

Forever... Study Guide

Forever... by Judy Blume

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



Contents

Forever... Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-5.....	5
Chapters 6-10.....	10
Chapters 11-15.....	14
Chapters 16-20.....	17
Chapters 21-26.....	20
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	28
Style.....	32
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	35



Plot Summary

"Forever..." is a young adult romance novel by Judy Blume. The story of "Forever..." is a universal tale of first love, adolescence, and the struggle towards self-discovery. Katherine Danziger is not alone on her journey and has friends and family that consistently help her along the way. Katherine comes from a loving, supportive family. Her parents and grandparents are open about everything from love, sex, and relationships to life experiences and mistakes. They want their daughters and granddaughters to know about life in order to be able to make sensible, informed decisions. Throughout the novel, Katherine's parents help to guide her through the journey to self-discovery and offer her the advice and information that she needs to make wise decisions. As Katherine goes through the normal adolescent journey toward self-discovery, she meets Michael Wagner, who becomes her first love and ushers her into the world of romance and intimacy. Michael and Katherine throw themselves into the excitement and romance of their relationship and it is this relationship that builds up Katherine's confidence and begins her preparation for adulthood. Through her relationship with Michael, Katherine slowly learns to take command of her own life. She learns to take control of her destiny, make decisions for herself, and accept the consequences for her actions and decisions.

When she first meets Michael, Katherine has no definite plans for her life or understanding of her own identity. In the middle of her senior year in high school, Katherine goes to a friend's New Year's Eve Party and is immediately attracted to Michael Wagner just as he is immediately attracted to her. The next day he returns to the friend's house under the pretense of collecting his records and asks Katherine to spend some time with him. It is not long before they are spending their every available moment with each other. Michael has been sexually active while Katherine has not and as their relationship progresses Katherine is continually having to set boundaries around their physical intimacy. Katherine also discovers that the first time Michael had sex, he got a venereal disease. While Michael is not pushy or demanding, he makes it obvious that he wants a physically intimate relationship and Katherine feels pressured. As Katherine contemplates a sexually intimate relationship with Michael she and her friend Erica debate the nature of sex. Erica argues that sex is simply a physical act and not a romantic one, while Katherine sees sex as an emotionally loaded action that can result in greater intimacy between the participants. The question of birth control and protection is also an issue in the novel. Katherine's mother and grandmother both provide her with literature and information that helps her realize the seriousness of sex and allows her to make an informed decision. Katherine's grandmother works with Planned Parenthood and Katherine goes to Planned Parenthood of New York when she plans on entering a sexual relationship with Michael.

But Katherine and Michael's relationship is not just about sexual intimacy. Through her relationship with Michael, Katherine works towards self-discovery. At the beginning of the novel she had no ambitions or goals in life. She planned to go to whatever college accepted her. During her relationship with Michael, she begins building her life around him and making plans for the future around his dreams and plans. She adopts his



interests and throws herself completely into his life. Katherine's parents are understandably concerned by this development, but Katherine is very defensive. Eventually, as Katherine begins to realize how much her parents care for her she slowly begins to see that they have a point. Towards the end of the novel, Katherine and Michael are separated by summer jobs in different states and Katherine realizes that in fact, her parents were right. She finds out that she is too young to plan on spending the rest of her life with someone and she slowly comes to realize that there is a balance between thinking that the future will take care of itself and having every detail of the future planned. She realizes that she has to take control of her own life and make decisions based on her own dreams. With the death of her grandfather, Katherine comes to understand that life must be lived fully and that she has her whole life ahead of her to have a serious relationship. Ultimately, Katherine realizes that she is simply too young for a forever relationship and that her relationship with Michael is just a stepping-stone in her life journey. However, she knows that she will always cherish her time with Michael, which helped her to embrace and discover her identity as a young woman.



Chapters 1-5

Summary

Forever... opens with an introduction to Erica Small's cousin Sybil Davison, who is a genius but sleeps around with various guys because of her self-esteem issues as a result of being overweight. Erica is Katherine's best friend and they live in Westfield, New York. Erica and Katherine go to Sybil's New Year's party where Katherine meets a guy named Michael Wagner, who has glasses and reddish-blond hair. Katherine is immediately attracted to Michael but becomes defensive and pretends that she doesn't like him. As she admits later, "It's true that I come on strong with my sarcastic act sometimes, but only when I'm interested in a guy." Erica tells her that this is because she is insecure.

After the party, Erica tells Katherine that she can tell she likes him, while Katherine continues to deny the fact that she likes Michael. Katherine gives a brief description of Erica's history, saying that she has an outspoken and uninhibited personality while Katherine does not. Erica is very short and says that she has to be assertive and strong-willed in order to make up for her height. Katherine admires Erica's ability to remain calm even in the face of enormous events like college-board score tests.

Michael comes over to Sybil's house the day after the party in order to pick up some records. Katherine says hello to Michael as he passes by the kitchen on his way to the basement to collect his records. From the basement he asks about some records labeled K.D., and Katherine says that those are hers and she goes down to help him sort the records. Michael tells Katherine that he came over because he wanted to see her again and invites her on a ride in his car.

Michael and Katherine leave Sybil's house and drive by Overlook Hospital where Katherine tells Michael she works as a candy striper after school every Thursday. Michael and Katherine drive to the lake and walk around it and talk about their plans for college. Michael asks Katherine where she is going, and she says that she has applied to three colleges and will just have to wait and see where she is accepted. She asks Michael where he is going, and he says that he wants to go to either University of Vermont or Middlebury. Michael takes Katherine's hand as they continue to walk. Michael asks Katherine if she can ski and she tells him she only knows how to water ski. He offers to teach her to snow ski and she says that would be nice.

When they return to the car, Michael asks Katherine if he can kiss her. Katherine asks if he always requests permission and Michael says no. Katherine says O.K. and Michael takes his glasses off and stares at her for a moment. When Katherine says he is making her nervous, he explains that he just wanted to see what she looked like without his glasses and tells her that she's blurred. They both laugh and he kisses her. Before he lets her out at Sybil's house he kisses her again and tells her she is delicious, something Katherine has never heard from a boy.



Katherine tells her mother, Diana, about meeting Michael and her mother is pleased for her.

Diana Danziger is a librarian in charge of the children's room at the public library. Katherine's younger sister, Jamie, comes in to show Katherine her latest artistic endeavor, embroidering her jeans, and promises to do the same for Katherine before her date next weekend. Jamie asks if Katherine is in love again and refers to the boy named Tommy Aronson who Katherine thought she was in love with a while back. Katherine says that was a childish infatuation. Katherine remembers that all Tommy Aronson wanted from her was sex and that when she told him she wouldn't sleep with him, he simply went out and slept with another girl. However, Michael is not like Tommy and calls to talk during the week before their date. Michael tells Katherine about his fifteen-year-old schnauzer, Tasha, and Katherine tells Michael that she plays tennis and takes modern dance.

On the night of her date, Katherine is extremely nervous and wears a light blue sweater because she once read, "boys like light blue on a girl better than any other color" (23). Michael arrives and Katherine is momentarily embarrassed by the fact that her parents are hooking rugs rather than sitting on the couch and watching TV. After meeting her family, Michael takes Katherine to a movie and dinner and asks her if there are any good places to "park." Katherine does know about places to "park" because Erica lives in one of the locations and finds used condoms all the time. Katherine wonders how people can just throw something like that away and forget about it. Katherine suggests that they go back to her house because her parents allow her to take boyfriends to the den. Michael attempts to make some moves, but Katherine says she wants to wait and Michael asks if she is a virgin. Katherine becomes a bit defensive and tells Michael that she is. Michael tells her it's nothing of which to be ashamed. Katherine considers if the fact that Michael asked to find out was what she expected of him.

