

Criss Cross Study Guide

Criss Cross by Lynne Rae Perkins

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Criss Cross Study Guide.....1

Contents.....2

Plot Summary.....3

Chapters 1-5: The Catch; Hector Goes into a Sponge State and Has a Satori; Boys, Dogs, Science Fiction; Rodeo Show; Leg Buds.....4

Chapters 6-13: In the Rhododendrons; The Fable of Lenny; Easy Basin Wrench, or Debbie has Mechanical Moment, Too; Guitar Lessons; Conversation in the Dark-Brilliant Eskimo Thoughts; Hector's First Song; Truck Lessons; Ravine.....6

Chapters 14-23: Japanese Chapter; Guitar Progress; HomeWork; At the Taste Freez on a Tuesday Evening; Where the Necklace Went; Hair; Confession; Wuthering Heights/Pop Mechanics; The Childhood Friend.....9

Chapters 24-28: Grosi; Meanwhile; Somewhere Else; Meanwhile,Elsewhere; Mrs. Bruning.....13

Chapters 29-38: Elephants; What Patty Said When Debbie Showed Her the Photo; California of the Mind; Dan Persik's Progress; A Pig Roast; Sarong; Flip-Flop,Necklace; On the Roof; Lightning Bugs.....15

Characters.....18

Objects/Places.....22

Themes.....24

Style.....26

Quotes.....28

Topics for Discussion.....30



Plot Summary

It is spring in Seldem, a small town that could be anywhere in the U.S., and Debbie is looking forward to her summer vacation, though she wishes that something good would happen to her. In Seldem, very little exciting happens, and this summer will probably be no different. As school comes to an end, she begins to hang out with her normal friends, Patty, Hector, Lenny and Phil, doing normal things - walking around town, going to the Tastee Freez, and sitting in Lenny's dad's parked truck each evening listening to the nightly "Criss Cross" radio show. Hector is feeling the same way as Debbie and, after hearing a guitarist play at a local coffee house, takes a bit of action, in the form of guitar lessons at a local church.

As summer progresses, Debbie makes a few changes. She moves into the tiny front parlor of the family home, so that she can have her own room, obtains a part-time job, cleaning for elderly Mrs. Bruning, and, ultimately, meets Mrs. Bruning's grandson, Peter, when he arrives for a visit. Thrown together by Mrs. Bruning's medical crises, a short romance of one week ensues, and then Peter must return home to California. Hector continues with the guitar lessons and becomes completely infatuated with the beautiful fellow student Meadow, though her only interest is in Dan Persik, local football star. Hector unrealistically plans opportunities to be alone with Meadow, only to be thwarted and ultimately rejected. Lenny, who is in the vocational-technical track at school, begins to help his father with projects, like building a pig roaster for the block party, tries chewing tobacco, teaches Debbie how to drive a stick-shift, and realizes that he is pretty good at teaching others something new!

The tale ends with a block party pig roast, and the four friends are together, sitting on a roof singing with Hector and catching fireflies - still having their "normal" Seldem summer. And yet, things have somehow changed. Debbie is more contemplative, more mature, and has found a new sense of self that she likes; Hector realizes that his identity is not determined by others, like Meadow and Dan; and Lenny has gained some self-esteem and confidence. Not bad for a few young teens passing the summer in a very ordinary small town!



Chapters 1-5: The Catch; Hector Goes into a Sponge State and Has a Satori; Boys, Dogs, Science Fiction; Rodeo Show; Leg Buds

Chapters 1-5: The Catch; Hector Goes into a Sponge State and Has a Satori; Boys, Dogs, Science Fiction; Rodeo Show; Leg Buds Summary

The first five chapters introduce the reader to the important characters of the novel - Debbie, Hector, Lenny, Phil and Patty - all young teens floating through a spring and summer of early adolescence. Chapter one finds Debbie scanning through the pages of her older sister's teen magazine, looking at the happy smiling faces of boys and girls, some happy couples, and wishing that something, just one good thing, would happen to her soon. As she re-words her wish, she contemplates that wording wishes correctly is difficult. One does not want to phrase it in a manner that would be harmful to anyone else. As she poses the final wording of her wish, the necklace she wears, which has a faulty clasp, falls from her neck onto a picture of a happy teenage couple. She re-clasps the necklace.

Chapter two focuses on Hector, a young man who lives in another part of town with an older sister, Rowanne, as pretty as he is "average." Hector's major concern this summer is his appearance, and his wishing that, in a few more years, fate will make him handsome and more "buff." Rowanne asks Hector if he would like to accompany her to a coffee house event at a local community college. There, Hector is quite mesmerized by the guitar playing of an entertainer and vows to learn to play. As the event concludes, Rowanne's friends propose that they all move on to another activity. Rowanne bows out, with the excuse that she must get her younger brother home, and Hector discovers that his presence has allowed Rowanne to avoid the obvious advances of a young man for whom she clearly does not care. The following Saturday, Hector must help his father put up screens for the summer months. He has plans to go over to friend Phil's house after supper, but has the opportunity to contemplate how spring re-arranges nature and the correlation between this and the changing nature of the girls he knows. They may be like caterpillars changing into butterflies, but, for him, change is more like from a puppy to a young dog.

Chapter three finds Debbie sunbathing in the backyard with her older sister and a friend. Debbie is so absorbed in a science fiction novel that she acquires a sunburn. However, the book takes her out to the backyard after supper, so that she has time alone to read more. It is a science fiction novel about a peaceful society which becomes completely disrupted by earthlings arriving with apples. While Debbie does not see this society as



an ideal one, still their mental telepathy abilities would be nice. No one would have difficulty talking with boys as she does, and choosing a mate might be rather easy. As the chapter ends, Debbie is stroking her loyal and fully accepting dog, wishing that boys could somehow be more like dogs.

Phil and Lenny are introduced in Chapter four. Debbie has been invited across the street to Lenny's, where he and Phil are sitting in the truck parked in the driveway, listening to a radio show, called "Criss Cross," filled with raucous songs and jokes. As the three continue to listen, Hector arrives and notices Debbie's uneven sunburn.

"Criss Cross" has become the nightly activity for Lenny, Hector, Phil, Debbie, and Debbie's friend Patty as the reader is moved into Chapter five. They have come to know and enjoy one another, and Debbie is finding more comfort in the presence of boys, although there are no romantic attachments. Everyone is crowded into the truck and certainly there is physical contact, but it is innocent, until the contact experienced by Debbie and Hector as they change places in the crowded space. Debbie and Hector both experience an alteration in their response to this event, though nothing further ensues.

