

Geography Club Study Guide

Geography Club by Brent Hartinger

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Plot Summary

Geography Club is a novel by Brent Hartinger. The story follows the main character, Russel Middlebrook, as he tries to come to terms with the fact that he is a gay teenager, while also trying to hide his sexuality from everyone else. When Russel discovers that one of the baseball stars and popular guys in school, Kevin Land, is also gay, Russel feels as if he finally has someone that he can be completely honest with. As Russel and Kevin start a romantic relationship, Russel also decides it is time to tell one of his best friends, Min, that he is gay. Min reveals that she is bisexual and has a lesbian girlfriend.

Russel, Min, Terese, Min's girlfriend, Ike, Min's friend, and Kevin all agree to meet at the local pizza parlor. Since they are all gay, lesbian, or bisexual, this group meeting allows the individuals to feel as if they belong somewhere for the first time. This leads them to form an official after-school club, the Geography Club, so that they continue to meet without anyone catching on that they are homosexual and bisexual.

While the pressure of being gay leads Russel down the path to stand up for and defend the rights of Brian Bund, the kid that everyone at school picks on, it also leads some of the other club members down a different path. Kevin continues to hide his sexuality, which ultimately breaks up his relationship with Russel. Min and Terese also separate because Terese wants to continue to hide who she is while Min wants to reach out and invite Brian to join their club, which could also put the identity of the group members at risk and exposed to the public.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Russel Middlebrook is in the boys' locker room. He's trying not to look too closely at all of the naked boys around him because he's gay. He's gay but nobody knows he's gay. When one of the popular boys, Kevin Land asks to borrow his shampoo and makes a joke about his butt, Russel has to think quick so he can react like a straight guy would.

Later, in the lunch room, Russel is sitting with his best friends, Gunnar and Min, when they witness some of the popular guys fling their food at Brian Bund. Brian just gets up from his chair and leaves. Russel knows that if his sexuality gets out, that he could be in Brian Bund's place.

Russel gets into a gay chat room that night. He is one that divides the chat rooms by city and is shocked to see that a new listing is his small town. When he enters the room, he finds that there is one other person in it whose handle is GayTeen. Russel finds out that the teen goes to his school. When he asks his name, GayTeen asks Russel's name. GayTeen suggests they meet in person. they agree to meet at the playfield. When Russel reaches the gazebo where the other teen sits in the shadows, he sees that it's Kevin Land.

Chapter 1 Analysis

For completely different reasons, Brian Bund and Russel are living parallel lives. While the guys at school pick on Brian because he smells, had bad acne and is just weird. Russel tries to stay out of the sights of the jocks that tease people mercilessly, so he continues to hide his sexuality even from his best friends. Kevin Land mercilessly teases the other boys at school about being gay to hide the fact that he is also gay.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

At first, Kevin says he was just out for a walk. When Russel says the handle GayTeen, Kevin asks Russel if he's calling him a fag. Finally, Kevin admits that he is GayTeen. The two boys decide to talk. The boys end up talking about how Kevin acts all macho like he does so that the other jocks don't know that he's gay. The next day at school, Kevin acknowledges Russel and talks to him. After school, Gunnar and Russel meet at the bike rack like they usually do to ride home together. Gunnar asks for Russel's help in getting a girlfriend.

On Saturday, Russel is at Min's house. Russel tells Min about running into Kevin Land in gay chatroom, while inadvertently admitting to Min that he is gay too. Min starts laughing hysterically and then admits that one of the girl soccer players at school is a lesbian and that she is Min's girlfriend. Min says she's more bisexual than a lesbian. Then, both Min and Russel laugh hysterically together.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Even though Russel and Kevin have very different school personas, they are really living the same lives. They both have to hide who they truly are from the other people at school and in their lives.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Russel IMs Kevin the following night to meet him at the gazebo. He tells Kevin about Min and her girlfriend. They decide to meet at the pizza place after school the following day. Min's girlfriend, Terese, brings a gay friend of hers by the name of Ike. When Russel mentions they are alone, everyone starts talking about how hard it is to be gay. The group decides to disperse, but to reassemble the following day at school to have lunch together.

