on with Frank than the principal. "That guy's a tool. Stood over the kid, saying 'You have a seizure, we call an ambulance and you go to the hospital. That's how things work in the real world, my friend' Like that's any way to teach a kid a lesson. Give an eight-year



-old boy a chance to cut class, run red lights, and blast a siren? What kid says no to that?" (195) Readers cannot help but think that once his support team is gone, Dr. Matthews will learn that a PH.D. in child development may let one put children in categories, but it does not help one deal with them in real life.

This section also further characterizes Alice when Xander slaps the label of "selfish" on her. On the surface, this label fits. She is only thinking of herself when she decides to leave before Mimi has finished writing the book. Not only is she not thinking of the people in the household, she is also not thinking of Isaac who is depending on her. In reality though, it is the insecurities of youth and her life that cause her to behave as she does. She has been abandoned and she needs love and to feel as if others care about her even though she tries to hide it. At one point, she sees Mimi with Frank and says that he needs her love more than she does. She decides to leave because like Frank, her circuits become overloaded. Alice feels that Mimi does not appreciate her. "There's someone else, someone blonder, prettier, and more popular" (184). She literally cannot operate in an atmosphere in which she does not feel appreciated. That is why she never could bring herself to follow her degree in accounting. Instead, she settled for jobs that were beneath her. In essence, she was a big fish in a little pond. She has to feel good about herself, or at least that she is responsible for something (even if it is something negative) in order to operate. She realizes this fault in herself, though, and that is why she cannot write Isaac. It is also why she does not go back to New York yet. Her journey is not over. Alice has more to learn.

## Discussion Question 1

Whom do you think is to blame in the Fiona/Frank incident? Support your answer.

## Discussion Question 2

What does Alice's decision to leave before the book is done say about her character?

## Discussion Question 3

What is your opinion of Alice's and Xander's decision to let Frank skip school? Support your answer.

## Vocabulary

custodial, countered, sanctimonious, rhythmically, pivotal, disruptive, hamstrung, spectacular, ensemble, sheath, embossed, intense, sane, nuisance, expelling, predicament, sage, hiatus, abbreviated, concentration



## Section 6: Part 6 (Chapters 22-29)

### Summary

In Chapter 22, Frank wakes Alice up on his birthday. He has driven the car into the garage because it was raining and set it and the Dream House on fire with the Roman candles in the box that Xander had sent him for his birthday. The fire gets put out, but Mimi has to go to the hospital. It turns out that she has finished the book and wants to try and save it. Frank tells her that Alice is also writing a book and she finds out that Alice has been taking notes to send to Isaac. Xander gets in trouble for driving without a license. Later, a delivery comes for Frank and Alice realizes that the code for the gate is Frank's birthday. She thinks that the book burned in the fire.

In Chapter 23, Alice pretends that Mimi is her mother so that she can get information about her from the hospital. They want to keep her under observation in the psychiatric ward due to her family and personal history. Isaac comes to LA the day Mimi goes into the hospital in spite of a blizzard in New York. When he arrives Frank first falls on the ground because of Alice's rush to his car and then asks him to leave in spite of the fact that Isaac gives him a present that he likes.

On the third day of Mimi's being in the hospital, Frank and Alice go to pick her up. He will not let Isaac go along and makes Alice stand between him and Isaac when they are together. When they get there, they find out that Mimi has already checked herself out, disappointing Frank and spawning questions as to why she had not forewarned Alice. Frank looks for Mimi when they return to the house. She is not there now, but he deduces that she was probably there when Isaac was out or vacuuming because there is evidence that she came and took things, even the portrait Alice painted of Frank. She left her cell phone thought so she could not be contacted.

After Alice puts Frank to bed, she and Isaac talk. He is not worried about Mimi's current situation because she has done this type of thing before and he thinks that Alice has done her job, but he implies that he never asked Alice to keep notes. Isaac is not worried about Frank because he was an odd kid too and made it. He is worried about Mimi in general, but he would be more worried if she did not have Frank. The question of Frank's guardian comes up and it turns out that it is Isaac, something that he has just discovered himself.

In Chapter 24, Frank is not worried about where Mimi is because he thinks that Isaac knows, even though Isaac denies having this knowledge. Instead, he wants to find Xander and suggests that they call Sara. They do and find out that Xander has told Alice some things that are not quite true and Sara tells them where they can find Xander. He plays the piano at a department store. Isaac goes along after he gains Frank's interest by telling him that his morning hair style is "the Albert Einstein." Frank dresses him and they all go to the department store together on the bus. When they get there, Frank talks about shopping, but then he hears the piano. Xander is there



introducing his sister Sara and his nephew Alec. As soon as he sees Alice he runs and the old ladies that he runs between check to make sure they still have their handbags. Frank runs after him and Isaac understands that Alice has to run after Frank.

In Chapter 25, Alice saves Frank from getting hit by a bus. Then Xander comes and comforts Frank. Xander disappears again to get a cab. As they get ready to go, Frank reminds them that they are leaving Isaac behind. They go to pick him up. When they get to the house, Frank takes Isaac inside, and Alice stays outside to talk to Xander. With her help, he realizes that he is too old to behave the way he does and says that he is going to reform. Alice has him prove it by telling her the story of his other sister who died in a car accident because he was teaching her how to do a 360 degree skid. He was driving, and she died. His parents had never forgiven him, but his sister Sara had forgiven him. Sara even named her son after him. Her husband did not like him much though, so he did not stay around for long. He goes into more detail on how he had met Mimi and leaves.

Alice goes in and Isaac is sleeping. Frank has his bow and arrow suction cup on his eyelid. She fixes him dinner and carries him to bed after he falls asleep on the couch. She is about to go to bed when Frank gets up. She asks him to play the song they were listening to when they first met. He does and he tells her that he misses his mother, talks about her leaving, and, when she tells him that she loves him he says that he loves her, too. Afterwards he asks her why his mother named the only female character in her book Alice and none of them Frank even though she has known him longer.