Katherine's father, Roger, is a pharmacist who owns Danziger's Drugs and another store in a nearby town. Her father works out at a gym and plays tennis to stay in shape. He keeps telling her mother that if she doesn't start to work out soon her thighs will be flabby. Katherine recalls one of her mother's divorced friends telling her mother that she should keep in shape if she didn't want to lose her husband. Diana thought that was ridiculous.

Katherine's parents go on a trip to Mexico when business is slow in January, and Diana's parents come and keep the house and the girls because Roger's parents are both dead. Katherine's grandmother keeps herself busy with Planned Parenthood and NOW. The night before her parents leave for vacation, Katherine has Michael and Erica come over and Michael brings his friend Artie. Artie suggests they play board games. They play for a while and then decide to go for pizza. When they return, Katherine's parents are asleep and Katherine and Michael go to the den by themselves. They have been dating for five weeks and Katherine has asked him to go slow and Michael has promised he will. Michael removes Katherine's bra and they kiss, but when Michael reaches for the snap on Katherine's jeans, Katherine tells him no. Michael rolls away



and groans but says he understands. Katherine says that if Erica and Artie hadn't been in the next room she probably wouldn't have stopped Michael.

Katherine wishes she could have some time alone to think. Michael comes back and suggests that he and Artie leave. After they leave Erica complains about the fact that Artie didn't even try to kiss her. Erica asks Katherine if she loves Michael and Katherine says that she likes him a lot. Erica asks Katherine if she is still a virgin and Katherine says yes. Erica tells Katherine that she thinks she wants to have sex before college to get the experience out of the way. Katherine says that she wants her first time to be special, and Erica says she is a romantic while she herself is a realist. Erica says that sex is a physical thing.

Jamie is also an excellent cook and when their grandparents come over, Jamie and their grandmother cook gourmet meals every night and have guests over. Katherine talks about her sadness over her grandfather who had a stroke and now has difficulty talking. Katherine says that it is painful for her mother to interact with him but that her grandmother treats him the same as always. Katherine muses on the idea that people who come from happy homes tend to have good marriages and she says she believes that.

Michael picks Katherine up from her candy stripper shift and she explains to him why she works in geriatrics. She tells him that when she was little, her father's parents lived in a home and she was always afraid of them and hated the place. When her grandmother passed away she was relieved that she would never have to visit her again. But when her mother's father had the stroke and she visited him in the hospital, she wasn't afraid of him because she loved him and she thought about the other older sick people who need people to care about them. Katherine says that her uniform makes her feel as if she is dressed for a part in a play. Michael tells her that Artie has the lead role in his school play and invites her to come with him to see it.

Michael meets her grandparents, and her grandmother tells her that she likes him but warns her to be careful of pregnancy and venereal disease. Katherine thinks about the old days when nice girls didn't sleep with boys. She says that not everyone in her generation has sex and does drugs; her generation is just more open about sex. Katherine has Michael over for dinner with her and Jamie and while they are cleaning up dishes they have a water fight. Michael again takes his glasses off to kiss her and she asks if he always does that. He tells her that glasses get in the way of kissing. She and Michael go upstairs to change clothes and Michael makes her allow him to stay in her room while she changes her top, although he promises not to touch her. However, Michael does touch her and just as Katherine is asking him to stop her sister knocks on the door and they go downstairs. Later, Jamie asks Katherine if she slept with Michael, although Jamie phrases it more bluntly. When Katherine becomes offended, Jamie says that her generation is so hung up about sex.



Analysis

Although Sybil has the IQ of a genius, that does not help her to feel better about herself. Teenagers are generally caught up by appearances and genius Sybil is no different. Erica is right in her assessment of Sybil's behavior. She is insecure as a result of her weight problem and she seeks attention from guys in order to receive some sort of affirmation about her value as a human being and as a girl. Like Sybil, Katherine also struggles with insecurity, which causes her to act somewhat abrasively towards any boy to whom she feels attracted. Katherine's insecurity also manifests itself in her occasionally shy behavior and her inability to be as uninhibited as Erica. Katherine and Sybil represent the average teenage girl who is looking for affirmation of her value as a human being even as she attempts to discover and establish her own identity and place in the world. Luckily for Katherine, and unlike Sybil, she has a loving and supportive family that affirms her and helps her to make logical, sensible decisions. A stable, loving home life provides a far better guarantee of life success than a genius IQ.

Katherine has never had experience with the kind of masculine attention she receives from Michael. Michael seems to be a good guy who is interested in Katherine as a person as well as the sexual possibilities she represents. Michael always removes his glasses when he kisses Katherine and when they engage in intimacy of any kind. This first time he tells her that he wants to see what she looks like without his glasses and tells her that she is blurred. This could suggest that ultimately, Michael is just a teenage boy and Katherine's real value for him lies in her identity as a girl and a sexual object and not in her identity as a human being. Because Michael is unable to see into the distance without his glasses, it could also suggest that Michael is incapable of looking far into the future and prefers to live in the moment. It could serve as a foreshadowing of Michael's naive assumption that their relationship will actually last forever and his inability to see the end of their relationship before it occurs. Lastly, it could also foreshadow his unwillingness to maturely accept Katherine's eventual decision to move on because he is limited to a view of the present moment.

Katherine's parents allow her an unusual amount of freedom. They hold to the opinion that they would prefer she "do stuff" in their house in a safe environment rather than out somewhere on a "parking" hill. They obviously rely on Katherine's upbringing in a sensible, stable environment to keep her from making unwise decisions. For the most part, this method works, but Katherine is not totally immune to the mistakes and foibles of adolescence. Katherine immediately "falls in love" with Michael and feels as if she knows everything about him from the moment they first meet. She is also not immune to the power of peer pressure and the typical adolescent need to please others. She does feel pressured by Michael into sexual intimacies and allows him to go further than she would seemingly like or encourage if the decision was her own.

Vocabulary

analyze, uninhibited, insight, sarcastic, insecure, fantastic, fabulous, infatuation, ordinary, pang, occurred, speckled, inexperienced, romantic, realist, request, assume



Chapters 6-10

Summary

At school Katherine asks Erica about her date with Artie, and Erica complains that Artie still hasn't made a move. Erica tells Katherine that she is also going to Artie's play and if he doesn't try something after the play she is going to be forced to do something drastic. Katherine and everyone else are amazed by Artie's performance, and Katherine says that he seemed different on the stage, more assured of himself, and made her forget who he was. A girl that Michael went out with a few times is also in the play and Katherine feels a bit jealous.

Michael, Erica, and Katherine go to an after-party at the home of the girl that Michael used to know. When her mother answers the door she tells Michael to go on down he knows the way, and Katherine wonders if she is trying to rub Michael's old relationship with the girl in her face. Everyone is having a good time, but when Katherine sees Michael kiss his old girlfriend on the cheek, she can't enjoy the party. Michael comes over to her and she asks, "Have we met?" and pulls away from him and goes over to Artie to tell him he did a wonderful job. She asks him how he acts so well and Artie says it just comes naturally and it's something he has always known he wanted to do. The rest of the party is uncomfortable for Katherine and Michael and they leave early. Michael asks her if she wants him to come inside when he drops her off and she tells him not to do her any favors, although she has been waiting all night to be alone with him. Michael finally gets her to tell him what's wrong and they agree to a policy of no secrets between them. They lay down on the rug in the den and when Michael reaches under her skirt she doesn't stop him. She tells Michael she's not ready and he tries to argue but Katherine tells him that she has to control her body with her mind. Michael says that if he didn't know better he would think she was a tease.