Chapter 3 Analysis

For the first time, Russel feels as if he has people he can relate to and can relate to him. Russel is starting to have romantic feelings for Kevin. The first meeting of all of the teens that are gay is the start of a new secret club, where teens can come and be with other people like there and where they can feel comfortable in being honest about their sexuality.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Min accuses Russel of liking Kevin Land as she put their bikes in his Mom's Honda. Min explains how Terese and she met at Girl Scout Camp, but it was just an infatuation at first. Then, for the last three years they started meeting in an abandoned building to have sex. Russel admits that he does like Kevin.

On the way to third period, Russel overhears the health teacher, the principal and the Reverend talking about how she showed her classes how to put on a condom using a cucumber. When the principal gets up to close the door, he sees Russel.

When all of them meet at the lunch table, it's awkward. It's as if they all realize that they can't really be seen together in school without people questioning what's going on. When Gunnar walks up to the table to sit with Min and Russel like he does every day, the others scatter to their original tables.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Russel and Kevin will end up in a secret relationship. For Russel this will be his first experience, sexually, and otherwise with anyone, let alone another guy. The problem will be that they have to keep their relationship a secret from everyone else because of the consequences.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Russel receives an email from Min telling him they're all going to meet in the library after school. They start discussing places they can get together without drawing attention to themselves. Min suggests they start a club at school so they can get a classroom for their meetings. They decide to start the Geography Club and get an uninvolved teacher to be their faculty advisor so that he won't attend any of their meetings.

On Saturday, Russel and Gunnar are playing racquetball. Gunnar tells Russell that Trish Baskin likes Russel. Gunnar also tells him that he got a date with Kimberly Peterson, but the only way she would go on a date with him is if Russel agreed to double with Trish.

Trish and Min meet up later. Min tells Russel that Terese and she met up at their warehouse the night before, but that things felt different between them. Russel asks if it's because people know about them now and Min thinks it is. When they arrive at the Children's Peace Park, they see that someone has vandalized the children figures.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Once they start the Geography Club, the group is taking a chance in others finding out that the members of the club are meeting because they are gay and lesbian. The vandalism at the park symbolizes what could happen to them if the wrong people find out they are gay and lesbian.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

A few days later, they all meet in Mr. Kephart's history classroom for their first meeting of the Geography Club. The group decides to make rules and bylaws and to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school.

On Saturday, Russel is dreading his double date. Russel spends a lot of time getting ready, even though he doesn't care about his date at all. Gunnar picks him up and they drive over to pick up both of the girls at Kimberly's house. When they ring the doorbell, the girls come rushing out to get into the car before Kimberly has to introduce them to her parents.

They end up seeing a movie and then heading to the entertainment complex after. Kimberly sneaks a flask into the movie theater and is pretty drunk by the time they leave the movie. Trish tells Russel that Kimberly isn't so bad once you get to know her. When they drive the girls home, Gunnar walks Kimberly to the front door and Trish and Russel kiss goodnight in the back seat of the car.

When Russel walks into school on Monday morning, he finds everyone reading the Goodkind Gazette, which is the school newspaper that nobody reads. When he finds Min, she hands him the paper. He reads an article of an interview Ms. Toles, the health teacher gives about sex education. At the end of the article, she mentions the support group for gay teens at the school that someone told her about.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Russel foreshadows that Trish ends up having a crush on him. Ms. Toles's interview indicates that one of the Geography Club members told Ms. Toles about the group or that somebody else found out about the existence of the group.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

At the emergency meeting of the Geography Club after school that day, Terese demands to know who told Ms. Toles. They all deny that it was them and then they realize that it must have been someone else. They say all of their friends are speculating as to who the gay person is. All of them come up with Brian. When Russel catches the ball that Kevin is tossing up in the air as a nervous habit, Kevin applauds his catch and asks if he ever thought of joining the baseball team.

After the meeting, Gunnar is waiting for Russel at the bike racks. He tells Russel Kimberly wants to go out with him again and that Trish wants to go out with Russel again. Russel suspects that Kimberly is using Gunnar, but Russel doesn't have the heart to tell Gunnar this. So, Russel agrees to go out on another double date.