In Chapter 26, Frank gives Alice Mimi's book. He had found it by accident and had taken the box, thus saving it from the fire. Alice reads the opening and then takes it to Isaac. He flips through the manuscript and has to splash his face with cold water to make sure he is not dreaming. Alice goes to check on Frank and realizes that she is not as careful as she had always thought she was and that maybe someone other than Frank, Isaac, or her mother would love her. That evening she discovers that an anonymous donor who really did send unmanned probes to Mars was the man Mimi had picked to be Frank's father.

In Chapter 27, Alice goes to copy Mimi's manuscript and send it to New York. When she gets back she finds Isaac looking at all of Mimi's manuscripts that she had written, but never sent in for publishing. Frank had saved them. They do not read them though because they would need her permission to do so. Frank talks about how he misses his mother. He continues to talk and Alice thinks that he has spoken to her, but the information he knows is from a note she left in *Le Petit Prince*. Alice gets Frank to show it to them. It says that she needs a month alone and if there is an emergency Isaac will know where to find her.

In Chapter 28, Isaac tells Mimi that her book did not burn in the fire. She packs up, and they go to the house. Frank asks her why she had not named one of her characters Frank. She says that she just used names that popped up in her head and had planned to change them later. His name did not pop up because it is always there. Isaac wants to know what happens to the little boy at the end and she says she wished she knew.



In Chapter 29, as the novel ends, Alice is getting ready to leave. Isaac says that he will follow in a day or two. Frank gives her the chocolate heart he had bought for her when they had gone to pick Mimi up. They go and bury it outside, as it will not fit in her suitcase.

Xander, whom Frank has called to say Alice is leaving, shows up. As Frank has figured out how to contact Xander, Alice thinks that Frank will be okay. If not, then worrying about something that she cannot control is a waste of time. They offer to go to the airport with her in a cab, but she says she can go alone. As they talk, Frank gives her his pocket square saying that he thinks she may need it. Alice tells Frank that she is proud of him, and he says that he knows she is and she should be.

## Analysis

The last section of the novel's primary function is to tie up loose ends. This section does that by allowing Alice to piece together the mysterious pieces of Xander's life, discover the identity of Frank's father, and find out what is in Mimi's book. Isaac also takes on the role of Frank's guardian.

As it turns out, the mysterious woman in Xander's life is his sister and the child who looks so much like him is his nephew, Alec. The previous misconceptions about the mysterious woman and the child show how wrong and dangerous labels can be. Alice has labeled Sara as Xander's romantic interest. Then, when she sees Alec she thinks that his is Xander's son because he looks so much like him.

Xander explains why he thinks he fits the "disappointment" label when he tells Alice about his sister's death. This is the event that causes him to act the way he does because his parents abandoned him after the accident. Xander's story supports the theme that parents have a responsibility toward their children and things go wrong with their children when the parents do not own up to it. In Xander's case, he has become a disappointment because that is what his parents have labelled him. The only person who keeps him afloat on some level is Sara, his sister. She honors the responsibility family members have for each other.

Xander's story shows how much he has in common with Mimi which has a lot to do with why she connected with him. Both carry the burden of the death of their sibling. While Xander did not intend to kill his sister, he acted in an irresponsible manner and caused her death. He physically went to prison for his actions and even though the State and his younger sister have forgiven him, he still suffers because his parents have abandoned him.

In Mimi's case, she did not physically push her brother out of the window, but she did not own up to her responsibility for him when he needed her. She goes to a mental prison. Her mother rejects her when she writes *Pitched*, saying that the family had suffered enough. Like Xander, Mimi's actions afterwards are based on the fact that her mother abandons her. She buys the most expensive house on the market in Los



Angeles even though it is a glass house and she wants privacy. She stays there, even though she hates the house, to spite her mother. She probably married her ex-husband because he was someone her mother never thought she could catch with her homely looks. The marriage ends, though, and Mimi does not publish any more books. In this sense she is also like Xander. He gives up his piano career and she seems to give up writing. However, like Xander, who still plays the piano on the side, Mimi still writes. These are the manuscripts that Frank gives to Isaac.

Both Xander and Mimi have enormous talent, but their scars, both physically and mentally, keep them from finding happiness by using them.

Alice's curiosity causes her to discover that Frank's real father is a sperm donor who really did work on projects related to the mission to Mars. That is why Frank tells such stories about his father and that is why Mimi cannot contact him when there are problems. Thus, Frank's father has not abandoned him.

Regarding Mimi's book, readers do not know much about its contents, but it once again seems to be a slice of real life. Now that she has Frank, perhaps Mimi sees Julian in a different light and maybe she is coming to terms with his life and his death because this time she gives him a name.

In this section, readers can see the growth of the characters. Frank leads the way in finding Mimi and takes taxis with people even though they are not his mother. Alice begins to use powers of deduction like Frank does to help find Mimi. She also learns that it is a waste of time to try to control things that you cannot control. Xander opens up and realizes that he has to grow up, Mimi connects with Isaac and Isaac now has new meaning in his life through Mimi and Frank.

It is interesting to note that Frank's progression comes with the tender pushing of Xander. He is able to coax Frank into doing things that he would not do before because he is a big boy now. Frank's world has widened with other actors involved and now he is willing to try new things. He is also older now. In addition he has seen the consequences of not trying to fit in on some level. He has even wanted to hide the fact that he has had to come home early from his mother because he does not want to worry her. By the end of the narrative he is ready to let go of his rules and participate in the real world. This fact raises the question as to whether or not there is a medium road when dealing with personalities like his. Previously everyone has given in to his ways. Then Dr. Matthews takes the complete opposite approach and tries to make him conform by using a "cold turkey" method. What seems to work with Frank best, however, is a middle road approach. It is a win-win proposition because it makes life easier for the adults around him and it benefits Frank as it gives him a guide to navigate the real world - the same type of guide he used before with movies.