Michael calls Katherine and invites her to his sister and brother-in-law's place in Vermont for some skiing. Katherine tells her parents, who are at first reluctant to give their permission. Her father says that skiing is a dangerous sport and says that he doesn't like to make hasty decisions and will have to sleep on it. However, after talking to Michael's sister, they agree to let her go.

Erica tells Katherine that she asked Artie if he was gay and he said he wasn't sure. Erica suggests he try to find out with her and Artie agrees. Katherine's father comes to her room and sits down on the edge of her bed like he did when she was little and tells her to keep her common sense and be careful with Michael physically. Katherine assures him that everything will be fine.

Once at the ski house, Katherine tells Michael that she has gotten her period and so they won't be sleeping together. Michael is disappointed but says he is just glad that she could come. Michael's sister is an anthropologist for the Museum of Natural History and Katherine gets her to promise to come to career day at her school. Michael and



Katherine share a bathroom and Katherine wears her best white nightgown, hoping that Michael will see her. Michael comes into her room and they kiss. She asks Michael about her nightgown and he says it's nice and soft but covers too much of her. Michael tries to take things further but Katherine tells him no, and Michael tells Katherine that he loves her. Katherine tells him she loves him in her head, but she is unable to repeat the words aloud as she wonders if she can love someone she has only seen nineteen times in her life. They sleep in each other's arms.

The next morning they go out skiing and Michael's sister warns Katherine not to hurt Michael. Michael teaches Katherine to ski and she tells him she is excited even though she is completely terrified. Katherine catches on quickly and finds skiing an invigorating activity. After dinner that night, Katherine and Michael take a walk and return to find Michael's sister and brother-in-law smoking grass. Katherine is surprised because his sister seemed like such a normal person with her good career and because of her speech about not hurting Michael. And Michael's brother-in-law is a doctor. Michael says that he occasionally smokes with them. Katherine says that she tried it once but she got sick and didn't like the lack of control. Michael says he has noticed.

Their conversation pauses and Katherine wishes she had a script so she wouldn't say the wrong thing. She and Michael become almost totally intimate and Michael refers to his genitalia as "Ralph." She asks if all boys name their privates and he says that he can only speak for his own. Katherine thinks about how the descriptions in books don't really prepare you. She says that "Ralph" feels as if there is a lot going on under the skin. Michael tells her that he really does love her and this time she says it back to him. "Forever?" he asks her. "Forever," she replies.

Katherine returns home and Jamie asks her if she and Michael still like each other because their parents said that sometimes a lot of time together will end a relationship. Katherine is offended and her father tells her that it was just a general discussion. Katherine said that being together only made them closer. Katherine questions her father and he tells her that he likes Michael, but he doesn't like seeing her tied down and that she has to consider the future. Katherine tells him that the future will take care of itself. Katherine goes to her mother who tells her that her father would simply like it if she wasn't as exclusive with Michael.

Katherine and her mother go to school and Katherine thinks about how she is hardly ever allowed to have any driving practice. Katherine asks her mother if she was a virgin when she got married. Her mother tells her that she was a virgin until she got engaged but that there was a double standard then and boys were supposed to have experience. Katherine asks her if she would still wait and her mother tells her that she wouldn't have married so young in the first place. Her mother tells her that she has to be sure before she has sex because it is a commitment, you can't go back to holding hands. You become completely vulnerable to that other person.

Erica says that she would be able to tell the moment Katherine lost her virginity because she would be able to see it in her appearance. Katherine tells Erica that Michael said he loved her and Erica exclaims about how romantic it is. Katherine says she thought she



didn't believe in romance and Erica says she doesn't. She tells Katherine that she and Artie played strip poker. Katherine asks about her plan to have sex before college, and Erica says she wants to sleep with Artie. Katherine asks why and Erica says that it's because they at least like each other.

Analysis

While Katherine and Erica and the other girls of their generation believe that they are sexually liberated, they are obviously not completely free. Katherine feels unable to tell Michael exactly what she wants and lets herself be talked into allowing more privileges than she would really like to allow. Erica is obsessed with sleeping with someone in order to get the experience over with and move on rather than being totally liberated from all preoccupations with sex and making sexual decisions for herself. Erica worries when a boy shows no sexual interest in her whatsoever. Erica feels that she has to force a sexual relationship in order to be normal, but she never really thinks about whether or not she herself wants a sexual relationship. It is only after she develops feelings for Artie and sees the relationship between Katherine and Michael that Erica decides to wait to experience intimacy with someone for whom she at least has feelings. Like most teenagers, Erica and Katherine are living only in the present and feel pressure to experience all of the adolescent experiences that are "normal" for this stage of their lives.

Artie's performance develops an underlying theme of the entire novel dealing with the performance skills employed by all adolescents as they grow, develop, and adjust to the world around them. Katherine wonders about Artie's acting abilities but quickly reveals her own abilities when she acts like she doesn't care if Michael comes home with her or not. She actually wants nothing more, but she is able to convince him that she doesn't care. It is typical of teenagers to adopt various attitudes, beliefs, and personalities as they observe the world around them and try to find their places in the scheme of things. They try on different personalities and performances to see which ones are comfortable and natural. They put on performances all the time as they try to seem cool to one another and attempt to gain the approval of their peers. Katherine is afraid to reveal her true fears and feelings to Michael, so she allows him more intimate liberties than she would otherwise.

Michael's naming of his genitalia and his assertion that he "speak" for it illustrates the typical masculine adolescent attitude. Michael is still discovering his sexuality and it has become one of the most important things in his life. His personal identity has become wrapped up in his sexual identity and his genitalia are given an independent personality of their own. Typically and ironically, Katherine finds that the description in books doesn't really capture the real thing or prepare her for the experience. Most teenagers learn about sexual techniques and encounters from books, magazines, and movies. Thus, many of them have mistaken ideas about sex and love. However, this is ironic because this is a book that is supposed to be something of an educational treatise on the experiences of first love and adolescent life. Perhaps Blume is suggesting that no



book, no matter how detailed and realistic, can adequately prepare someone for his or her first sexual encounter.

Vocabulary

arrange, drastic, fidgeting, anxious, aside, convince, shift, hasty, complex, improved, elope, bombard, qualified, vulnerable, improve, likely, invigorating, certain, experimenting, standards



Chapters 11-15

Summary

Michael, Katherine, Erica and Artie go to a Rangers game in Madison Square Garden, and Artie takes their loss very hard. Katherine tries to encourage him by saying it's just a game, but Artie replies that nothing is ever just a game. Erica says that Artie has been accepted by the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, but Artie explains that his father won't allow him to go to anything but a four-year college. Michael explains to Katherine that Artie really hates school and he doesn't think he'll make it through one year of college, let alone four. He says they can't help Artie but she can help "Ralph," and he ends the discussion by taking her hand and placing it in his lap.

Michael goes away for a week to work on his ski instructor's pin and Katherine's family keeps her very busy that weekend. Katherine's father asks if she is going steady and she replies that she doesn't want to see anyone else. Katherine's mother reminisces about an old boyfriend and Katherine thinks it is for her father's benefit so he can see how her mother has forgotten about her old high school boyfriend. Katherine doesn't tell her parents, but she thinks that her relationship with Michael is not just some youthful fad. Katherine's father tries to tell her that she would be better off not tied down, but this only makes Katherine realize that she and Michael won't be going to the same college. She tries to apply to the same schools but it is too late.