Russel tells Min about the second date and why he's going. He asks how things are going with her and Terese. She says they are better than they were before. On Tuesday, the group is playing baseball in the classroom at the Geography Club meeting. Someone knocks on the door and it turns out to be a girl who is a junior, asking how she can become a member.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Russel might join the high school baseball team to be closer to Kevin and to get to spend more time with him without anyone being suspicious as to why they are hanging out together. They're going to have to figure out a way to not allow the girl who wants to join the club join, which might expose the true reason for the Geography Club.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The group tries to talk Belinda Sherman from joining the club, but it doesn't seem to work. The next day, Russel joins the baseball team. When Russel tells Kevin, Kevin is excited.

On Saturday, Gunnar and Russel pick up Kimberly and Trish at the corner of Kimberly's house. They eat dinner at the Chinese restaurant, where Kimberly is loud and obnoxious and tries to get their meal for free by putting one of her own hairs in the soup. After, they go to the teen dance club. After dancing for a little while, Trish tries to get Russel to go driving with her alone. When they park, Trish kisses Russel and tries to get him to have sex with her. He says no, which she thinks is because he is a virgin. When they drive back to the club, the girls go off to the bathroom and when they come back Kimberly wants to go home because she has a headache. They drive the girls home, kiss separately again and end the date.

Russel IMs Kevin that night to meet him at the gazebo. Russel tells Kevin everything that happened on the date. When Kevin is about to say something to Russel, Russel tries to get away. Then, Russel realizes he doesn't want to run from Kevin. Kevin tells him that they don't have to do anything Russel doesn't want to do, and if they do anything that they'll be safe. Then, they kiss.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Kevin and Russel are starting a romantic relationship with each other. Since it might get out that the Geography Club is gay teen club, it might also expose Kevin and Russel's relationship. This could cause a major backlash with the kids at school—possibly even getting the boys kicked off the baseball team. On the other hand, it might cause other gay students to admit their sexuality and find out that they are not alone like they might think that they are.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Kevin and Russel kiss for a while. Kevin admits that he's wanted to kiss Russel since the first time they met at the gazebo. He also admits that he joined the Geography Club because of Russel. Russel asks Kevin when he knew he was gay, and Kevin says he's always known.

At baseball practice on Monday, Russel gets to third base. They coach pairs them up to practice their throwing and catching. Kevin offers Russel some chewing tobacco, which Russel takes because he wants to prove to Kevin that he is willing to take risks because Kevin told him he likes guys because they take risks.

Tuesday, while waiting for Belinda to show up for the club meeting, Russel starts complaining. Belinda overhears him talking about the club members being gay. When they ask if she's going to tell, she tells them she knows how they feel having to pretend because her mother is an alcoholic. They invite Belinda to stay because they realize that the club is about being an outsider more than it is about being gay.

It is the first baseball game that Russel plays. It is his turn to bat and winning the game depends on him. After getting two strikes and one ball, Russel hits the ball out of the park. He wins the game for his team.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The members of the Geography Club come to realize that they originally came together because they are gay. After Belinda finds out their true purpose for the club, however, they realize that it's not about being gay or straight, it's about being their true selves when they are with each other. While Russel is basking in his glory of hitting the ball out of the park and winning the game for his team, he also foreshadows that some terrible things are about to unfold in the upcoming days.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The baseball team is whooping it up in the locker room after the game. For the first time, Russel feels comfortable in the boys' locker room—as if he belongs. The following Saturday, Gunnar and Russel are playing racquetball when Gunnar brings up going out on another double date with Trish and Kimberly. Russel tries to tell Gunnar that he doesn't think Kimberly wants to go out with Gunnar, but Gunnar infers that it's strange that Russel's never been interested in any girl. Russel agrees to go out with Trish again.

On Monday, everyone at school knows Russel won the game and is treating him like he is a superstar. After practice, Russel goes to his locker to get a book and two of the baseball players, Jarred and Nolan, are talking in the empty hallways. They talk with Russel and then Brian comes down the stairs with a stack of books in his hands. Jarred and Nolan start picking on Brian and Russel joins. Then, Min comes down the stairs and from the look on her face, Russel can see she heard everything.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Russel is transitioning from someone that nobody knows at school to one of the popular kids. He feels peer pressure to do things he's never done before. One of these things is to pick on Brian. His change in attitude is putting his relationships, such as the one he has with Min, in jeopardy.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Min doesn't speak to Russel before she leaves. Brian follows Min out. The following day at school, Min eats lunch with some of her friends from Girl Scouts instead of with Gunnar and Russell like she usually does.