The end of the novel signals the end of Alice's journey that took her to Wonderland. She has learned that being perfect does not mean one will be loved. In fact, imperfection is what attracts love and affection. She now knows that someone can love her. It is okay to let go of control. The world will not come to an end if you do and it is a waste of time to



worry about things that you cannot control. She has grown and is ready to go home. Isaac stays because it is time for him to go on his own journey.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Mimi leaves the hospital before Alice and Frank can pick her up?

## Discussion Question 2

Alice tells Isaac that she has taken the notes he told her to take, and he replies that he never told her to take any notes. Alice thinks that she has to take notes due to something Isaac says at the beginning of the novel, "Take care of Mimi. Take notes" (26). However, she never finds out what he means by his statement. What do you think Isaac meant?

What is an explanation for Alice's interpretation?

## Discussion Question 3

Alice, Mimi, Frank, and Xander do things at the end of the novel that they would not have done earlier. Who changes the most? Support your opinion.

## Vocabulary

incendiary, converging, lectern, barricades, sequestration, confrontational, monotone, forlorn, canvassed, reconvened, unequivocally, olfactory, hiatus, requisite, gumshoe, grappling, itinerant, materialized, absolution





# Characters

## Alice Whitley

Alice is the novel's narrator. She works for Isaac and goes to Mimi's to help with things while Mimi writes her book. She takes care of Frank during her time there, becoming what she calls a "proxy Mimi" and is often being mistaken by strangers for Frank's mother. She has an affair with Xander. At the end of the novel, she returns to New York. As the narrator, she is the one who unwinds everyone's stories for the readers.

Alice is from the Midwest and is organized and competent, yet she is also insecure. She talks about her mother a lot, but her mother is dead. Her father left the family when she was 8 years old. She is lost, working at dead-end jobs until Isaac finds her. When she goes to Mimi's, she expects to sweep in and take charge. She is met by a situation that is unreal for her when she passes through Mimi's gate.

When there are problems, Alice likes to give advice on how to solve them and says that everything will work out. Mimi hates this attitude because that is what she had said to her brother right before he committed suicide. Alice also tries to be perfect, but Mimi does not like that either. She tells her that being perfect is not going to make people love her, and Alice craves love. Even though she finds it amazing that people think that she is Frank's mother, she tries to act like she is, often racing with Mimi to get to him when he has a problem and being offended when she is shut out because she is not Frank's parent. She also sleeps with Xander even before she knows what his relationship is with Mimi. She always digs for information. She says she is curious, but Xander calls her selfish, which she is. She almost leaves because she is jealous of Xander's relationship with Frank and how the household changes when he is there. Everyone laughs in a way she had not been able to make them do.

Alice grows throughout the novel. She realizes that she should not worry about things she cannot control. Her need to play it safe and be in control may have come about due to the fact that her father abandoned the family and her mother died unexpectedly. She learns to let her hair down, literally, in the Dream House. By the end of the novel, she realizes that other people can love her. She also understands how her mother could have married her father due to her own attraction to Xander. Alice has completed her journey. She is ready to go back to New York at the end of the novel.

## Frank

Frank is the novel's protagonist. Though Alice is the narrator, Frank drives the action in the novel. He is Mimi's son, Xander is his friend and piano teacher, and Isaac is his guardian. Alice comes to help take care of him while Mimi writes her book.

Frank represents children who are different and/or who may be ahead of their time. He is extremely smart and his high level of intelligence causes him to act in ways that some





people label as weird. The narration often makes comparisons between him and geniuses, indicating that he may just be misunderstood in the same way these people were during their childhood. Xander and the security guard at the museum tell Alice to let him be. He is just a boy behaving as boys do. When Isaac meets him, he says that he will be okay and explains how he was also different when he was a child. Even Frank cannot explain why he does what he does, which sometimes makes readers wonder if his actions are just learned behaviors to help cope in a world where he does not fit in. Xander says that facts are his armor, and Alice says the same thing about his clothes.

Frank's education comes from old Hollywood movies, and he feels that he does not belong at school. He is right about that. The staff tries to work with him, and they manage in their own way until a new principal comes who has book knowledge, but no knowledge of human beings. The principal tries to make Frank conform.

Frank does begin to fit in with society a bit more by the end of the novel. He makes friends with Isaac. He is willing to take a taxi without his mother. He tells Alice that he loves her. Readers still do not know whether he is going to be able to make use of his abilities, but the book ends on a positive tone. Xander promises to be there for him. Mimi has written her book, so their financial situation is stable, and he has a responsible guardian in Isaac.

## **Mimi (M.M. Banning)**

Mimi is a recluse writer who wrote a best seller when she was 19 years old. The book became a classic. Isaac was her editor for the novel, and she calls him again when she needs to write another book to make money after being the victim of a dishonest investor. Mimi is Frank's mother, and Xander is her friend. She has a rocky relationship with Alice.

Mimi's relationship with Alice stems from her own history. When Mimi was young, she had been the perfect one. She had done well in school and had covered for her brother by doing his homework. He was eccentric, but she did not see him as her responsibility and had not recognized how much he needed her help. Her attitude that everything would work out fine was proved wrong. For that reason, Mimi hates seeing Alice with the same attitude. Mimi has lived through that same attitude's consequences. Her mother was not proud of her for the success of her book. After that, she did things to spite her mother.