Chapters 1-5: The Catch; Hector Goes into a Sponge State and Has a Satori; Boys, Dogs, Science Fiction; Rodeo Show; Leg Buds Analysis

Oh, the lives of early adolescence! Here are a group of young teens, not quite removed from childhood and yet clearly contemplating life as older teens see it, worrying about the opposite sex and their own appearances, and wishing for exciting and happy events and experiences. They feel awkward, unattractive, and unable to "make" the kinds of wishes they have come true. Hector and Debbie are both at a bit of an advantage, however, because they have older siblings from whom they learn a bit. Hector learns that girls, rather than bluntly stating their feelings, may sometimes develop schemes in order to avoid boys, as experienced through his excursion with Rowanne. As well, he begins to understand that girls his age are in a process of evolution, like the caterpillar to the butterfly, and that he, too, will be changing, although he does not see his change as exotic or as pleasing as the one for the girls he knows. The symbolism of the changes of spring, re-arranging nature, are pointed and clear. Debbie, on the other hand, contemplates her shortcomings in the ability to talk to boys, to become at ease with the opposite sex. She wishes that boys could be more like dogs, non-judgmental, loyal, and always there with acceptance. The comparison between Hector's analogy of turning from a puppy to a dog and Debbie's wish that boys would be more like dogs is not lost on the reader and is perhaps a bit of foreshadowing of things to come.



Chapters 6-13: In the Rhododendrons; The Fable of Lenny; Easy Basin Wrench, or Debbie has Mechanical Moment, Too; Guitar Lessons; Conversation in the Dark-Brilliant Eskimo Thoughts; Hector's First Song; Truck Lessons; Ravine

Chapters 6-13: In the Rhododendrons; The Fable of Lenny; Easy Basin Wrench, or Debbie has Mechanical Moment, Too; Guitar Lessons; Conversation in the Dark-Brilliant Eskimo Thoughts; Hector's First Song; Truck Lessons; Ravine Summary

Debbie and Patty are hiding in a large row of rhododendrons, changing their clothes before school. Neither likes the clothes their mothers have purchased for them, especially because the pant legs do not drag on the ground. Having talked their moms into longer jeans, with promises to hem them, they are now ripping out these hems before proceeding to school.

Lenny's school career is being steered toward vocational technical programs, as he himself veers more toward a blue collar future. He has taken up chewing tobacco, which rather disgusts Debbie, and is often given odd jobs at the garage of his father's friend. As well, he has developed skills in "fix-up" projects around the home. This was not always the case. As a child, Lenny read the encyclopedia for fun, one book at a time, as his mother brought them home from the grocery store special. Lenny absorbed all sorts of knowledge which he still enjoys sharing with anyone who will listen, but his teachers see him as a future skilled technician of some type. Debbie, Phil, and the others, however, have been moved into the college-prep track. Debbie gets a taste of mechanical skill in Chapter eight. Unable to understand the directions she is reading about the use of a basin wrench, she is, nevertheless, able to assist her dad by fitting under the sink and using the wrench to tighten a joint, thus stopping a leak.

Hector is moving on to new things as well. Chapter nine finds him immersed in free guitar lessons at the local church, a result of a compromise with his parents. They have purchased the guitar because Hector has agreed to free rather than paid lessons. His fellow students are two older adults, a girl his sister's age, a very cute girl his age,



named Meadow, and Dan, the obvious high school jock. Though Hector is immediately infatuated with Meadow, she seems primarily interested in Dan. Pastor Don, the youth minister, is the teacher, and Hector wonders why this man has chosen a ministerial career as opposed to music. The first lesson involves tuning and the fingering for three chords, which can be used to strum and sing the song, "You Are My Sunshine." Hector is a proficient student, singing along as he plays, but is disappointed to see Meadow leave with the older girl and jock Dan.

In a continuing theme of this section, Debbie and Patty are discussing life's fairness in Chapter ten. They wonder why some people experience adversity and others do not; why some are naturally beautiful and others are not. Patty contributes the thought that many of those who experience adversity believe that God will reward them later. Debbie's contribution relates to the influence of environment upon what one becomes, especially the cultural mores of the community in which they grow up. Both girls realize that living in a small town will impact their adulthood. As a final thought, Debbie wonders how Albert Einstein would have been different if he had grown up in an Eskimo village.

A short Chapter eleven shows that Hector is immersing himself in his new environment of music. Having learned just three chords, he has found that he can create an original song using them. Perhaps he has some talent after all, and perhaps this will impress Meadow.

Chapter eleven is all about Lenny. He and Debbie are sitting in the truck, the only two who can make it this evening, when, on a whim, Lenny asks Debbie if she would like to learn how to drive the truck, a stick shift vehicle, just up and down the driveway. Feigning that his father is inside, Lenny goes to the door to ask permission and assures Debbie that the permission has been given. The lesson ensues, and Debbie goes home excited about her newly acquired skill. For his part, Lennie is excited that he can teach a skill and demonstrate his expertise in something.

Hector, in Chapter twelve, has decided to locate a place in town to which he may take Meadow. After a survey of the potential spots, he decides upon a quiet, pretty ravine, except for the trash that has been strewn about. With trash bag in tow, he cleans up the area and runs toward the gas station trash can, as wet garbage is dripping out of the bag all over him. When he runs into his sister, she suggests something less intimate, like the Tastee Freez, because, after all, ice cream is "always good."



Chapters 6-13: In the Rhododendrons; The Fable of Lenny; Easy Basin Wrench, or Debbie has Mechanical Moment, Too; Guitar Lessons; Conversation in the Dark-Brilliant Eskimo Thoughts; Hector's First Song; Truck Lessons; Ravine Analysis

This section provides insight into the ways in which adolescent lives begin to be disseminated onto different paths in early high school. Lenny, who probably has one of the most inquisitive minds and who has obviously absorbed much from voracious reading, will not pursue college. Already, he is tracked toward a technical career, because he happens to be skilled in using his hands. The others, less agile, have been tracked toward college. Specific interests, such as Hector's unfolding musical talent will perhaps point him in a path far different from his friends. Debbie and Patty demonstrate great insights, as they discuss the impact of one's environment on what he or she ultimately becomes and the growth or decline that may accompany adversity. For one so young, Debbie's contemplation of the critical nature of the differences in cultural environments in determining who we are as adults shows a maturity beyond the normal early adolescent.