Michael comes home early to see her and they go out. Michael tells Katherine to guess what he has and she jokingly suggests a venereal disease. Michael doesn't laugh and tells her that he once got a VD from a girl he met on the beach. Katherine says he should never take chances and Michael says she always thinks of everything. Michael says she probably never took a chance in her life.

They make up and Michael tells Katherine that he has the key to his sister's apartment.

They go to his sister's apartment and Michael tells Katherine that he has never brought another girl there. They lie on the bed and kiss and Katherine tells Michael that she loves him even though he is an outsy and she is an insy, explaining that she is talking about his belly button. Katherine and Michael explore each other without actually having sex, although Katherine doesn't want to go as far as they do in the beginning of the evening. The next night Michael picks her up and they go straight to the apartment, this time knowing that they will finally sleep together. Katherine makes Michael wear a condom, although he is reluctant and a little annoyed. However, Michael finishes before they can come together and Katherine reassures him that everything is fine. They go out for hamburgers and come back to finish things. This time they actually do have sex, although Katherine finds it an extremely uncomfortable experience and doesn't enjoy herself. She wonders just how terrible it would be if your first time wasn't actually with someone you loved.



Katherine is somewhat surprised that her parents can't read her experience on her face but since they act normal, she does too. Katherine's mother gives her an article from the Times about sex. The article was entitled, "What About the Right to Say 'No'? Sexual Liberation." The article asks readers to ask themselves four questions before they commit to having sex: Is intercourse necessary for the relationship, what should you expect, where would you go for help if you needed it, and have you thought about how this relationship will end? Katherine feels better when she realizes that good sex takes time and practice and thinks about the difference between reading and doing. Katherine doesn't like that the writer asks her to think about the end of her relationship with Michael and skips this step. Katherine tells her mother that she liked the article and agreed that a person shouldn't ever feel pushed into sex or that she has to do it to please someone. Katherine is surprised when Erica can't tell she is no longer a virgin. Michael comes over and tells Katherine he can't wait until Friday and Katherine thinks about how her mother said you can never go back to holding hands, but she doesn't want to just hold hands anymore.

Katherine's grandmother sends her a bunch of literature on Planned Parenthood, birth control, abortion, and venereal disease. Katherine thanks her grandmother for sending her the stuff and sets up a lunch date with her grandparents for Friday in New York. Katherine sets up an appointment with Planned Parenthood of New York for Friday as well. Katherine and Erica go with Erica's mother on her job as a film critic and see a preview of a new Robert Redford movie in New York. Katherine doesn't like that the movie wasn't realistic and Erica's mother agrees. She asks Katherine if she was hoping for the story to turn out the way it would in real life, and Katherine says yes.

Katherine has lunch with her grandparents and notices that her grandfather looks pale. But they have a good lunch and her grandmother notices that Katherine is glowing. Her grandmother says that she must be in love and her grandfather raises his glass in a toast to love. She thanks them for lunch and her grandfather hugs her extra hard. Katherine happily goes off to her appointment with Planned Parenthood.

Katherine goes to a group session and a personal session called Personal Counseling. They talk about what type of birth control Katherine wants and she says she wants the Pill. Her counselor says they have to find the right birth control for her lifestyle and proceeds to ask her a variety of questions. Katherine is examined and has a gonorrhea culture and is totally cleared. The doctor gives her a mirror to look at herself so that she will become familiar with her own body. Katherine is given a prescription for the Pill and goes home to find out that Michael has the flu.

Analysis

Artie's dim view of life and his assertion that nothing is just a game presents a darker example of this teenage search for identity and control. Artie's father won't give him the opportunity to pursue his dream and develop his acting skills. Instead, he has already decided Artie's future regardless of Artie's hopes, dreams, and talents. This kind of lack of control can be extremely devastating to an adolescent who is just discovering his or



her identity and role in the world. However, this is even more difficult for Artie because, as he has told Katherine, he has known that he wanted to become an actor from a very young age. It is something he has always wanted to do, and now when he finally has the opportunity to take his dream to the next step, he is cut off from opportunity and given no choice in the matter. Further complicating Artie's life and enhancing his confusion and difficulty is his confusion about his sexuality. He is unsure whether or not he is a homosexual and this is yet another thing that he lacks control over.

Luckily for Katherine, her parents are very open about sexuality and they want her to understand sexual experiences before she participates in them. Not all adolescents receive this kind of education, as Katherine notes there is a girl in her school who didn't know that pregnancy can result from sexual intercourse and the girl has already participated in sexual intercourse. Katherine's mother gives her the Times article in order to help her make wise decisions about her life and her experiences. Katherine doesn't like the last question of the article because she, like Michael, is living in the present. Her relationship with Michael is just beginning, so why think about the ending? This is evidence of Michael's influence in her life. While she still doesn't like to lose control and still continues to think logically and sensibly about things, Katherine is definitely developing a tendency to live in the moment. This can be a good thing or a bad thing. If you don't live in the moment sometimes, you can miss out on wonderful experiences and joys, but if you live too much in the moment, it can hurt the future, as Sybil will discover. The efforts of both Katherine's mother and grandmother to provide her with the information she needs to make a sensible decision definitely protect Katherine as the story progresses. Thanks to her mother and grandmother's influence, Katherine makes Michael wear a condom and acquires birth control, protecting herself from disease and unwanted pregnancy.

Vocabulary

responsible, optimist, fad, sudden, fantastic, demonstrate, absolutely, requires, automatically, turmoil, hypothetically, perpetual, innermost, dense, valuable, appeal, spontaneous, preference



Chapters 16-20

Summary

Ten days later, Katherine gets the same flu and her parents take turns staying home with her. Michael is well enough to come over that weekend and Katherine wears a hat to conceal her greasy hair. Katherine waits until her birthday the following Friday to tell Michael about the Pill. At her birthday dinner, Michael gives her a necklace with the inscription Katherine on one side and Forever...Michael on the other. Katherine loves it and almost cries.

Later, she tells Michael to guess what she's got and he jokingly says a VD. She says not unless he gave it to her and he says not a chance. They laugh and she tells him about the Pill. They go to Michael's house where Katherine sees just how messy he is and she sees his trophies and team pennants. Katherine picks out her favorite aftershave, they joke about him putting it on his genitalia, and he tells Katherine to put it on for him. Michael changes his mind and they decide to sleep together instead and Katherine notices that as Michael watches her undress, "Ralph" sticks straight out as if he is watching too. Michael finishes before Katherine is able to and she wonders if they will ever get it right even as she assures him that everything is okay. They go to sleep on his bed, and when they wake up they try again, this time Katherine finally finishes. She can't stop laughing because of the novelty of it and because of how close she feels to Michael. They fall back asleep and then get up to take a shower and get hamburgers. They return to Katherine's house and go to the den so that her parents won't be suspicious.

Jamie falls in love with a boy named David although they have decided to act like they hate each other so no one will know. Jamie is going to New Hampshire for a camp in the summer and as she is perfectly fine with being apart from David for seven weeks, Katherine thinks about how different love at thirteen is from love at eighteen. Katherine finds out that Sybil is pregnant and that she didn't tell her parents so that she could keep the baby and have the experience. She doesn't know who the father is. She is going to give the baby up for adoption. Erica is now going on the Pill as well because her mother freaked out.