Frank, however, is the biggest payback for how she treated her brother as he has similar issues. This time, she cannot put a book in her face and say that everything will be okay. Frank is her responsibility. She is all he has and he is all she has. She takes her responsibility seriously. She loves Frank and lets her love show in spite of being grumpy with everyone else.

Her grumpy attitude though, is not only due to how things have turned out in her life but it is also her armor. She lets it down a few times and then she is nice to Alice. It rises



again when Alice thinks she has finally made progress in becoming friends with Mimi. Mimi is also insecure when it comes to Alice. She worries that Frank will love Alice more than he loves her and that she will take Xander away, even though she does not have a romantic relationship with Xander. Frank is all she has and while she cannot count on Xander, Frank loves him and he is helpful when he is there.

Mimi and Xander share a similar history, and Xander thinks this is why they have connected with each other.

## Xander

Xander is the handyman Mimi mentions when Alice first arrives at the house. He is also Frank's piano teacher and a good friend of the family. Alice has a short, romantic relationship with him. He has a key to the house and stays there when he is around. He had studied at Juilliard, but he had to stop due to a car accident. This accident changed his life in many ways because he was driving the car that killed his sister. His parents had not forgiven him, but his younger sister Sara, has. He has a nephew, Alec, whom she named after him.

Xander is a nice man, who understands Mimi. Frank looks to him as a father figure, but Xander is still childish and irresponsible. He lets Frank play dangerous games with fire. His birthday present to Frank causes the fire at the end of the novel. He literally bolts from responsibility and avoids connecting with people by not telling them about his life. At the same time, he is there for Mimi when she has Frank. By the end of the novel, Xander vows to grow up. He promises Frank that he will be there when he needs him.

Xander acts as if he is sad to see Alice leave, but Alice realizes that he is not the type of man she needs, The two of them getting together would reenact the story of her mother and father. Her father left when she was 8 years old. Xander does serve a purpose in Alice's life. He gets her to the Dream House where she lets her hair down. He also makes her think about her motives and what she wants in life. Finally, she now understands how her mother fell for her father.

Like Frank, Xander has "too much" of something. In Xander's case, he has looks, charm, and talent. He wastes his talent and uses his good looks and charm to get by in life. He never aspires to make anything of himself because he thinks that he is a loser due to his sister's death.

Xander has a lot in common with Mimi in that his life has not turned out as he thought it would when he was younger, his parents do not talk to him, and he was there when his sister died. In his case he physically caused the death of his sibling while Mimi figuratively contributed to the death of her brother.



## Isaac Vargas

Isaac is Alice's boss, Mimi's editor, and Frank's guardian. He is a widower and has a daughter about Alice's age. He saves Alice from a dead-end job by hiring her as his assistant. In addition to being her boss, he also acts like a father figure to her. He serves as the rock that stabilizes everyone. Mimi calls him when she needs help and she had the foresight to name him her son's guardian.

Helping Mimi, Alice, and Frank also helps him. His daughter is away living her own life. His wife, with whom he had thought he would grow old, has recently died. Until Mimi called with news about her book, he thought that he might lose his job as his company had been recently bought by a larger conglomerate. Serving as the rock gives him purpose, and he jumps to the occasion. He does not see Frank as strange. In fact, he thinks Frank reminds him of himself when he was young, and it is not long before Frank views him as a friend.

## Fiona

Fiona is a new girl at Frank's school. Frank likes her and tries to be friends with her. She rejects him, but he still tells Mimi and Alice that she is his new friend. In essence, she is his imaginary friend.

She is, however, just like all of the people who do not understand Frank and bullies him. As she behaves as someone who is trying to find her place in the hierarchy of the playground, Dr. Matthews does not blame her for her actions. Instead, he blames Frank for not conforming.

## Dr. Matthews

The arrival of the new principal, Dr. Matthews, at Frank's school makes everything worse for him. Dr. Matthews has a PH.D. However, he does not understand the psychology of children. Also, he does not understand Frank or anyone like him. He kicks a second grader out of school, defends Fiona's bullying of Frank, and blames Mimi for letting Frank express his style, thus putting him in a position for someone to bully him. He also disrupts a system that has worked well thus far by not letting Paula talk to Alice about what is going on. Dr. Matthews' reaction to Frank sets off a chain of events that cause Frank to play hooky. As he does not understand Frank, he does not like him. He does not like Mimi either because she stands up to him.

Dr. Matthews' behavior toward Frank is in direct contrast to the security guard's at the museum and shows that education does not indicate intelligence. The security guard understands Frank and appreciates him while the principal simply wants to extinguish any signs of nonconformity to what he has learned from books.



## Paula and Miss Peppe

Paula is the secretary at Frank's school, and Miss Peppe is his teacher. Both of them understand Frank and work with him the best they can until the new principal comes and bounds them to rules that do not function well for the children in the school.

When Alice has to pick Frank up on the first day of school because he is blocking the classroom exit, Miss Peppe explains to Alice what causes him to do what he has done and says that his third grade teacher had warned her that it could happen. She cannot pick him up though because of school rules. They are not allowed to move him.

Paula has a lot to deal with regarding other children who behave strangely in different ways, like Fiona who breaks her arm on the first day of school. When the new principal comes, Paula shows that she does not agree with Dr. Matthews' way of doing things and says that she might be leaving the school.

## Sara

Sara is Xander's sister and the mother of Xander's nephew, Alec. Before Alice finds this out, she thinks that Xander is having some type of romantic relationship with Sara and that Alec is Xander's child because he looks so much like him.

Xander goes to stay with Sara at times when he disappears. She does not blame him for the death of their sister. Actually, she named her son Alexander, after him, to prove it.