For Hector and Lenny, it is all about finding some talent or skill with which to elevate themselves and their self-images and to impress others. Hector is impressed with his emerging musical talent, and Lenny takes great pride in the fact that he is able to teach someone else how to do something. While these seem to be small things to many, they are monumental to these two boys who are searching for their identities and their "badges of honor," something that will signify they are on a path to somewhere.



Chapters 14-23: Japanese Chapter; Guitar Progress; HomeWork; At the Tastee Freez on a Tuesday Evening; Where the Necklace Went; Hair; Confession; Wuthering Heights/Pop Mechanics; The Childhood Friend

Chapters 14-23: Japanese Chapter; Guitar Progress; HomeWork; At the Tastee Freez on a Tuesday Evening; Where the Necklace Went; Hair; Confession; Wuthering Heights/Pop Mechanics; The Childhood Friend Summary

This section of nine chapters provides the reader further insights into the thoughts and activities of the young characters, in a series of short vignettes.

Chapter 14: It is close to the end of the school year, and Debbie and Patty are looking at the yearbook, attempting to make Haiku's or stories about the seniors. Ultimately, they turn to their own class pages, and, as Debbie looks at her photograph, she thinks of the word "caterpillar," not quite ready to build its cocoon and begin the journey to emerge as a butterfly. They see Hector running by with the trash.

Chapter 15: Hector is now able to strum several songs and sing along. He has rather forgotten why he began all of this and where it is supposed to take him.

Chapter 16: Lenny is home from school and assisting his father in the move of a washing machine up from the basement and into the pickup truck. As Debbie is completing her homework in algebra and German, she hears their work and conversation from her open window. She is also thinking of jock Dan Persik who has a locker next to hers. She is impressed with his physical appearance and his status as a football star but considers, as well, that he has yet to learn some important life lessons and to develop some personal qualities far more important than football. He needs experiences that will promote "...humility, compassion, respect, and independent thinking." (p. 141)

Hector is busy, not only with guitar strumming and picking, but, as well, composing original songs and struggling a bit to find his "voice."



Patty is struggling with the laws of physics and the theory of relativity, worried if, at some point, all of the moving atoms in the world would suddenly decide to move differently and thus disintegrate her physical world.

Russell, another young man, has found Debbie's necklace by his trashcan. Obviously, the clasp has failed her. Lenny, meanwhile, goes to Phil's house to watch him shoot hoops on a pleasant evening, following a cleansing rain.

Chapter 17: Debbie and Patty are at the Taste Freez, when the guitar group arrives with Hector, Dan Persik, and a very pretty girl. Hector is obviously upset that his proposal to Meadow that they go for ice cream has been embraced by the entire group, that is now gathered around a picnic table, strumming and singing "Edelweiss." As Russell throws down his jacket, moreover, the necklace drops out of his pocket and is retrieved by Dan Persik, who decides to use it to tease Debbie Pelbry.

Chapter 18: Debbie has convinced her mother that she needs a room of her own and has taken up residency in the front parlor, with a curtain for a door. She must share a closet with boxes of her mother's mementos, and she is going through the boxes, finding one that contains dog figurines. She overhears a conversation between her mother and a friend, in which her mother informs the friend that Debbie will be helping a local senior citizen, Mrs. Bruning, for pay, on the weekends. The school year has come to an end.

Chapter 19: The saga of the necklace continues. It has fallen through a small hole in Dan's pocket and as he walks past Hector's home, it finally falls onto the ground behind Rowanne's car. Two little girls discover it and place it on the trunk lid. Rowanne, in a hurry, drives off, and the necklace fall off the trunk in the middle of Prospect Hill Road, into a fresh patch of tar.

Chapter 20: Hector has decided to let his hair grow, moving more toward his image as a guitar-playing singer, while Mrs. Bruning has instructed Debbie to cut off her waist-length braids and trim what remains, no matter how it may look. A nervous Debbie complies with her directive, and Mrs. Bruning seems to be pleased with the thought that she will no longer have to spend so much time on her hairstyle.

Chapter 21: The friends are discussing the concept of Catholic confessions and the upcoming Catholic church carnival and annual Seldem Days celebration on Saturday. Although she will be working for Mrs. Bruning, Debbie will still be able to make the dinner and fireworks. Hector is hoping that Meadow will attend. As they pile into Lenny's truck for the nightly "Criss Cross" show, they discover that the battery is dead. With Debbie at the wheel, they push the truck and she pops the clutch, getting it started. The ensuing running out of gas is an additional irritant.

Chapter 22: Debbie is reading *Wuthering Heights* in the backyard and is saddened that Catherine, who truly loves Heathcliff, has succumbed to a marriage with the refined and wealthy Linton. She sees Lenny in his yard, working on his bike and is surprised to realize that he has developed arm muscles. As she contemplates life in a century such



as the setting of her book, she realizes that Catherine would never have enjoyed the freedoms she does. Lenny, for his part, is passing an idle afternoon by making unnecessary alterations to his bike. He notices Debbie but says nothing. Nevertheless, when he steps inside for a drink and returns, he is somewhat saddened to see that she is no longer there.

Chapter 23: Phil, Lenny, Debbie and Hector are sitting on the curb, spending an evening chatting. Phil and Lenny are reliving a movie that she and Hector have not seen, so Debbie begins a conversation with Hector, about the silly things about which people talk, such as dreams they cannot remember, or surgeries, or recipes.

Chapters 14-23: Japanese Chapter; Guitar Progress; HomeWork; At the Taster Freez on a Tuesday Evening; Where the Necklace Went; Hair; Confession; Wuthering Heights/Pop Mechanics; The Childhood Friend Analysis

Again, Debbie stands out as a bit of a dichotomy, as is so often the case with young adolescents. On the one hand, she is a bit self-absorbed, as she contemplates her yearbook picture, seeing herself as still a caterpillar, not yet ready to complete the metamorphosis into a mature and beautiful butterfly. On the other hand, she is beginning to emerge as more mature than some of her peers. She understands that Dan Persik, for all of his handsome, hero-like physique and football star capability, has yet to have those experiences which result in true maturity - experiences that will result in humility, compassion, and empathy. He, although older than Debbie, remains rather stuck in his development, unable to get outside of himself and to see the world from the viewpoint of others less physically blessed. Debbie is also developing her sense of independence, as she asks to be moved into a tiny space that can at least be called her own, so that she can experience privacy. In her private space, she takes the time to contemplate her mother's past and is fascinated with those mementos from her mother's youth, wishing that her mother would open up more to her. To choose to read *Wuthering Heights* as a part of her summer, moreover, is rather stunning to a current teen, who would probably not find the work to be of much interest. Debbie, however, ponders life in Catherine's century and is certainly happy to have the freedom available to twentieth century girls.