Katherine and Michael plan for him to take off the winter semester of college and work on getting his ski instructor's pin so that he can be in Denver with her over the winter and make up his classes in the summer. Michael gets accepted into the University of Vermont and Katherine gets accepted into the University of Denver. Sybil gets in everywhere and Erica gets accepted at Radcliffe, where she was hoping to go to college.

Katherine is looking for a summer job and her father tells her that he has made arrangements for her to be a tennis instructor at Jamie's camp in New Hampshire over the summer. Katherine says she won't go because she doesn't want to spend the



summer apart from Michael, but her father says she is going. Katherine goes up to her room to cry.

Katherine goes over to spend the night at Erica's and Michael and Artie come over also. They throw Michael a surprise birthday party and Artie brings down the mood with a gloomy view of the future. He says that all they have to look forward to is winding up in a cancer ward with no one who cares and dying alone. Erica tells him to enjoy whatever he can and forget about the rest and Artie agrees to try to be more cheerful. Michael and Katherine and Erica and Artie go to separate rooms upstairs. After they sleep together, Katherine reluctantly and carefully broaches the subject of her summer job to Michael. She is horrified to discover that he also has a summer job in North Carolina. She is upset about the fact that he doesn't seem to mind as much as she does but is comforted by the fact that his parents arranged his job as well. They try to sleep together another time, but "Ralph" won't respond. They get dressed and Michael and Artie leave.

Katherine notices that things are strained between Erica and Artie as well and asks Erica about it. Erica says that she won't be seeing Artie anymore because he locked himself in the bathroom and threatened to kill himself. Erica ran to Michael and Katherine but didn't come in because she heard them in the room. Then when she returned, Artie was sitting on the bed as if nothing had happened, and when she said she can't see him anymore, he just said that he understands and that she has been very kind, as if he was playing a part in a play.

The morning of Michael's birthday Artie tries to hang himself from the shower-curtain rod, but the rod breaks and he is sent to Carrier Clinic, a private psychiatric hospital. Michael and Erica blame themselves, but Katherine tries to comfort them by saying that now Artie will get the help he needs. They both talk about how he tried to come to them and talk to them but Michael was too busy and Erica didn't want to see him for a while. The next night, they go to The Playground, a bar, and Erica and Michael get trashed while Katherine sips one drink and then sticks to ginger ale like her father told her. Katherine has a rough time getting them both to the car and when she gets home her parents help her take care of them. She realizes how wonderful and caring her parents are and is glad she didn't do anything drastic to protest her summer job.

June--the month where one life ends and another begins--arrives and Katherine gets ready to graduate. Katherine's family celebrates her mother's birthday and Jamie and Katherine bake her a cake. Their father gives her a bikini and she laughs saying it is great to be forty. Katherine wishes Artie could see her mother. Her mother comes to her room that night and asks if she is getting fat and Katherine says no but offers to teach her some exercises to tone her thighs.

Erica calls late that night to say that Sybil had a baby girl two weeks early and that they are both fine. Erica and Katherine go to visit her in the hospital the next morning and Sybil tells them all about the birthing experience. She tells them it is different from in the movies, much easier. She says she is getting birth control because she is not giving up sex, but the next time she has a baby she wants to be able to keep it. She is sorry she



won't be able to graduate and compares her situation to Artie's and makes herself feel better. Sybil says that she thinks her baby will be going to a good home but sounds sad about giving her up. Katherine wonders why she didn't think of all of that before this happened. Sybil explains that she could have had an abortion but she wanted the experience of giving birth.

Analysis

This section of the novel is a time of beginnings and endings. It accomplishes the events foreshadowed in the earlier portions of the novel and develops and foreshadows the final events of the novel. Artie's desperation and depression foreshadowed by his dim predictions about life and his difficulty establishing his identity and sexuality at the beginning of the book culminate in his attempted suicide. Sybil's search for affirmation and affection results in her pregnancy. Sybil decides to have the baby in order to have the "experience" of giving birth, but discovers that there is more to life than just "experience." She begins to realize that her decisions affect others and that she should employ her genius IQ to think about her actions before she goes through with them.

Life and death also play a big role in this section of the novel. Sybil's immaturity and innocence begin to deteriorate with the birth of her child. Artie unsuccessfully attempts to kill himself, leading to the hope that he will be able to begin a new life. Michael and Katherine declare that their love is an eternal kind of love and that their relationship will last forever even as their relationship slowly begins to deteriorate. Katherine finally experiences pleasure in their intimacy even as Michael begins to experience impotence. Just as they are growing closer and closer, they discover that they will soon be separated for the summer. Katherine's adolescent life is coming to a close with her graduation from high school, and her new life as a college student is on the verge of development.

Vocabulary

concoct, recuperating, suspicious, experience, odds, glum, asserted, hysterically, generous, disgusting, distorted, automatically



Chapters 21-26

Summary

Katherine goes to Michael's graduation and after that to a party at his house. She finally meets his parents and his mother introduces her to everyone as "Michael's little friend." Katherine doesn't really care for her description. An uncle of Michael's comes over and asks Katherine what she wants to do with her life. Katherine tells him that she wants to be happy and make other people happy. He says that is not enough and she says that's all she knows right now and walks away. That night Michael and Katherine make love in her den on the rug in front of the fireplace for old time's sake. Katherine takes control of the experience for the first time. Katherine graduates and also has a party and the next morning she and Michael leave for Erica's house on Long Beach Island. Michael and Katherine go out to the beach that night and make love and sleep on the sand. They wake up and watch the sunrise together. Four days later, Jamie and Katherine leave for New Hampshire.

Katherine immediately writes a long letter to Michael telling him about the camp and about how much she misses him. Michael writes back immediately telling her about what is going on at home and telling her how much he and "Ralph" miss her. Katherine writes another letter to Michael the day before he leaves for North Carolina wishing him a good trip. Erica writes Katherine a letter telling her that she wrote an editorial for the local newspaper *The Leader*. Erica gives Katherine Artie's address so she can write a nice letter to him. Katherine writes her parents and tells them how she and Jamie are doing and that she is keeping an eye on Jamie. Michael writes Katherine a letter from the airport. Katherine writes Artie a nice, encouraging letter. Katherine writes Erica and tells her about the camp and the other tennis instructor, Theo, who she doesn't like herself but wants to fix up with her shy friend, Nan. Erica writes back telling Katherine about her weekend at the beach and telling her that Sybil has changed since the baby. She says she thinks the experience was a bit more than Sybil bargained for. She says that she is going to wait to have sex until she wants to do it with someone she really cares about, like Katherine and Michael. Katherine's mother writes her a letter telling her about home.

Katherine notices that Theo watches her a lot and when she looks back he doesn't look away. Katherine says that Theo is a lot nicer than she thought he was. Theo notices Katherine's necklace and asks her what forever is supposed to mean and says that forever is a long time for a kid. Katherine says she's not a kid. Katherine doesn't like it that Theo calls her Kat. She gets a letter from Michael saying that he loves her and writes back. Both their letters are much shorter.

On their night off Theo, Nan, and Katherine all go to a movie. Katherine sometimes dreams about making love with Michael, but that night she is ashamed to awaken from a dream about Theo. She writes Michael a four-page letter. Every night the campers have the time to hang out and dance, Katherine notices that Theo only dances with the



little girls. When a slow song comes on, Theo asks Katherine to dance and she feels a great attraction to him. When they stop dancing, Katherine runs away, down to the lake, and cries. Parent's day arrives and Katherine and Jamie show their parents around the camp.