That Tuesday, at the Geography Club meeting, Min suggests that they put allowing Brian to join to a vote. The last one to vote is Russel. He's torn because Min votes for Brian to join and Kevin votes for him not to join. Min forces Russel to vote, even though his vote will cause a tie either way, and Brian votes not to let Brian join.

On Friday, Russel and Gunnar go out on their third double date. After pizza, Russel finds out Trish has the key to her parent's beach house. They are all heading there instead of the movie. When they get to the beach house, Kimberly raids the alcohol bottles there. Gunnar and Trish join in but Russel drinks Coke. When the three get drunk, Kimberly suggests a game of Truth or Dare. After one dare, Gunnar and Kimberly start making out. Russel decides he wants to live but Gunnar suggests they spend the night. Gunnar and Russel get into an argument and Russel ends up walking out and walking home from the beach house.

Chapter 11 Analysis

It seems as if Russel's secret is creeping up on him. He has worked so hard to keep it a secret that he is gay, that little by little, things are starting to happen that could out him to people who don't know his sexuality. Russel is also torn between the relationship he has with his friends, Gunnar and Min, and the romantic relationship he has with Kevin.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Russel finds a payphone after two hours and calls Kevin to come pick him up. He also calls his parents to say Gunnar got a flat tire and they call AAA. Kevin arrives at 2 am to pick up Russel. Russel tells Kevin the whole story and cries in Kevin's arms. Kevin says they're a team and he would do anything for Russel.

That Monday at school, Russel sits with the jocks because Min and Gunnar are both mad at him. Suddenly, Brian is shoved into the lunch room from the theater door wearing a bra, rouge and lipstick. Everyone in the lunch room laughs and Brian pulls the bra off and heads to the bathroom to clean his face. Two jocks stroll in after, as if they don't know what's happened.

The next day at the Geography Club meeting, Min brings up holding another vote to allow Brian into the club. She says she's afraid if Brian does something to himself and they didn't take their chance to help him that they will all regret it. They vote again. This time, Ike changes his vote to allow Brian in the club. This leaves Russel as the deciding vote. Russel sides with Kevin and votes no.

That afternoon at baseball practice, Russel keeps striking out. After practice, Kevin pulls Russel aside. Russel tells Kevin it's bothering him for not allowing Brian into the club, so Kevin says he should change his vote and that he'll try to get Min and Terese to rejoin. Kevin also promises to stay in the club. Kevin is conducting his nervous habit of tossing a baseball in the air and catching it while he is talking to Russel, his behavior gets even more fervent when Russel kisses Kevin. The next day at school, Jarred, one of the jocks, asks Russel if it's true that he is the faggot that Ms. Toles was talking about, that he heard Russel turned in an application to start a gay club at school.

Chapter 12 Analysis

In the lunch room, even though Russel is surrounded by the members of the baseball team, he never feels more alone. This is because he is acting as if he is someone else to hide his true identity to everyone he knows. Russel compares himself to the apostle Peter who denied Christ, making Russel a symbolism of religion in his betrayal of Brian. Russel continues to let down his friends and to let down himself by not standing up for Brian and for giving Brian a helping hand. This failure continues through Russel's baseball practice.

Kevin is starting to feel uneasy about his relationship with Russel. It suggests that Kevin is afraid of what might happen to him if the kids at school find out that Kevin is gay. It foreshadows Kevin breaking up with Russel.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

From that point on, rumors fly around school that Russel is the gay kid Ms. Toles was talking about in her article interview. Russel asks Brian if he can sit down at his table for lunch. Brian asks if the rumor is true and Russel says it's true that he's gay but not that he is the one Ms. Toles was talking about. In talking to Brian, Russel also realizes that Brian has a stutter. Russel apologizes for the part he played in teasing Brian with the other jocks, but it seems as if Brian isn't quite sure what he's talking about.

After school, Russel crouches behind the dumpster he knows Kevin passes on his way to baseball practice. He tries to talk to Kevin and convince him to meet him at the gazebo that night or the next night. Kevin tells Russel he can't make it. When they hear someone coming, Russel hides behind the dumpster. It's two other members of the team and one discovers Russel crouching there. They start saying things to Russel about him being gay and Kevin just laughs along with them.