Hector, although experiencing success as a musician, is not experiencing success in his love life. In fact, he begins to wonder why he ever chose to pursue guitar lessons and where this could possibly take him. Still, he continues, because success is a beautiful thing, no matter how disappointing the lack of Meadow's response may be.

The other young teens continue to provide nostalgia for adults who remember their own youths and who certainly can relate to the foibles and tribulations of boys, such as Lenny, who, perhaps out of shyness, does not converse with Debbie as he makes



unnecessary "repairs" to his bike, while he exhibits his forming muscles. Patty, struggling with her school work, ponders the potential of atoms suddenly changing directions and causing the ruination of the entire planet. What adult cannot remember similar behaviors or thoughts?



Chapters 24-28: Grosi; Meanwhile; Somewhere Else; Meanwhile,Elsewhere; Mrs. Bruning

Chapters 24-28: Grosi; Meanwhile; Somewhere Else; Meanwhile,Elsewhere; Mrs. Bruning Summary

Grosi is the name Peter Bruning has long used to refer to his grandmother. He and his parents are at Grosi's on an overnight stop to another relative's home. When Peter's father approaches the subject of her moving into an assisted living facility, Mrs. Bruning is livid and insists, that, with the help of Debbie Pelbry, she can manage fine. When the deterioration of the home's exterior is pointed out, Peter volunteers to stay for a week and conduct the necessary repairs. On Saturday, Peter meets Debbie, as she arrives to clean. Grosi awakes, comes downstairs and is in obvious physical distress. Knowing that she is diabetic, Debbie immediately provides sugared orange juice, which provides mild recovery, but both teens realize that they must get her to the hospital, two towns away. Because Mrs. Bruning has failed to pay her phone bill, however, there is no way to call for assistance, and all neighbors are at Seldem Days.

The two teens, neither of whom has a driver's license, are able to get Grosi into her car, with a dead battery. Debbie, however, remembers what Lenny has taught her about rolling the car and popping the clutch, and, ultimately, they are successful in getting Grosi to the local firehouse, from which she is transported to the hospital. As Chapter 24 ends, Peter's parents return, while Debbie and Peter finalize their plans to fix Grosi's home.

Meanwhile, in Chapter 25, the Seldem Days Celebration continues. Lenny, Phil, Hector and Patty are enjoying themselves, but Hector is surveying the crowd for Meadow. She is eventually found, holding hands with Dan Persik, who makes disparaging comments about the elephant ear Hector has just purchased to share with his friends. Humiliated by Dan's comments, Hector rejoins his friends, hating Dan even more than before. As he waits for the fireworks, Hector is hit with a new melody and begins to compose words about the game of pulling petals from a daisy with "She loves me, she loves me not" thrown in. The melody is definitely Caribbean, and he can almost hear the guitar chords in his head.

Chapter 26 finds Debbie and Peter at work on Mrs. Bruning's home, wishing they could have some type of adventure. They decide to take a bus trip, boarding at Seldem and embarking at a stop thirty minutes away, in order to explore "somewhere else." Checking the schedule, they decide on the town of New Bridge. As they explore New Bridge, Peter takes Debbie's hand, and a perfect day is improved by this new infatuation. Unfortunately, two days later, Peter and his parents are on a plane bound for home in California.



Seldom Days are over, and there has been a light soaking rain that has brought out the worms. As Hector walks the streets of town, he notices the worms that have emerged, many of them having been stepped upon by indifferent, uncaring people. He begins to feel like a crushed worm himself, after the encounter with Dan and Meadow, and begins to compose a maudlin, albeit silly, song.

By Chapter 28, Mrs. Bruning is home, physically frail but still filled with her "spark." The house repairs have pleased Peter's parents, and she has agreed to a visiting nurse and meals on wheels. On the housekeeping issue, however, she has remained firm. Debbie will be just fine. Realizing that there had been some "spark" between Debbie and Peter, moreover, she presents Debbie with a recent photo of him.

Chapters 24-28: Grosi; Meanwhile; Somewhere Else; Meanwhile, Elsewhere; Mrs. Bruning Analysis

Poor Hector! His unrequited love for Meadow will remain just that, since there is obviously a serious relationship developing between Dan and her. To make it worse, Dan has humiliated him in front of Meadow, and Hector now likens himself to a crushed worm. Meadow is obviously "above" his status, and he must now accept this.

For her part, Debbie has experienced her first "love" experience, only to have it abruptly end with Peter's departure. Debbie's resourcefulness during Mrs. Bruning's crisis obviously impresses Peter, as does her ability to get the car started. Their adventure to New Bridge had been like a real first date for Debbie, and she will be able to tuck the memory away forever. Debbie also exhibits a resilience that perhaps contrasts with Hector's dejectedness over Meadow. She does not "pine" over Peter and certainly does not fall into the self-pity mode that Hector does. This is perhaps because the "end" of her romance comes about by circumstances, not by rejection.



Chapters 29-38: Elephants; What Patty Said When Debbie Showed Her the Photo; California of the Mind; Dan Persik's Progress; A Pig Roast; Sarong; Flip-Flop, Necklace; On the Roof; Lightning Bugs

Chapters 29-38: Elephants; What Patty Said When Debbie Showed Her the Photo; California of the Mind; Dan Persik's Progress; A Pig Roast; Sarong; Flip-Flop, Necklace; On the Roof; Lightning Bugs Summary

This section provides temporary conclusions in the lives of the teens, as well as more insight into their growth processes. In Chapter 29, Debbie is in her room looking at an old photo album and considering the truth of the old adage that there is only one true romantic match for each person. Her conclusion? It is probably false. Mother appears with a letter from Peter, and Debbie provides a brief explanation of his identity, failing to reveal that he is the "love that got away." Mother, not grasping the extent of Debbie's feelings, does not take the time to tell Debbie about the boy she once cared for, who gave her little dog figurines, but who then went away. Their feelings "sidestepped each other...like blinded elephants crossing the tiny room." (p. 281)

A one-sentence long Chapter 30 has Debbie showing Patty the letter from Peter and Patty's response - "...maybe I could go work for Mrs. Bruning, too." (p. 284)

Debbie is happy to walk around Seldem with Peter's letter in her pocket. She sees things differently now. Arriving home, however, she begins to feel more "ordinary" again, rather non-special. Suddenly, however, as she contemplates herself in the mirror, "a small piece of her Buddha self" awakens, and she is quite pleased with who she is becoming.