The following Sunday, Katherine gets a call from her mother telling her that her grandfather is dead. He had a second stroke and passed away. Katherine wants to come home to be with her mom and grandmother, but her mother tells her to stay at camp because her grandmother needs the time to pull herself together. Her grandfather didn't want a funeral; he just wanted to be cremated, so there is no reason for Katherine to come home. Katherine realizes that she will have to tell Jamie. She goes down to the lake and remembers her grandfather and how he used to play with her when she was little. She remembers how he toasted to love the last time she saw him.

She turns around to see Theo, who comforts her and offers to help her tell Jamie. Katherine kisses him after he walks her to her door, but he says he doesn't want to kiss her now with death as an excuse. Jamie takes the news better than Katherine did. They call home and their grandmother says that they had forty-seven wonderful years together and one couldn't hope for more. Katherine writes Michael a letter telling him about her grandfather. Theo talks to Katherine about the night she tried to kiss him, although Katherine says she doesn't want to talk about it. Theo asks her if she realizes that sex is an antidote to death. He says that he wants to see her again after camp, after she gets her head together. Katherine gets a letter from Michael and can't reply. He writes back asking what is the matter. Katherine writes to Michael telling about her feelings for Theo and her confusion, but she never sends the letter.

A few days later, Katherine is called to the office again. She is nervous and Theo holds her hand and escorts her. However, it is not more bad news, it is Michael. Michael and Theo meet one another and Katherine gets ready for a night out with Michael, wondering what she is going to do. They have dinner and go back to Michael's hotel room. Michael kisses her and begins to undress her, but she stops him and realizes that she can't pretend and it isn't fair. Michael guesses that there is another guy and he gets angry and says that they were supposed to be together forever. He goes into the bathroom and comes out to calmly tell her that she will have to make up her mind. Katherine says that she can't make any promises at the moment and he says then he supposes it's over. She thinks about the article her mother gave her that told her to think about how the relationship would end. Katherine asks if they can wait a little while and just see how things go, and Michael says she can't have it both ways. Katherine tries to give his necklace back but he won't accept it. He drives her back to camp and as he is driving away he tells her that he slept his way across North Carolina.

Katherine sees Michael one more time before leaving for school when she is in a store with Erica. They say hello and Katherine asks after Artie. Michael says he is at home. Katherine wants to tell Michael that she doesn't regret any of their time together and that she will always love him. She wants to tell him that maybe if they were ten years older things would have worked out differently, but that she is not ready for forever right



now. She hopes Michael can see all of that in her eyes. Katherine returns home and her mother tells her that Theo called.

Analysis

At Michael's graduation party it is obvious that Michael's parents are as unhappy as Katherine's parents over the exclusivity of their relationship. Both sets of parents think that their children are too young for this kind of attachment and commitment. They want their children to be able to take the time to discover and form their own identities before they choose a life partner. As Katherine's parents have been supportive, loving, honest, and sensible throughout the novel, Katherine ultimately discovers that they are right about her relationship with Michael.

The early chapters of this section of the novel build up a foreshadowing of Katherine's eventual separation from Michael. The final time they make love at Michael's graduation, Katherine takes control of their interaction for the first time. This moment symbolizes her growing security and confidence in her own identity and her developing distance from Michael. She doesn't need him to guide or instruct her anymore. She is truly liberated for the first time as she initiates and controls their sexual interaction.

When Katherine meets Theo and immediately dislikes him, the reader senses the hint that she will eventually develop a relationship with him. At the beginning of the novel, she treats Michael rudely because she is attracted to him and even states explicitly that she becomes defensive and prickly around guys to whom she is attracted. She instantly becomes defensive with Theo and mentions him quite often in her letters to Erica. The fact that she wants to set him up with Nan just serves to illustrate the fact that she is still clinging to the comfort and security of her familiar relationship with Michael. Her emancipation from this relationship is a slow and painful process, but when she eventually does break up with Michael, it is clear that she is finally deciding to take complete control of her life and determine her own identity.

While she will forever love Michael as her first love, she also recognizes the fact that she is just at the beginning of her new life and that she is too young to make promises and commitments that are supposed to last forever. As she leaves high school behind and looks forward to the world of college, she understands that she needs the opportunity to develop herself as an individual.

Vocabulary

opportunities, examine, aggressive, tremendous, sweltered, prohibited, editorial, platonically, enclose, emphasis, adjusting, improve, drenched, rally, shriek



Characters

Katherine Danziger

The protagonist of the novel, seventeen year-old Katherine is a senior in high school with no definite goals for her life when she meets Michael and falls in love. Katherine is very logical and realistic but that does not prevent her from being swept off her feet by Michael. Katherine and Michael are determined that their love will last forever even though their parents think they are moving too quickly. Katherine continues to adapt her life to Michael's, until summer jobs in different states allow Katherine the space to reevaluate how her life has changed, and she decides she can no longer be with Michael.

Diana Danziger

Katherine's mother, Diana, is very nurturing and open with her daughters. Diana is very honest about sex and teenage life experiences so that her daughters will be well prepared and make mature and informed decisions.

Roger Danziger

Katherine's father, Roger, is very protective of his daughters and thinks that Katherine's relationship with Michael is too serious for such a young age. Roger encourages his daughters to be logical and sensible.

Jamie Danziger

Jamie is Katherine's thirteen-year-old sister and a very talented musician and artist. Her parents encourage her talents and their house is full of her artwork. Jamie seems to be even more mature than Katherine at times in her knowledge of the world and her opinions about gender roles.

Hallie Gross (Grandmother)

Katherine's grandmother, Hallie, is very active and works with Planned Parenthood in New York City. She also ran for Congress. Hallie has a very open policy with her granddaughters and believes that they should know about sex in order to make informed decisions.



Ivan Gross (Grandpa)

Katherine's grandfather, Ivan, is a very kind, gentle man who has suffered a stroke and now has difficulty speaking. It is sometimes hard for Katherine and her mother to be around him and see the change in him, but he doesn't let his difficulties hold him back. Ivan dies at the end of the book but his life provides an example of a happy, well-lived life.

Michael Wagner

Katherine meets Michael at a party and almost instantly falls in love with him, as he does her. Michael loves Katherine but is impatient to have sex with her not long into their relationship. Michael continues to love Katherine even when they are separated over the summer and his heart is broken when Katherine breaks up with him.

Erica Small

Katherine's best friend, Erica, is tiny, honest, and opinionated. Erica wants to get the experience of sex over with for most of the novel, but towards the end of the story she decides that she wants to wait for someone she cares about and have a meaningful experience.

Artie

Artie is Michael's best friend and kind of dates Erica for most of the novel. Artie loves theater and is not sure whether or not he is gay. Erica attempts to help Artie understand himself but breaks up with him when she thinks she isn't helping him. Artie wants to go to an acting school rather than college, but his father forbids it and he attempts to commit suicide near the end of the novel.

Sybil Davison

Sybil is Erica's cousin who sleeps around because she has self-esteem issues as a result of being overweight. Sybil ends up becoming pregnant and having the baby for the experience. Sybil gives the baby up for adoption and grows up rapidly as she realizes that the experience of childbirth was a bit more than she had bargained for.

Theo

Katherine meets Theo near the end the novel when she goes to teach tennis at her sister's summer camp. Theo is also a tennis instructor and shows an interest in Katherine. Katherine doesn't like Theo at first, but as she gets to know him, she realizes he is a good guy and she grows close to him when he comforts her after the death of

her grandfather. Her feelings for Theo are part of the reason that Katherine ends her relationship with Michael at the end of the novel.