## Security Guard at Museum

When Alice and Frank are at the museum, a security guard comes to see whether he can help after Frank falls to the ground. The incident makes Alice nervous at first. She is angry with Frank for the way he is behaving, but the guard, instead of being mad, is helpful and takes the attitude that what Frank has done is just a boy being a boy. In other words, it is nothing out of the ordinary. He and Frank talk about the fabric of his uniform. Thinking that Alice is Frank's mother, the guard compliments her on Frank and says that she needs to have more kids like him. In fact, the world does. He sees Frank as being smart and polite.

The guard's comments show that while even Mimi has labelled Frank as "weird" and the new principal at the school blames Frank, not Fiona, for the incident on the playground, Frank is only wired in the context that he does not conform in certain situations and has built barriers to protect himself from harm. In fact, it could be that everyone else needs to catch up with him.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Alice's Name

Alice's name symbolizes two things. First of all, the meaning of the name is "of the nobility." When Alice first arrives, she acts as if she is above everyone else by telling them what to do. This makes Frank's telling her that she is hired help and that she should stay in the car ironic and a blow to her self-image.

Alice is also the name of the main character of the novel, *Alice in Wonderland*, and the situations of the two "Alices" are similar. Both go through an entrance that takes them into a different world than the one they came from - a world that is much crazier. In the end, they tell their story and leave others to discover it for themselves. In the novel, Alice leaves Isaac, and Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* leaves her sister.

## The Gate at Mimi's House

Gates represent an entrance into the unknown. When Alice enters the gate that separates Mimi's house from the outside world, she is entering a world that is unknown to her.

## Alice's Hair

Alice's hair is the one extravagance that she allows herself to have. Her hair symbolizes her insecurity and her need to appear in control. She keeps distractions out of the way, and she calls her hair a distraction. Thus, she keeps it braided. When she relaxes, she literally lets her hair down. Her thoughts about it show how insecure she is because she calls it the best thing about her. It is almost like it gives her strength and that without it she is nothing.

Long blond hair also symbolizes youth which is in contrast to Mimi's hair, which Mimi cuts.

## Los Angeles

Los Angeles represents a place without boundaries. It symbolizes Frank's imagination.

## New York

New York represents order and business as normal. This is the place Alice misses due to what it symbolizes.



## **Mimi's Glass House**

Mimi's glass house symbolizes the narrative itself. One can see inside such a house. In essence this is the same as a book which reveals what is going on in the mind of the writer and this narrative as Alice peers into the lives of the different characters.

## **The Dream House**

The Dream House symbolizes the perfect house with a perfect family unit: a mother, a father, and a child. This is Alice's dream house, and it is here that she is with Xander and Frank, without Mimi.

## **Fire**

As a symbol in this novel, fire has two sides. One is purification and the other is destruction. Fire destroys the Dream House and damages the glass house. However, out of all of this comes people who are more complete.

## **Alice's Flights**

Alice takes two journeys in the novel. One is to Los Angeles where she learns about herself. Once the lesson is complete, she returns home.

## **The Apron Isaac Wears**

Aprons symbolize work and craftsmanship. In the novel, it is Isaac, not the women, who wears the apron in the house because he is the one who is able to craft confidence in the characters.



# Settings

## New York

Alice works in a publishing house in New York. She got the job because she is good with computers. She fits in well in the world of business, which New York represents. Like a computer, Alice is competent and careful. New York represents order, business, and a type of logic that Alice does not experience in Los Angeles. Toward the end of the narrative, Alice says that she has been in Los Angeles for too long and it is time to leave.

## Los Angeles

Los Angeles is where Mimi, Frank, and Xander live and it is where Alice must go to help Mimi while she works on her book. It is a place where people go when they are young to find fame and end up spending more time than they had originally planned. Before they know it, they are much older. Alice realizes that she has been in Los Angeles long enough and needs to leave.

Los Angeles is also the perfect place for Frank. Through its old movies and museums, Frank gets the type of education he needs in order to learn how to get on in the world. He learns mannerisms from the actors. He also receives validation for his own behavior through historical characters who were also not like other children when they were young.

Los Angeles is also a place without boundaries where one can find almost anything. Frank can probably find some way to create the script for his own life in Los Angeles.

## Mimi's House

Mimi lives in a glass house which contrasts to her wish for privacy. The fact that she chose it demonstrates how angry she was with the world at the time. She bought it because it was the most expensive house on the market. She did not even think about the fact that it was glass. It exposes her to the very people from which she wants to hide. She keeps it because she does not want to prove her mother right, showing that she still has a chip on her shoulder.

## Frank's School

Frank's school is a place where he feels that he does not belong. When he is there he exists in a world where he does not know how to operate. He is not like the other children. His teachers understand him, but his actions are still too much for them. Often,



he must leave school early. The situation gets worst when the new principal comes. He orders Frank to reform or be kicked out of school. Frank tries, but he cannot do it.

## The Dream House

The Dream House is the name Alice gives to the space above the garage. This is where she has her affair with Xander. It is also the place where she paints. For Alice, it is a dream house because it is the place where she can literally let her hair down and be herself without inhibition. It is also the place where Frank gets to do things that he does not get to do in the glass house, like play with fire.

## Museums

Frank likes to go to museums. It is at a museum that a security guard shows readers that Frank is special, but in a good way. The guard says that there should be more like Frank. The guard describes Frank as smart and polite. This is in direct contrast to the new principal at his school who thinks that Frank is a problem and needs to conform to the others, like Fiona. Frank is more at home and accepted in the museum because it is the home of artists - people like Frank.





## Themes and Motifs

### **It is much harder to live in a situation that you previously have only imagined.**

Mimi is a writer. She imagines worlds and creates actions and endings. Doing so in one's mind is one thing. Actually living the situation is different. Xander tells Alice that Mimi does not hate her. She hates the fact that her life has turned out differently from what she had imagined. As readers get to know Mimi better, the truth behind Xander's statement becomes apparent.