In Chapter 32, the reader is left to wonder who Dan Persik will ultimately become. On one hand, he appears to be developing some empathy, as he initiates a bus-stop conversation with a man who has lost his legs in war. When Dan boards the bus and takes the last available seat, however, he fails to offer that seat to the next boarder - a mother with a toddler on her hip.

The big news in Chapters 33-34 is that Phil announces a pig roast block party on his street, to which all of them are invited. Lenny and his dad Leon have made the pig



roaster for the party, arriving at the appointed spot at 3:00 a.m., in order to start the coals and hoist the pig on its spit, for the required hours of roasting. Exhausted, they decide to sit in their lawn chairs rather than trek back home. As Lenny falls asleep, his father looks at his son, pleased with who he is becoming.

Chapter 35-36: Hector believes a pig roast to be rather Hawaiian and has decided to learn to play and sing "Tiny Bubbles," the only remotely island song he knows. Further, having seen a picture of a male Hawaiian entertainer, he emulates the sarong dress, through the assistance of his older sister and her bedspread. Flip-flops complete his outfit. As he runs across the street, however, he loses one of those flip-flops and, returning to retrieve it, discovers a necklace embedded in the tar. Prying it loose and re-arranging the crumpled parts, he realizes that it actually spells "Debbie." He will present it to Debbie Pelbry, as a joke.

Chapter 37: The teens have found the perfect spot from which to observe the block party. Propping a ladder against the Karposki's house, they have climbed onto the roof. Hector, observing the warm glow of lights and camaraderie below, launches into what he believes to be an appropriate song for the occasion - "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire." Both the teens and those below sing along. When Rowanne arrives to retrieve Hector, she is carried away by the festivities and climbs to the roof to join her younger brother and his friends, seating herself next to Debbie. They begin a conversation about romance, and Rowanne concludes that Debbie's brief relationship with Peter counts. Debbie then relates the tale of her piano teacher, an aging spinster until her mother died, who then married a truck driver and was transformed into a sparkly, outgoing woman. The death of the truck driver, moreover, did not dampen this new person, and she is now the same happier, more complete person because she had experienced that love. Rowanne then tells Debbie of the tragic life of a co-worker at her summer job who makes up boyfriends because she cannot stand the thought of not having one.

The final chapter finds the teens back on solid ground, catching lightning bugs. Debbie feels a bit uncomfortable holding the captured bugs in the jar someone has produced, but is clearly fascinated with Lenny's explanation of how and why they light up. Lenny then asks Debbie for a date, but she explains that being just friends is a better relationship for them. Patty, however, is happy to accept the offer, and Debbie hands the jar of bugs to her. Debbie walks away to discover Hector lying in the grass playing his guitar, and she sits beside him. Together, they compose a song. Hector then gives Debbie the necklace and is surprised to learn that it is actually hers. For a moment, it seems as if Debbie and Hector will "connect" in a new way, but the timing is a bit off. Eventually, Hector begins to play and sing again, and the others gather around.



Chapters 29-38: Elephants; What Patty Said When Debbie Showed Her the Photo; California of the Mind; Dan Persik's Progress; A Pig Roast; Sarong; Flip-Flop, Necklace; On the Roof; Lightning Bugs Analysis

This section points to the continued growth of the teens, especially Debbie and Hector, although we even see some movement on the part of Dan Persik. Debbie has her first "love" experience and, validated by older teen Rowanne, is able to decide that the experience, although short, does, in fact, mean that she has a romantic relationship. As well, she is mature enough to conclude that the belief that there is just one perfect person for another in this world is clearly a myth. She has experienced love and, in that experience has improved her own being. She is able to relate this, moreover, to the experience of her much older piano teacher who, having known love for only a short time, has been nevertheless permanently transformed for the better.

Hector, certainly deflated by the inability to win the heart of Meadow, is, nevertheless, emotionally strong enough to dress in a sarong for the pig roast and to learn a new song for the occasion. He is obviously supported by his friends who climb on the roof with him and participate in the singing of a Christmas song. The ultimate "connection" between Debbie and Hector does not occur, but the reader is left with the impression that it may eventually occur.

Teen-parent relationships are also finally addressed by the author, during the scenario between Debbie and her mother, in which each could have expressed their inner feelings about "lost loves," but the opportunity is missed as it is so often between teens and their parents. Communication between parents and teens is a critical issue, to be certain, and the author is at least courageous enough to address it, if only peripherally. Parents and teens do have difficulty expressing their feelings to one another, and even Debbie and her mother, who apparently have a relatively good relationship, struggle with this issue.

The ultimate freeing of the lightning bugs is significant and symbolic. By handing over the trapped lightning bugs to Patty, Debbie is rejecting the lack of freedom to be who one is, and the ultimate release is a statement by all of these young adolescents that they, too, must be set free to become who they are to become.



Characters

Debbie Pelbry

A young teen in search of her identity, Debbie is experiencing all of the emotions and struggles of early adolescence. As the school year comes to an end, Debbie is engaged in relatively normal activities in her small town of Seldem, enjoying the warm weather with her friends. At the same time, however, she is struggling with her identity, attempting to discover her values and priorities. As well, she would like for something good to happen to her, and happen soon. As the summer moves forward, Debbie engages in normal activities, listening to a radio show, stuffed into a truck with her friends, sunbathing, reading, and, as well getting a part-time job assisting an elderly woman in her home. Debbie's maturity for her young age is revealed in her conversations with her friends and her thoughts. She understands, for example, the shallowness of Dan Persik, knowing that he needs experiences that will develop humility, empathy, and unselfishness. She understands that Lenny is truly unique, that, though he will obviously face a blue-collar future, he has intelligence and insights others may never achieve. Ultimately, she has a love encounter with Peter, Mrs. Bruning's grandson, when he arrives in town and stays for a visit. Though the relationship is only one week in duration, Debbie is changed by the experience, realizing that each of these life sojourns will allow her to grow and develop into the woman she will one day be.