Chapter 13 Analysis

For the first time, Russel gets to know Brian. Russel realizes that even with all of the things Brian doesn't have going for him—all the reasons the kids pick on him—that Brian has a sense of humor and is really a strong person for taking all of the bullying. Kevin is about to end his relationship with Russel. Russel knows that Kevin is going along with what the other baseball players are saying because Kevin has to protect his own sexuality. Russel also realizes that he is suffering the bullying of the whole school now for not sticking up for Brian in the first place.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Russel skips baseball practice and heads to the Children's Peace Park, where he and Min found the vandalized wooden children cutouts. The children cutouts are gone, but Russel finds Min there. Min confirms that she and Terese broke up. She is talking to Russel again, though.

That night, Gunnar knocks on Russel's bedroom window. He admits that it's Kimberly and Trish that started the rumor about Russel being gay and that Gunnar didn't stop them. Russel tells Gunnar that it's true and Gunnar admits he's known for the last five years. After, Russel goes to the gazebo, in case Kevin shows up, but Kevin doesn't come.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Min infers that Russel making fun of Brian with the jocks and voting not to allow Brian into the club is because Russel is scared. Russel is scared of what will happen to him if everyone finds out he is gay.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The next day, Russel runs into Jarred at school. Jarred apologizes for calling Russel gay, saying he saw the application that Brian turned in to start a gay-alliance club. Russel finds Brian and asks him why he turned in the club application. Brian says he did it so that Russel wouldn't be an outcast like he is. In the lunch room that day, Kevin tries to get Russel to sit with him at the jocks' table, but Russel decides to sit with Brian instead.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Russel realizes that Brian turned in an application to make it look like Brian really is the gay kid at school and to save Russel from being outed. By choosing to sit with Brian instead of Kevin, Russel is finally making the statement to the kids that Brian shouldn't be treated the way they are treating him. Russel also suggests Brian is a religious symbol, that of Jesus sacrificing himself on the crucifix.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Kevin IMs Russel, asking him to meet him at the gazebo. Russel goes because he wants to hear what Kevin has to say. Kevin apologizes to Russel, saying that he isn't strong enough to stand up to the pressure of being gay. Kevin suggests he and Russel continue to secretly meet at the gazebo. Russel says no.

Min, Gunnar, Belinda, Russel, Ike and Brian are in Mr. Kephart's classroom for the first meeting of the gay-straight-bisexual alliance.

Epilogue Analysis

Russel realizes that Kevin is never going to be who he truly is because he is too scared. Russel truly cares about Kevin and wants to be able to show they are a couple publicly. Because Kevin doesn't want to do this, Russel knows he has to let Kevin go. Russel mentioning that he will always look back suggests that he will always remember how he felt when he was trying to keep his sexuality a secret as a reminder of how he doesn't want to feel.



Characters

Russel Middlebrook

Russel Middlebrook is a 16-year-old boy that attends Goodkind High School in a small town near Boise, Idaho. The big secret Russel is trying to keep is that he is gay. He has never been in a relationship with a guy or a girl and he is still a virgin. One night, in a chat room, he discovers that one of his classmates is also gay.

The other gay guy at Russel's school turns out to be one of the biggest jock, Kevin Land. Russel arranges a meeting with Kevin at the gazebo in a local park. Russel has two best friends, Min and Gunnar. When he tells Min that he and Kevin Land are gay, Min admits to being bisexual. Russel and his friends are the founding members of the Geography Club.

Russel continues to struggle with his sexuality throughout the book. As he secretly starts a romance with Kevin Land and continues to be a member of the Geography Club, he continues to hide his secret from his friend Gunnar, who also convinces Russel to double date with him and two girls. When Russel tries to get out of having sex with the girl he went out on some sates on, Trish, Trish, and her friend Kimberly spread rumors that Russel is gay.

Kevin Land

Kevin Land is a 16-year-old boy. He is a star baseball player and one of the boys in the boys' locker room that is always ragging on boys like Russel about being gay. It turns out that Kevin is keeping a secret too. He is also gay.

When Kevin finds out that Russel is gay, they start to have secret rendezvous in the gazebo in the park. Russel also introduces Kevin to Min, Terese and Ike, so he helps to form the Geography Club. Kevin has an athletic body, is good looking and is one of the most popular kids in school.