Mimi tells Alice, "I always thought my mother was a fool. Then I had Frank" (187). Mimi had always imagined that she would be a better mother than her mother had been. She thought that she knew her brother, Julian, better than her mother did and she thought that she was helping him when she did his homework for him and that everything would work out. It did not though. Now that she has Frank, a child who is similar to Julian, she understands what her mother had to go through. Now she, like her mother, is always tired. She had to deal with the child who is "different from other kids" (188). When she says, "He'd outgrow being an oddball someday; or he'd be so famous for something that no one would care about his awkwardness anymore" (188) she is talking about Julian, but it could just as easily be a description of Frank.

Life also does not turn out as she had imagined when her book became a success. Instead of praising it, her mother had gotten mad at her for writing it. She had "gotten back" at her mother by marrying a movie star, something their kind of people did not do. In addition, her mother would never expect that of Mimi. "Mimi, bless her heart, was such a homely, frowny-faced runt that nobody would ever want her. She'd have to get a job" (190). For her mother, getting a job was not a good thing. Yet, even though Mimi proves her wrong and she has fame and fortune, living that life causes her to buy a glass house that she does not like and gives her fanatic fans whom she hides from.

Alice also discovers this to be true for her life. Throughout the book, she says that things would never happen to her. No one would ever swindle her money as they had done with Mimi's money. She had never been kicked out of school. In addition, like Mimi, she thought that her mother was a fool for having married her father. Xander shows her, though, how one could easily fall for a charming, handsome man. She also realizes that she is not as careful as she had imagined. It is easy to imagine that you will always know best and that you are careful until you are in unexpected situations. She finds it hard to implement these traits in the eccentric world of Frank and Mimi.



## People often develop coping mechanisms to help deal with life.

Alice, Frank, Mimi, and Xander are similar in that they have all developed coping mechanisms to deal with stress, anger, and loss in their lives. Alice loved her mother, but her mother dies unexpectedly when Alice is in college. Her mother's death has such a strong influence on Alice that it changes her view of the novel, *Pitched*. When she first reads the novel she had criticized it in spite of the fact that it was her mother's favorite book. "My poor mother. Her favorite book trashed by her only child" (11.) After her mother's death, she says that the book tore her apart. "I'd cried my eyes out when I finished" (12). The unexpected death of her mother causes this change in perspective. Add to this the fact that her father left when she was 8 years old, when her mother dies, she puts up a protective shell. She tries to protect herself from unexpected bad things happening to her by being careful to the point that some see her as boring. Bad things like Mimi losing her money would not happen to her. She would not fall for a cad like her mother had done with her father. She is the rational, sane, and competent one. She even keeps the one crazy, extravagant thing about her, her hair, braided. With this shield around her, she really does think that everything will turn out great if you just apply yourself.

Mimi has put up a shield of being tough and mean. Her shield forms after numerous disappointments in life. Her brother commits suicide in front of her, her mother rejects her and her book, she finds fame and fortune only to have her marriage end in divorce, her money is swindled away, and she has a child who is similar to her brother.

Frank has also experienced loss because he never knew his father. His mother does not talk about him and there are no pictures of him. He does not know that his father was a donor at a sperm bank. Sandwiched between his feelings of abandonment, Mimi's desire to stay away from people, and her crazy fans, it is no wonder that he has found his own ways to cope with life. He uses his style and facts as armor.

Xander copes with the death of his sister by fulfilling the view his parents have of him after the car accident. He is a disappointment. He plays the charming, good looking drifter role because he is afraid that if he stays around for too long, or commits to something, he will indeed be a disappointment. So, he leaves before this can happen and fulfills the prophecy. He becomes a disappointment by leaving.

In reality though, none of these people are like this. Alice is insecure and wants love. She finally does let her hair down. She learns to let go and that she cannot control outcomes. Mimi has love, which she shows to Frank and from time to time, she is nice to Alice. Xander is a nice guy. He was there for Frank's birth and is there for him when he needs him. Frank wants friends his age. This is why he tries to be friends with Fiona.



## **Labels and judgements can be demeaning, misleading, and wrong.**

The Prologue sets the stage for Frank's behavior. Readers realize that he is not like other children his age. Everyone judges Frank as being different, but he is never diagnosed with a specific disability. This fact supports the theme that labels and judgements can be demeaning, misleading and wrong. Everyone has something about them that is different. Isaac realizes this and says, "He's an odd duck, but brilliant children often are. It may take him a while, but someday he'll figure out how to live in the world or ordinary mortals" (241). He later tells Alice that he was also different from other children when he was young. He had turned out to have a successful career, a loving wife, and a daughter. Now he was even the one supporting everyone else.

While others judging Frank to be different was in many ways demeaning, misleading, and wrong, giving Frank a diagnosis would have hindered his development. He would have been put in a category and treated accordingly when, in fact, he is only different from other children in his level of intelligence. He is trying to find his place in the world just as Fiona is trying to find her place in a new school. The only difference is that her actions can be put in a category.

When characters give people labels in the novel, they tend to be wrong. People think that Alice is Frank's mother. They also think that Alice is Mimi's partner. In college, Alice said that people may have thought she was boring, but she was the one they always came to for help. The nurse calls Mimi "Frank's grandmother," and Alice thinks that Sara is Xander's romantic interest.

At times, people become their labels. People label Xander as a disappointment. and this label makes him one. The more people call Alice Xander's mother, the more she starts to behave like one, often racing with Mimi to his side and thinking that she has the right to as much information about him as Mimi does.

## **Family members have a responsibility to each other.**

Family members have a responsibility to each other. Furthermore, there are consequences when family members do not live up to that responsibility. Mimi and Xander feel guilty because they did not take responsibility for the lives of their siblings. The outcome causes their respective parents to abandon them, creating even more pain for each of them. Alice and Frank suffer from feelings of being abandoned by a family member.