Hector

Though he lives on the other side of the small town of Seldem, Hector obviously attends the same school and moves in the same circles as Debbie, Lenny, Phil and Patty. He, too, is searching for his special niches and obviously has a great relationship with his older sister, Rowanne. After attending a special music concert with his sister, Hector is enthralled with the guitar and, in return for his parents' purchase of a guitar, agrees to free lessons given at a local church. There, he encounters Meadow, a beautiful girl with whom he is completely infatuated but who is obviously far more impressed with Dan Persik, the typical high school "jock." Hector's musical ability begins to blossom, and he is pleased to be able strum chords, sing along, and even compose some of his own music, elementary though it may. Hector's dismay at his inability to win the love of "fair maiden" Meadow, while momentarily crushing, does not stop him from moving forward. In fact, he is so self-assured, that he is willing to don a Hawaiian sarong to attend a neighborhood pig roast and sing "Tiny Bubbles." Hector is a kid who is quite comfortable in his own skin but probably not quite ready for his first love. At the very end of the tale, he almost "connects" with Debbie, but the moment is lost.



Lenny

A study in contrasts, Lenny is at once an inquisitive young man who spent much of his childhood reading a set of encyclopedias, book by book, as his mother brought them home from the grocery store special offer. He is a wealth of knowledge and probably intellectually gifted; however, because he has demonstrated such solid mechanical ability, he has been placed into the vocational-technical track among the high school programs. Lenny is a happy young man, however, and enjoys teaching others what he knows. At one point, he teaches Debbie how to operate a standard transmission and even how to start a car when the battery is dead. Lenny hosts the nightly radio listening in his father's truck which is rather permanently parked in the driveway, and he takes on other "blue collar" personas, such as chewing tobacco. While the reader is not given insights into many parents in this tale, Lenny and his father obviously have a great relationship. Lenny helps his father out and, together, they build the roaster for the block party, arise in the middle of the night together and begin the roasting. Once the task is completed, Lenny and his father, Leon, settle into lawn chairs. Once Lenny is asleep, Leon watches him lovingly. Lenny is ready for a relationship with any girl. Failing to get a date with Debbie, he is happy to move on to Patty, who happily accepts. Lenny is clearly the happy-go-lucky "good guy," who will always have friends, who will settle into a stable blue collar job, and live a comfortable life.

Mrs. Bruning

A feisty, independent senior citizen, Mrs. Bruning employs Debbie to assist her with housekeeping on the weekends. Debbie enjoys the work, the pay and, as well, Mrs. Bruning. When Mrs. Bruning's son, daughter-in-law and grandson, Peter, arrive for an overnight stay, the son suggests that it is time for Grosi (as Peter calls her) to move into a senior citizen center. Grosi, of course, adamantly refuses, but consents to have Peter stay on with her for a week, in order to fix up the exterior of the home. Mrs. Bruning has, in fact, neglected many things, including payment of her phone bill, so that, when she has a diabetic attack, Debbie and Peter are unable to telephone for help. While her condition is stabilized by Debbie's quick action, she nevertheless spends time in the hospital. Ultimate, she agrees to add a home health care person and "meals on wheels" to her level of care and remains in her home.

Peter Bruning

Arriving with his parents at his grandmother's home, Peter offers to remain with his grandmother for a week, in order to complete needed repairs on her home. While there, he meets Debbie, who comes in on weekends to do housecleaning. He and Debbie work together to handle the crisis when Mrs. Bruning becomes ill and then to repair the home while she is in the hospital. In so doing, they develop a romantic relationship that is finalized by their taking a bus trip to a nearby town, walking around and holding hands. Peter must return to California with his parents but sends Debbie a letter with a



picture of himself. Though short-lived, this summer interlude has been significant and meaningful for these two young teens.

Patty

Patty is a friend of Debbie's and, consequently, of the others in their small group. While Debbie is portrayed on the more pensive, contemplative teen, Patty seems to be more superficial, not having reached the maturity level of her friend. Patty is involved in most of the activities of the group throughout the summer, including the pig roast, and ultimately accepts a date with Lenny.

Mrs. Pelbry

A typical mother, Mrs. Pelbry obviously cares for her daughters and has created a warm home environment. Though she is not developed much throughout the story, the reader is given a bit of insight into her teen years through the scrapbooks, mementos, and photo albums that Debbie peruses. At one point, the reader learns that Mrs. Pelbry's first love bought her gifts of dog figurines which she has kept carefully wrapped through the years, though the romance was, like Debbie and Peter's, short-lived.

Rowanne

Hector's older sister Rowanne has a circle of friends with whom she is active but demonstrates genuine care and concern for her younger brother. While she appears only briefly in the story, she does take the time to help Hector dress in his sarong for the pig roast, using her bedspread for the costume, takes Hector to the roast, and has a "big sister" type conversation with Debbie about Debbie's brief connection with Peter. She is portrayed as genuine and mature.

Dan Persik

Dan is the typical high school "jock," the buff football player who has no difficulty with girls. Even Debbie has a very brief infatuation with him. Dan is portrayed as a rather superficial, egocentric individual, however, who has not had the life experiences that provide maturation into a caring, empathetic individual. His "type" does not have to be fully developed by the author, because young teens understand this persona fully.

Miss Spransy/Mrs. Szebo

Though not a major character throughout the story, Mrs. Szebo is nevertheless introduced to make a point. A spinster piano teacher, she has dedicated her life to caring for her elderly mother and providing piano lessons, one of her students being Debbie. Once her mother dies, Miss Spransy meets and marries a truck driver, and her entire

personality is altered. She becomes a happy, outgoing, vibrant individual who remains so, even though her truck driver husband dies six months later.



Objects/Places

Seldem

Seldem is the small town in which the tale takes place.

Satori

Satori is an epiphany or sudden understanding.

Criss Cross

A nightly radio program of music and conversation to which the teens listen in Lenny's parked truck is called "Criss Cross."

Coffee House

Individuals gather for simple entertainment, usually music and/or poetry at a small place called the Coffee House.

Ravine

A green depressed area that has green space, to which Hector should like to take Meadow is referred to as the Ravine.

Tastee Freez

Tastee Freez is an ice cream shop and a gathering place for teens during the summer.