Objects/Places

Overlook Hospital

Overlook Hospital is where Katherine works as a candy striper every Thursday after school. Katherine suffers from guilt as a result of being afraid of her father's grandparents when she visited them in the hospital as a child and not getting to know them before they died. She works as a candy striper in the geriatric ward so that she can encourage the older people and make them comfortable.

Planned Parenthood

Katherine's grandmother works for Planned Parenthood and Katherine goes to Planned Parenthood of New York in order to get birth control so that she can continue to have sex with Michael.

Birth Control

When Katherine decides to pursue a physical relationship with Michael, she goes to Planned Parenthood of New York and goes on the Pill. Katherine takes on the responsibility of birth control as her own.

VDs

Katherine is shocked to discover that Michael got a Venereal Disease when he had sex with a girl on the beach. As a result she convinces Michael to use a condom when they sleep together, although he is somewhat unwilling at first.

Board Games

Artie is obsessed with board games and always drives around with them in his car. This obsession illustrates his desire to return to the simplicity and happiness of childhood, as he believes that there is nothing to look forward to in life.

White Nightgown

Katherine wears a special white nightgown when she goes on the ski trip with Michael. The soft, old-fashioned, white nightgown symbolizes Katherine's innocence before she sleeps with Michael on the trip.



“What About the Right to Say No? Sexual Liberation”

“What About the Right to Say No?: Sexual Liberation” is the article that Katherine’s mother gives her that examines the definitions and concepts of sexual intercourse, tells teenagers where to go if they need help, and asks them to think about the end of the relationship so that they will make wise decisions while they are in the relationship. Katherine at first doesn’t appreciate her mother’s help but quickly realizes the validity of the article’s discussions.

University of Vermont

The University of Vermont is one of the two universities where Michael has been planning to attend. Michael has a plan for college when he meets Katherine and gets accepted into the school where he has always dreamed of going.

University of Denver

The University of Denver is where Katherine is accepted into college. Unlike Michael, Katherine has no particular desire to attend any schools. She attempts to apply to the same schools as Michael not long after they begin to date but is told that it is too late to apply. Katherine is very depressed at the thought of going away to school without Michael.

New Hampshire

Katherine goes to New Hampshire, the location of Jamie’s summer school, while Michael works a summer job in North Carolina.



Themes

Death

At the beginning of the story, Katherine tells Michael about why she volunteers at the Overlook Hospital geriatric ward. She does it because she didn't get to know her father's parents before they died because she was afraid of them and didn't like visiting them. When her mother's father got sick, she already loved him and realized that she missed out on the same type of relationship with her father's parents. She realized that there was nothing to fear and that she wanted to make older people feel better before they died.

Artie also has issues with death. His own inability to discover his identity and go to follow his passion lead him to attempt suicide. His attempt is foreshadowed by his gloomy forecast of horror and death for everyone before the end. At her mother's birthday, Katherine wishes that Artie could see how happy and fulfilled her mother is at forty.

Katherine's grandfather also serves as an example of a happy, long life that ends well. Although Katherine feels the tragedy of her grandfather's death, she recognizes that he had a good life and she remembers the good times they had together. She remembers how he toasted to love the last time she saw him and suddenly she understands real love. Her grandfather lived well and died well because he loved his family and was loved by them.

One of the underlying themes of the whole novel is elucidated by Theo when he states to Katherine explicitly that sex is an antidote to death. Before beginning her relationship with Michael, Katherine revealed her fear and conflicted feelings about death. Throughout the novel, couples, like Katherine and Michael and Katherine's parents, seek intimacy with one another in an attempt to connect and to feel alive. Elements of death can be found throughout the novel. Katherine's graduation is the end of one life and the beginning of another. Sybil's innocence and immaturity suffer a swift death after the birth of her child. Artie's near death experience makes Katherine, Michael, and Erica feel uncomfortably close to death. And of course, Katherine's relationship with Michael results in the death of her virginity and her innocence. Certainly the couples in the novel love one another for the sake of love, but there is also an underlying element of desperation and defiance in their lovemaking.

Performance

Artie provides the most obvious reference to theater and acting, however, Katherine and her friends perform for one another constantly throughout the novel. As they search to discover and establish their own identities, Katherine and her friends adopt different attitudes and ideas as if trying on different masks. Ironically, Katherine asks Artie how



he is able to act so well. When he tells her that his skills come naturally, there is an underlying suggestion that acting is a natural skill for everyone but especially adolescents. Katherine sees Artie up on stage as he is transformed into an entirely different person. But this is just really the transformation of maturity and education amplified and put on stage. All adolescents go through a transformation as they grow up and figure out who they are.

Following the party after Artie's play, Katherine pretends that she doesn't care if Michael comes inside with her when she wants nothing more than for him to do just that. She even thinks at one point that she wishes she had a script to follow so that she wouldn't make a mistake. While everyone takes on roles and adopts personas now and again, the concept of performance is especially applicable to teenagers. They are constantly performing for others, trying to figure out how to get people to like them, trying to figure out what type of people they like, and trying to figure out what personality feels most comfortable.

Gender Roles

The concepts of the generation gap and gender roles both play large roles in the narrative and relate to one another. The female line is represented by Hallie Gross, Diana Danziger, Katherine Danziger, and Jamie Danziger. Each new generation thinks that they are unique and that the gender roles of her generation have progressed, as well as the social and cultural concepts of her generation.

Hallie Gross is unusually active and independent for a woman of her generation. She is also unusually open about sex with her granddaughters. But for her generation, there were very strict codes of behavior for men and women. Like many of her generation, she attempts to completely destroy these codes and she ends up being even more open about sex than her granddaughters.

For Diana Danziger, many of these codes were still in effect when she was dating and she tells Katherine that she remained a virgin until she was engaged. She explains that there was a double standard and that boys were supposed to have experience. She also tells Katherine that if she was her age, she would not commit to marriage at such a young age. For Mrs. Danziger, the traditional gender roles were still in effect and she was expected to get married at a young age. Although she is strong and independent, even Mrs. Danziger shows signs of vulnerability to the traditional gender roles of marriage. When her husband criticizes her appearance, she shows signs of wondering if she shouldn't work out more in order to make him happy. There is still some part of her that listens to her friend when she tells Mrs. Danziger that she will have to stay in shape in order to keep her husband.

Katherine thinks that she is sexually liberated, but for much of her relationship with Michael, he is in control. He even places her hand in his lap and tells her what to do at one point. Katherine tells her mother that she doesn't think that a girl should be



pressured into sex, and although she does seem willing to have sex with Michael, there is no doubt that without his pressure she would have waited longer.

Jamie's generation seems to take the concepts of gender roles and sex even further so that sex is a meaningless, physical act. Even though she is young, Jamie is completely comfortable talking about sex and feels that it is simply a part of life. In some ways the generations seemed to have lessened the gender gaps and destroyed the traditional roles, but in many ways society is still stuck at the beginning.

Love

Love is the single dominant theme found consistently throughout the novel. Love exists in various kinds, such as love between friends and family, but it is romantic love that dominates "Forever..." It is the romance between Katherine and Michael that forms the core of the novel, just as Michael comes to be the core of Katherine's life. Katherine and Michael connect with one another instantly following the New Year's Eve party that they both attend. Within a short amount of time, they are spending every possible moment with one another. Katherine falls for Michael utterly and completely, to the point that she begins reorganizing her life, and reworking her plans so that Michael will become her life.