One of things that brings Mimi and Xander together is their similar family history. Both of them carry the burden of the death of their respective siblings. Xander showed a lack of responsibility for his sister when he drove recklessly and had an accident that killed her. While his sister Sara, forgave him, his parents never did. By not doing so, they abandoned him. Abandonment by a parent has negative impacts on their children.



Xander is a drifter due to the fact that his parents abandoned him. He thinks that if he stays around for too long, he will disappoint people. It is interesting that his sister takes her responsibility as a family member and shows Xander love and support. She even names her son after him.

While Mimi did not physically push her brother out the window, she did so in a figurative sense. He already felt as if his parents had abandoned him. They did not understand him and wanted him to be something he could not be. The only person who did understand him, or so he thought, was Mimi. Yet when he arrives at her dorm, he finds out that nobody even knows that she has a brother. In her mind, he was not her responsibility. It had been a relief when he had gone to college and now she was on her own. Any type of responsibility Mimi had toward him ended when they left home. That is not how it works with families. Her brother comes to her because, as a family member, she has a level of responsibility for him just as Sara has a level of responsibility for Xander. When Mimi dodges hers, her brother commits suicide right in front of her. She is so far removed from him that she does not even realize it at the time it happens.

As part of Mimi's healing process after her brother dies, Mimi writes a book. Her mother rejects it. By rejecting the book, she also rejects Mimi. What should have been a time of coming together becomes a time of abandonment. As a result, Mimi becomes mad at the world and does stupid things like buying the glass house because it is the most expensive one on the market and staying in it to defy her mother.

Neither Alice nor Frank have their biological fathers in their lives. Alice's father abandoned her when she was 8 years old. This leads to her being careful, orderly, and insecure when it comes to the belief that she can find love. Frank thinks that his father abandoned him. This contributes to his behavior and the need to protect himself from the world. He also feels that Xander, whom he loves, abandons him. Once Xander is there for him, he begins to grow up. Some of his different habits, like only riding in a taxi with his mother, disappear,

## **Perfection and fame do not bring love and success.**

When Mimi decides to let Alice in on a secret, she brings to the forefront one of the novel's themes. She tells her, "I'll let you in on a little secret, Alice. Being perfect doesn't make people love you" (180). Mimi knows this because she was perfect, but that did not elicit her mother's love. When compared to her brother, she was the perfect one. In fact, she was the one who did his homework. Yet, when he commits suicide, her mother gets angry at her for writing a book based on him. The book is a best seller and this does not help. It is made into an academy award winning movie and she marries the lead actor, but the perfect author life that she has achieved does not save her from divorce. In the end, she does not remarry, have Frank and live happily ever after. She chooses Frank's father from a sperm bank and even though she tries to be the perfect mother for him, when she tells him that she loves him at the hospital, he does not respond.



Xander tells Alice that she is perfect and, in fact, Alice does think that perfection brings love, something for which she longs. The ones who have love are the imperfect ones. Characters in the novel often proclaim that they love Frank. Paula, at the school, says, "I love him to death" (122). The security guard at the museum tells Alice that there should more kids like him. After spending some time with Frank, Isaac says, "I love that kid" (274). Alice tells him to get in line. At the end of the novel, Alice tells Frank that she loves him. Xander is also a loved character, even though he has flaws. Frank loves him. Sara loves him, too.

Finally, Alice realizes the truth in what Mimi has told her at the end of the novel. "I guess I wasn't the careful person I'd always imagined myself to be...Maybe I wasn't the one people should be calling Jeopardy, but I might be imperfect enough for somebody to love me someday. Somebody aside from Frank, or Mr. Vargas, or my mother, I mean" (264).



# Styles

## Point of View

The narrative uses Alice's first person perspective. This is appropriate because the book chronicles the challenges Frank and his family experience. In order to delve into issues that the characters try to bury, a curious outsider needs to come in and ask the questions that reveal the backstories and thus piece together the current day behaviors. This is what Alice does. The structure of the novel supports her role with each part of her revelation having a title.

What makes things more interesting is that Alice has her own insecurities. Since she gets drawn in by Xander and is in constant conflict with Mimi, she is not an objective observer. Her issues become entangled with theirs, making her an unreliable narrator at times. She even says so herself when she and Xander brush by each other. "Xander turned just as I passed him and our forearms brushed, which was too bad because I knew I'd have a better chance of keeping an objective eye on him if we never touched, ever" (131).

## Language and Meaning

There are several points to note when considering the language in the novel. In general, the narrative uses rather sophisticated language for two reasons. First, Frank is very intelligent and learns from old Hollywood movies and famous geniuses. He crafts his life after them, learning from the mannerisms. Thus, it is normal that he would adopt their style of talking. Secondly, his mother is a writer, Isaac is an editor, and Alice is his assistant. They all work in a world of words and know how to use rich words to express their thoughts.

The next point is that the sophisticated use of words begins with the title, which is a play on words. Frank is the name of the book's protagonist. He is different from other children his age. While trying to make him fit in can wear people out, going with the flow (as Isaac does when he lets Frank dress him) can let people enjoy being with him (as Paula does when they have lunch together). Alice also relaxes as she begins to think like Frank during their search for Mimi. Thus, the title could mean "be like me" or "play along with me."

The title could also mean "be honest with me." This meaning fits the narrative for two reasons. Frank is well, frank. He says what is on his mind. His mother calls it tactless, but his psychiatrist says that he has problems editing himself. In another sense, it reflects the fact that Alice is trying to unravel the story of everyone's lives. In order to do that she needs people to be frank, or honest, with her.



## Structure

The book's distinctive structure supports Alice's discoveries. The first section asks about Frank's identity. This is a question that will remain throughout the novel as Alice tries to discover what it means to be Frank. In this section, she discovers Frank's rules and stays in the confines of the house to do so.