New Bridge

New Bridge is a small town a short distance from Seldem, to which Debbie and Peter take a bus ride and explore

Seldem Days

Seldem Days is an annual town celebration, featuring food, games and fireworks



Sarong

A dress-like covering called a sarong is used primarily by Hawaiian musicians,

FLAME

A game played by girl teens in which letters of names of boys and girls are transposed in order to see if marriage is a possibility

Tiny Bubbles

A somewhat Hawaiian song that Hector learns for the pig roast.



Themes

Making Connections

Perhaps one of the biggest concerns for teens, from the time they enter high school, is making "connections," and, more important, the right connections for themselves. "Connections" can refer to being a part of a group of peers who share the same interests, activities, and values; it can refer to finding a few truly close friends with whom one may share their deepest thoughts and feelings; it can mean finding a romantic connection with that one individual who may provide the first experience of being loved in a new and different way. This need to "connect" is rather universal and is certainly a theme of *Criss Cross*, as this group of teens affirms its connection with each other, if only through the rather constant togetherness throughout the summer. Though some of the relationships appear deeper than others, these teens are connected by their close geographical proximity and the obvious ease with which they converse with one another. It does not appear that they often share their most inner thoughts or feelings, except some very occasional conversations between Debbie and Patty. In fact, Debbie reveals more to Hector's older sister Rowanne than to anyone else, and that only occurs at the end of the tale. Still, each of them is looking for special connections - Hector for Meadow, Lenny for any girl, and Debbie for the special connection she made with Peter. As for the group? Already, there are hints that they may move in separate directions as their lives move forward.

Coming of Age

Normally, novels that deal with "coming of age" are written with far more in the way of events, drama, suspense, and crisis. There would normally be an introduction of a conflict, rising action to a climax, and then a denouement. At first look, one does not see this in *Criss Cross*, because very little out of the ordinary actually occurs in the entire tale. Four teens simply move through their summer vacation engaged in normal small town activities, and it is difficult to locate a true plot line and climax. With further contemplation, however, the reader will see that this a far more realistic "coming of age" tale, for the lazy and rather uneventful summer actually has within it experiences that promote growth in at least three of the teens, specifically Debbie, Hector and Lenny. Debbie, in looking for something good to happen discovers that sometimes the popular beautiful people do not have the inner value systems that are actually more important. For this reason, she rejects her infatuation with Dan Persik and gravitates naturally to brief romance with Peter, because he is one who shows compassion and a willingness to assist his grandmother's goal to remain in her home. Further, she comes to understand that, whatever the generation, being loved is a critical factor for happiness, no matter how brief that love may last. Hector comes to realize that, even though unlucky in love, he has much to offer and that he is a person of worth and talent, even if the beautiful Meadow is beyond his reach. Lenny, too, realizes his worth. He hosts the nightly radio show gathering, teaches a new skill to Debbie, and realizes that he is



comfortable with who he is. These teens will continue to grow and develop and continue to "come of age," but in the small town of Seldem, this sojourn will be less dramatic and less eventful than it would be in a more urban setting.

Search for Identity

The search for one's identity begins at an earlier age than that of the young teens of this novel. It is during the teen years, however, that this search is more noticeable and, in many ways, most important in determining the type of adult one will come to be. The reader is introduced to Debbie, Hector, Patty, Phil and Lenny, but a number of peripheral characters as well. The search for identity focuses on three of these kids more than the others, however - Debbie, Hector, and Lenny. The story begins with Debbie's perusal of a teen magazine, a piece telling her that she is okay to be just who she is and yet shows her pictures of beautiful people who are clearly not anything like her. Though she is not unhappy with who she is, she still wishes that something good and exciting would happen to her this summer. As the summer moves forward, Debbie's experiences, although rather mundane, serve to point her in the direction of who she is and who she is to be. She reads *Wuthering Heights* and realizes that her ability to eventually select her life partner is a right that not all females have always had. As she contemplates the boys she knows, she comes to realize that who she is is not at all compatible with the jock Dan Persik. He is simply too superficial. She experiences her first romantic encounter and realizes that her identity is not based upon a single fleeting relationship, that she may have many such connections and, in fact, it would be okay if she were not truly loved until she is fifty. Her identity, therefore, is what is within - her spirit, her values, and her goals. Her identity is not determined by others. Hector begins his journey toward identity by a chance trip with his sister to hear a guitarist. Seeking to find something at which he possesses talent, he takes up the guitar and begins to compose simple songs of his own. In so doing, he becomes obsessed with the beautiful Meadow and, for a while, his life revolves around scheming to get her alone. Crushed that she has selected Dan Persik, he nevertheless picks himself up and moves forward, determined to become the unique individual he wants to be. Others do not define Hector, and this is an important truth to realize. Lenny, too, is searching for an identity. While his friends are all on the "college track" in school, he has been moved into the vocational-technical level. Though he may be the most intellectually curious of any of the group members, however, he comes to see value in his path, thrilled that he can teach a skill to someone else, happy to help his father around the house and, of course, to build the pig roaster. Lenny has found himself perhaps more than the others at this point and is now looking for romance. Turned down by Debbie, he is happy to move on to Patty, who readily accepts a date with him. All of these kids will move on with their lives. Debbie and Hector may eventually "connect" romantically; Lenny and Patty may become a couple; their lives may move in different directions, but, for these three, great progress has been made in their search for their ultimate adult identities.



Style

Point of View

Author Perkins has attempted to place herself into the hearts and minds of young teenagers, struggling, as they have for centuries, with the questions of their identities, their futures, and their values. She functions as a narrator with complete omniscience with at least two characters - Debbie and Hector - perhaps the two who exhibit the most maturity for their ages. Debbie, while focusing upon an upcoming summer, wants something good to happen, and that something good appears to be related to romance. As she moves through her summer and actually has a romantic connection, however, she is forced into contemplation of more important things, such as the growth of the role of women from the days of Wuthering Heights, to her mother and now, ultimately to herself. Further, the one major "heart-throb" of the tale, Dan Persik, falls woefully short in Debbie's estimation, for he has not had experiences that have developed him as a compassionate, empathetic, more mature individual who is able to get outside of himself. Hector's thoughts are revealed rather completely as well, particularly as he struggles with his male identity and his attempt to win the heart of an unobtainable girl. In the end, however, Hector demonstrates, by both thought and action, his uniqueness and his comfort level with who he is, as he dons a Hawaiian sarong and prepares to sing a song that few of his contemporaries would know, much less appreciate. Other characters are known primarily through their behaviors and speech, and yet they give the reader relatively good insight into their personalities and values.