Even though Kevin is always there for Russel in private, when rumors start to fly that Russel is gay. Kevin distances himself from Russel and their relationship. In the end, Kevin chooses his popularity over exposing himself as a gay teen, which ends the romantic relationship between Kevin and Russel.

Gunnar

Gunnar has been one of Russel's best friends for the last five years. Gunnar is originally from Sweden, but Russel and he became friends when Gunnar moved to Idaho with his parents. Gunnar asks for Russel's help in getting a girlfriend, which is why Russel agrees to double-date with Gunnar and the girl he likes, Kimberly.



Gunnar ends up using Russel to continue to be able to date Kimberly by making Russel date Trish. When Russel wants to leave their third date, Gunnar refuses to drive him home, choosing trying to have sex with Kimberly over his friendship with Russel.

Later, when Gunnar apologizes, he also admits that he's always known that Russel was gay. The two boys make up and Gunnar becomes a member of the gay-straight-bisexual alliance as his way of siding with Russel and Min in their sexuality.

Min

Min is Russel's other best friend. She is one of the smartest people in school. It turns out that Min is also bisexual, but has been keeping this a secret from Gunnar, Russel and the rest of the school for the past three years. Min met a girl at Girl Scout camp that she has been secretly dating by the name of Terese. Min is also one of the founding members of the Geography Club and later, the gay-straight-bisexual alliance.

Brian Bund

Brian Bund is a boy in Russel's class at school. All of the kids pick on and make fun of Brian because he smells, has zits and seems strange to the other students. Later, Russel also discovers that Brian stutters when he talks. The jocks throw food at Brian in the school cafeteria. They torment and call him names. When one of the teachers at school eludes to the fact that there is a gay student at the high school, everyone assumes it is Brian, which causes the jocks to hassle him even more.

Brian and Russel end up becoming friends by the end of the novel. When the rumor spreads that it's really Russel who is gay, Brian submits an application to the high school to start a gay-straight-bisexual alliance club to make it look like he's gay instead of Russel.

Terese

Terese is a high school soccer player. She met Min at Girl Scout camp. Terese is a tomboy so she dresses and acts more like a boy than a girl. Since they met in Girl Scout camp, Terese and Min have been girlfriends. They have also been secretly meeting in an abandoned warehouse in town to have sex with each other. Terese is one of the founding members of the Geography Club, but breaks up with Min when Min insists on voting Brian Bund in as a member.

Ms. Toles

Ms. Toles is the high school health teacher. She gets in trouble with the principal and the local Reverend for teaching students how to properly put on a condom using a cucumber in class. Ms. Toles gives an interview for the school newspaper defending her



stance. She also mentions in the article that a gay student came to her to talk about starting a gay club. This sparks the rumors that it is Brian Bund that is gay. Ms. Toles ends up getting fired.

Ike

Ike is a friend of Terese. Ike is also gay. Terese brings him to have pizza with her, Min, Russel and Kevin. He is also a founding member of the Geography Club. Ike admits that when he was younger that he tried to commit suicide rather than admit he was gay. Russel thinks that Ike has a crush on Kevin.

Belinda

Belinda is a girl at school that tries to join the Geography Club. She accidentally overhears that the club is really for gay students when she walks into a meeting late. Belinda tells the group that she hides the fact that her mother is an alcoholic and understands having to lead a secret life. She promises to keep their secret and continues to be a member, even though she is straight.

Jarred

Jarred is one of the members of the baseball team. He is the one that asks Russel if he is gay after somebody submits an application for the gay alliance. He also apologizes to Russel for spreading rumor about him being gay when Jarred sees the application that Brian submits.

Kimberly

Kimberly is the girl that Gunnar has a crush on and asks out. It seems as if Kimberly doesn't really like Gunnar, but is just dating him so that her friend Trish can go out with Russel. Kimberly is loud and obnoxious. She drinks too much as well. Kimberly is one of the girls that spreads the rumors about Russel being gay.

Trish

Trish is a small and mousy girl that has a crush on Russel. When Gunnar double dates with Kimberly, Trish is the girl that goes out with Russel. Trish kisses Russel and tries to get him to have sex with her a couple of times. When Russel refuses to have sex with Trish, she and Kimberly starts rumors that Russel is gay.



Objects/Places

Robert L. Goodkind High School

Robert L. Goodkind High School is in a small town near Boise, Idaho. It is the high school that all of the characters in the book attend or where they teach. The high school is the primary setting for the majority of the events that take place in the novel.