In Section 2, Alice and Frank get out of the house. This is when the adventure begins because Alice sees Frank interact with the outside world. This is indeed an adventure because it is not what one would expect of a 9-year-old child. As the sections continue, events happen and Alice continues to learn about the lives of the people with whom she interacts. Finally, by the end of the novel, Alice has pieced together everyone's story, even her own, and this book, as well as Mimi's book is over. Alice can go home.

It is interesting to note that the chapters have a quick pace and are rather equally spaced making for an easy read.



## Quotes

You realize now...that youth isn't wasted on the young. Literature is.  
-- Alice's Professor (chapter 1 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This quote comments on how young people do not appreciate literature until they are old enough to experience the events it chronicles. Mimi's book did not make sense to Alice until she read it after her mother's unexpected death. She was too young at the time to appreciate the meaning behind it. Taken further, the same is true of life. It is hard to imagine what you have not experienced. When it does happen to you, dealing with it is much harder than you thought it would be. It was hard for Alice to imagine "The Pitcher" as anything but a water jug when she was young. When she actually experienced an event (her mother's unexpected death) that the novel touches, she cannot stop crying.

Hair like mine is a burden. I'm always worried my face will be a disappointment when I turn around. Still, I'm not dumb enough to cut it off to punish it for being the best thing about me.  
-- Alice (chapter 2 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** Alice's hair is the one extravagant thing that she allows herself to have. Even then, though, she keeps it braided because it gets in the way of her controlled, organized persona. That is until she literally lets herself loose in the Dream House with Xander. The quote also shows her view of her self-worth. She thinks that her hair is not only the best thing about her looks but also the best thing about her.

I have uncanny intuition unencumbered by the editorial reflex.  
-- Frank (chapter 3 paragraph 44)

**Importance:** This quote gives an interpretation of the title, Be Frank With Me. Being frank means to be honest. Frank is overly honest at times. He has not learned when, and when not, to say things. It is interesting that his psychiatrist explains this in a tactful way and his mother comes straight to the point and is, in essence, tactless herself. It is not hard to see why Frank is the way he is in this instance.

The high point of my day was seeing Frank emerge from the chrysalis of his closet to unfurl his sartorial wings.  
-- Alice (chapter 4 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** This quote shows a view of Frank that describes the way his dresses as not strange, but stylish. He has such a flair that Alice looks forward to see what he is going to come up with next.

A superstitious person might say I brought that down on us by just thinking it.  
-- Alice (chapter 11 paragraph 100)





**Importance:** This quote serves to foreshadow the fire that Alice references in the Prologue. It also mirrors a statement that Alice makes in which she thinks that Mimi blames everything that has happened on her. In her insecure state, Alice has to feel as if she counts, and this is the role she has taken to do so. In her mind, she even has the power to cause a fire just by thinking about it.

I heard that her injury came about thanks to a surfeit of imagination and then her name was so lovely and full of promise that I decided I really ought to introduce myself...But as it turned out she was like all of the others/  
-- Frank (chapter 15 paragraph 97)

**Importance:** This quote shows that Frank wants friends his age. He thinks that Fiona is different from the other children: more creative and sensitive. However, he finds out that she is like all of the other children that he has met. She is nothing special, and she does not appreciate him as he is.

Frank couldn't wear his armor today...Facts were all the protection his had. Facts were his force field.  
-- Xander (chapter 21 paragraph 86)

**Importance:** This quote helps to explain why Frank surrounds himself with facts. It is his way of coping with the outside world. When he cannot wrap himself up in them, he is vulnerable to attack. The fact that Xander says this shows how much he understands and cares about Frank. The quote also shows that when people do things that others think may be strange, they may only be exercising a coping mechanism to handle situations that make them feel uncomfortable.

What I love about you, Alice...is the way you simultaneously give yourself too much credit for everything that happens and not enough. Listening to you makes me feel young again.  
-- Isaac (chapter 23 paragraph 70)

**Importance:** This quote goes back to the Alice's insecurities and her need to feel important. She give herself credit for things that she really did not influence and she fails to see how she really has contributed. It is the way of young people who tend to over dramatize things that go wrong. The quote also shows how Isaac is the rock who puts everything in perspective.

Energy spent on worrying about a future you can't control is energy wasted. It doesn't do anybody one bit of good.  
-- Alice (chapter 29 paragraph 29)

**Importance:** This quote shows how Alice has grown since being in Los Angeles. Before she had tried to control everything and now she is willing to let go. She thinks that it shows that she has gone native. In reality, it shows that she is ready to go home.



He's an odd duck, but brilliant children often are.  
-- Isaac (chapter 23 paragraph 93)

**Importance:** This quote supports the idea that nothing is wrong with Frank. There are plenty of brilliant people who were considered to be strange when they were young.

If you think you'll always let people down, that's all you'll ever do, I said.  
-- Alice (chapter 25 paragraph 65)

**Importance:** Alice is trying to help Xander. He has created a self-fulfilled prophecy for himself. He leaves because he thinks he will be a disappointment. Thus, he becomes one in the eyes of the people he leaves. One can become what one believes.

It's not about you, you know. What Mimi hates is how her life has turned out. It isn't how she thought it would be back when she was your age and on the top of the world.  
-- Xander (chapter 13 paragraph 98)

**Importance:** This quote shows Alice's insecurities and how she copes by thinking that she causes things, even if they are negative. It also shows why Mimi treats Alice the way she does. She sees herself in Alice and she does not like what she sees. She was like Alice when she was young and she blames being like that on her current state. Mimi considers Alice's qualities to be her own worst qualities. In addition, seeing Alice and her attitude reminds Mimi of how she thought her life would be different than it has turned out to be when she was Alice's age.