Setting

Setting is one of the more difficult aspects of this novel. The reader is obviously informed that it occurs in the small town of Seldem, and yet we are given no understanding of exactly where Seldem is. It is possible that it may be in the western part of the United States, however, because Peter and his parents apparently drive from California to Seldem for an overnight on a one-week trip. Other than this small hint, and the fact that Debbie is able to sunbathe in the spring before school is dismissed for the summer, the reader is left to wonder. The time is just as much a mystery, except for a few hints. If one reads the publication date, s/he will see that it was published in 2005; however, it is probably set in the latter half of the twentieth century, when one listens to the conversations among the teens. No specific music or events of the time are mentioned; computers and video games are not in use; the teens are listening to an evening radio program in Lenny's truck, not plugging themselves into i-pods. The one incongruity within this setting is the fact that Debbie and Patty do not like the clothing their mothers have purchased for them and, in fact, hide behind bushes to take the hems out of their jeans so that they will drag the ground, and this is definitely a very late twentieth and early twenty-first century phenomenon. It appears that author Perkins herself transfers between generational time in this novel, thus confusing the reader somewhat.

Language and Meaning

One of the things that gives any novel credibility for the reader is the author's use of language, both in descriptions and in conversations among the characters. In *Criss Cross*, the dialogue and the thoughts of the characters are particularly important, for they are those of young teenagers, and there is always a generational style of language among teenagers that is not the same as their parents and, often, found unacceptable by parents. In the case of *Criss Cross*, however, the language of both the teens and the few adults who do speak does not appear to differ much. None of the slang that one would expect is present. One curse word, which is quickly corrected, appears in one of Hector's thoughts, almost as an attempt to make him appear more realistic. For the most part, however, these teens appear to be in a time warp, relative to the language used, in both words and thoughts. If this is to be truly believable young adult fiction, as well as a piece that teens would find relevant, then the language should have included far more typical slang and far more references to contemporary events and issues. Perhaps in attempting to create a work that would be universal and more timeless in its readership, the author has somewhat sacrificed relevancy.

Structure

The structure of *Criss Cross* probably will be the most appealing venue for a young teen. While appearing to be a bit disjointed to the adult reader, because of its continual movement back and forth among the characters and the issues, and the scenes, it lacks the smoother plot development that an adult prefers. The novel is composed of numerous short chapters, some with just a few lines, interspersed among a few lengthier ones when there is some suspenseful action, such as the medical crisis with Mrs. Bruning. It is, however, chronological, as it takes the reader through a spring and summer in the lives of this small town group of teens. Each character is developed in a sporadic manner, however, and a bit of fluidity is lost in the process. Nevertheless, by the end, the reader has a solid understanding of the growth or lack thereof of each individual and has a relatively solid picture of where and how their lives will proceed.



Quotes

"The article she was looking at was about how the most important thing was to be yourself although the pictures that went with it recommended being someone else." (Chapter 1, p. 2)

"He definitely felt unfinished, still in process. He felt that there was still time, that by the time three years had passed and he was seventeen, as Rowanne was now, he, too, might coalesce into something." (Chapter 2, p. 7)

"Life was rearranging itself; bulging in places, fraying in spots. Sometimes leaving holes big enough to see through, or even step through, to somewhere else." (Chapter 2, p. 24-5)

"This was the danger of sharing your dreams with your parents. If you told them you wanted to learn to play the guitar, all they heard you say was, "I want to learn to play the guitar," and then they found some practical, convenient, cheap way, often involving a church basement, for you to do it." (Chapter 9, p. 71)

"I felt ten years old and a thousand years old, but I didn't know how to be my own age. I had never felt that way before, but now I feel like that a lot." (Chapter 14, p. 126)

"She was going to have to take her chances on actual people in trains with actual trees going by because the other stuff, the guy who gets younger because time is moving sideways next to his train, which science teachers seemed to feel was so exciting, made her feel like there was no ground beneath her feet. It gave her the creeps." (Chapter 16, p. 147)

"She looked poised. In some ways the past looked like a nicer place than the present. More golden, even in black and white, with less crudiness." (Chapter 18, p. 166)

"I'm a cartoon, he thought. My life is a cartoon." (chapter 25, p. 248)

"It's just fun to be a healthy beautiful young person walking around on a sunny afternoon with another healthy beautiful young person. A lot of fun. They shared their golden selves with the world, and the world smiled back." (Chapter 25, p. 249)

"I wonder how far from where you live you have to go," she said, "before it gets interesting."

"I don't think you have to go very far at all...I mean, think about it. You just go to someone's house for the first time, and it's different." (Chapter 26, p. 260)

"I think," he said, "that it's a good thing to get out of your usual, you know, surroundings. Because you find things out about yourself that you didn't know, or you forgot. And then you go back to your regular life and you're changed...because you take those new things with you." (Chapter 26, p. 267)



"Debbie's theory at the moment was that everything was perfect. This day was perfect. The bus was perfect and the world outside was perfect. She had a place in the perfect world, a perfect place, and she was in it." (Chapter 26, p. 268)

"Debbie wondered if it was true that there was only one person in the world for every person, and if you had already met him, and she either had to find a way to be around him again someday or always be alone. Romance-wise. She didn't quite believe this." (Chapter 29, p. 278)

"But I think if I knew someone was going to fall in love with me when I'm fifty-three or something, I think I could wait. Maybe. If I knew it would at least happen." (Chapter 37, p. 318)

"Debbie came over and sat, cross-legged, on the grass nearby. She crossed her arms, too, at the wrist, her hands resting side by side on her ankle. She was thinking that happiness wasn't necessarily, as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* says, in your own backyard. But it might be nearby, in someone else's backyard." (chapter 38, p. 329)

"As for Hector, he had spent a lot of time walking lately. He had walked out of his roly-poly childhood, out of his cocoon....it was a leaner, more thoughtful Hector who sat there in the cooling grass. He looked different too." (Chapter 38, p. 335)

Topics for Discussion

How would your summer differ from that of the teens of Seldem? Did you find their summer boring? Why or why not?

What do you think Debbie learned that summer?

Would you rather be Dan Persik or Meadow or would you rather be more like Hector or Debbie? Why?

How does teen life in a small town differ from that in a large city or suburb. Which would you prefer? Why?

What do you think about Lenny being placed in a lower "track" of high school classes? Is this fair? Why or why not?

Compare the relationships between Debbie and her mother and Lenny and his father? What makes them different?

If you could write a different ending to this story, what would it be?