The further Katherine falls into Michael, the more and more concerned her parents, grandparents, and family become. This is understandable, for Michael's sudden appearance in Katherine's life has completely undone years of Katherine's planning. Katherine won't hear any of it, however. But over time, she begins to see the things her parents are saying about losing her own identity in order to make Michael happy and to remain with him. When both Michael and Katherine end up with summer jobs in different states, the distance allows Katherine the ability to objectively understand how her life has evolved over the past several months, and she decides to follow the path of her own life, instead of attempting to journey with Michael on his own path.

Self-discovery

Self-discovery is a major theme in the novel "Forever...". Self-discovery is the journey one takes to learn more about oneself, to discover just who one is, and what one's purpose in life may be. Self-discovery most heavily affects Katherine, and to a similar though far-less discussed degree, Michael.

When the novel begins, Katherine is a very kind, very logical seventeen year-old girl who plans on college and a strong future. She believes she has everything figured out, but an all-consuming love has not been part of her plans. This changes when she attends a New Year's Eve party where she meets Michael. The two fall for one another instantly, and so deeply, that they spend every possible second with one another. This causes Katherine to reorder her life around Michael, planning her life around his. This concerns Katherine's family, who believes she does not know enough about herself as an individual to be so committed in such a strong relationship. Katherine ultimately

comes to agree with them. She will always value her time with Michael, but must discover who she is, independent of him.

Michael's parents are also quite concerned about how deeply Michael has fallen in love with Katherine. They caution him about his relationship with Katherine, but Michael has hopelessly fallen for her. They worry that he does not have an identity independent of her. Michael disagrees, and is later stunned and utterly heartbroken when she breaks up with him.

Style

Point of View

"Forever..." is told from a first-person limited viewpoint by Katherine Danziger, the heroine. Katherine Danziger is eighteen years old, and this first-person technique works to make the novel feel almost like a diary. Katherine's first-person account of her relationship with Michael, her family and her friends, allows the reader to see inside the head of a typical eighteen-year-old girl as she struggles to find her own identity and establish her place in the world. Through this first-person narrative, Blum allows the reader the chance to understand just how powerful first love is and to understand how it does always seem as if it will last forever. The closeness and mutual education of Michael and Katherine also allows the reader to understand how, in a way, first love does last forever. The reader understands that Katherine will never forget her time with Michael and that the memory of her first explorations into the world of relationships, sex, and love will be something she carries with her forever.

Setting

The narrative is set in the town of Westfield, New York. The town is a typical medium-sized town with a typical teenage culture and life. Erica and Katherine both come from average middle-class families and an average high school experience. In this way, Katherine becomes every girl and her story of first love, the difficulties of adolescence, and the lifelong bonds of family and friendship becomes universal. There is another setting in the novel, however, as Katherine's grandparents live in New York City. Katherine is able to go to New York when she wants a certain amount of anonymity in her visit to Planned Parenthood.

Language and Meaning

Katherine's narrative is very detailed and personal and her language is very typical of an average eighteen-year-old. She doesn't use big words and if she discusses big concepts like death and love, they are couched in the normal adolescent phrases and experiences. The story is simply about first love and a few months in the life of an average teenage girl as she experiences love, intimacy, and death for the first time. Although not as prone to psychological evaluations as her friend Erica, Katherine is one of those rare teenagers who is able to step outside of herself and notice what is going on in other people's lives and empathize with them. These skills make her an excellent narrator, as she is able to provide descriptions and analysis of her own thoughts, emotions, and behavior as well as the behavior of others.

Structure

"Forever..." is divided into twenty-six chapters and follows an essentially continuous path of narration. There are no large amounts of time left unmentioned, no big gaps in the narrative flow, so the reader gets a detailed, consistent view of an individual female teenage life. The main narrative arc of the story follows the romantic relationship between Michael and Katherine from its inception right through to the last meeting between them. The reader is able to watch and understand as Katherine and Michael fall in love and truly believe that their love will last forever. As Katherine loses her grandfather, she realizes the tenuousness of life and the meaning of love. As Katherine matures and grows and takes control of her own life, she continues to discover her own identity. As Katherine meets someone else, she realizes that she just might be too young for forever. Finally, as Katherine painfully separates herself from Michael but retains the memory of their time together as a cherished possession she learns a lesson she will never forget.



Quotes

Erica lives on the hill. She's always finding used rubbers in the street. I can't understand how someone could just throw a thing like that out a car window and forget about it.

My mother was very close to Grandpa while she was growing up and now when they're together I can see how painful it is for her to watch him. But my grandmother treats him the same as always, like there's nothing wrong at all.

It's true that we are more open than our parents but that just means we accept sex and talk about it. It doesn't mean we are all jumping into bed together.

I could have said it back to him right away. I was thinking it all along. I was thinking, I love you, Michael. But can you really love someone you've seen just nineteen times in your life?

He and Mom started reminiscing about their college days. I didn't tell them that with Michael and me it's different. That it's not just some fifties fad, like going steady. That with us it is love--real, true, honest-to-god love.

This summer Jamie is going back to camp in New Hampshire. She says she can't wait. It doesn't seem to matter to her that she won't see David for seven weeks, which proves that love at thirteen is nothing like love at eighteen.

It's strange, but when it comes right down to it I never do fall apart--even when I'm sure I will.

Sure...you spend your whole life trying to make it and for what...so you can wind up in some cancer ward full of needles and tubes with nobody giving a shit...that's what you've got to look forward to...that's what we've all got coming...

Michael and Erica belted their drinks down and ordered a second round while I sipped my first slowly, the way my father said I should. After that I stuck to ginger ale.

I thought of how he'd looked after his first stroke--small and white and how he'd held out his hand to me when I visited him in the hospital. I tried to remember all the good things--the way he'd toasted Grandma in the restaurant--To love, he'd said, raising his glass.

I'll never regret one single thing we did together because what we had was very special. Maybe if we were ten years older it would have worked out differently. Maybe. I think it's just that I'm not ready for forever.



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

What is Katherine's view of sex? Her mother's? Her grandmother's? What is Jamie's view of sex? Do they all view sex in the same way? Is Katherine right in thinking that that her generation is more open about sex and more liberated?

Topic 2

What is Katherine's view of death? Does she explain her view? What is Artie's view of life and death? How does Artie's view compare with Katherine's? Why do you think Artie holds the view he does?

Topic 3

How are gender roles portrayed in the book? Compare the relationships of Katherine's grandma and grandpa, her mother and father, and her and Michael. Are there any significant differences? What do Katherine's grandmother and mother have to say about the change in gender roles?

Topic 4

Does Michael seem to respect Katherine? In what ways does he or doesn't he respect her? Katherine says that she agrees a girl should never be pressured into sex; does she act like she agrees with this statement? Does she make the right decision when she has sex with Michael?

Topic 5

Katherine is very big on logic and realism; she even wants her books and movies to be realistic. Does Katherine always act logically and realistically? When does she act this way and when does she not act this way? Is this novel realistic?

Topic 6

Katherine's parents and grandparents are very open about sex and typical teenage experiences in general, is this a good thing or a bad thing? When does Katherine benefit from this openness? When does she not benefit from this openness?



Topic 7

Katherine and Michael think that their love will last forever, but Katherine eventually breaks up with Michael after she meets Theo. What do you think of this decision? Were they ever really in love? Why does Katherine seem to like both Michael and Theo at the same time? How can she give up what she has with Michael for someone she just met?

Topic 8

What concept of love does the novel develop? Are Katherine and Michael ever in love? What examples of committed or long-lasting love are seen in the novel? How do these relationships compare with Katherine and Michael's? What loves, besides romantic love, are depicted in the novel? How do these loves compare to romantic love? What type of love seems more important?