Gazebo

The gazebo is where Russel and Kevin reveal their sexuality to each other for the first time. Throughout the novel, the gazebo is the secret meeting place for the two boys. It's also where Kevin kisses Russel for the first time and their romance begins.

Children's Peace Park

The Children's Peace Park is where Min and Russel go to talk. At the park, there are wooden cutouts that represent the different ethnicities of children from around the world. The first time they go to the park in the novel, some of the cutouts have been vandalized. The second time they go to the park in the novel, the vandalized cutouts have been removed.

Pizza Place

The pizza place is where Terese, Min, Ike, Kevin and Russel meet for the first time as gay and bisexual teens. They talk about how hard it is to keep their sexuality a secret from each other. The pizza place is also where the original concept of forming the Geography Club is formed.

Mr. Kephart's Classroom

Mr. Kephart's classroom is the room at school where the Geography Club meets. This is the classroom where the group first establishes its rules for the club. It's also the classroom where they are playing baseball one day and Russel discovers his aptitude for playing baseball.

Boys' Locker Room

The boy's locker room is where all of the boys pick on each other. This includes Kevin Land, who is picking on other boys about being gay to hide his own sexuality. Russel



despises being in the boys' locker room because he feels conflicted with own sexuality and being surrounded by all of the naked boys in his class.

Baseball and Mitt

Kevin uses his baseball and glove as a form of stress relief. When he is nervous or something is bothering him, he tosses the ball into the air and catches it in his mitt.

Club Application

The club application is the form the group has to submit to the high school to make it an official club. The form that Brian submits is what originally fuels the rumors that Russel is gay. It turns out that Brian Bund is the one that submits the club application form for the gay alliance, which helps get Russel off the hook.

Cafeteria

The cafeteria represents the cliques of this high school. Each table holds a group of kids that represent the different cliques. The cafeteria is also where the jocks throw food at Brian Bund to tease him. Later in the novel, the jocks dress Brian in a bra, rouge and lipstick and throw him into the cafeteria for everyone to see and make fun of him.

Wooden Children Cutouts

The wooden children cutouts at the park are symbols of the different ethnicities from around the world. When someone vandalizes the cutouts, it reveals to Min and Russel that differences are not really tolerated in their small town. It's confirmation to them that hiding their sexuality is the right thing to do.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. Friendship is one type of relationship that the novel tackles. First, Russel hides the fact that he is gay, even from his two best friends, Min and Gunnar. When Russel admits that he is gay to Min, ironically, she admits to him that she is bisexual. Even though Gunnar is different from the other kids at school too, Russel and Min choose to continue to hide their sexualities from Gunnar.

Romantic relationships are also tackled in the novel. Russel and Kevin start out as friends that are bound by their secret of being gay. As they continue to spend time with each other, however, they end up becoming involved with each other romantically. In the end, their love doesn't last because Kevin chooses his popularity over exposing the fact that he is gay. Russel, on the other hand, is not willing to continue his relationship with Kevin as a secret and therefore ends the relationship. Min and Terese have been secret lovers for the past three years. When Min and Terese have a difference of opinion about exposing their sexuality to Brian Bund to allow him into the Geography Club, it's the last straw that breaks them up as well.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as bullying at school and having to hide sexuality. Russel struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes having to make hide the fact that he is gay from his two best friends, the rest of his high school and even his parents. Russel deals with the changes in his body and feelings toward other boys in his class when he feels repressed from expressing these feelings out of the fear of what the repercussions might be.

Russel also faces the rite of passage of having his first boyfriend, while having dates with a girl at the same time. Russel especially struggles with her feelings about himself as a person when he was doesn't stick up for Brian Bund, who is continuously bullied by the jocks at school.

Sexuality

Sexuality is another primary theme in the novel. Not only is each of the teens dealing with the normal rites of passage that teens experience, but the characters in this novel have to hide who they truly are. They feel the need to hide their sexuality from their fellow students because of the fear of what will happen to them if people know the truth.



Several of the characters even bully the characters that they think are gay. In Russel's case, some of the jocks only pick on him because there is a rumor that he is gay. This reveals a lack of self-esteem and understanding on the parts of the boys that are doing the bullying. Additionally, though, it simultaneously prohibits the gay and bisexual teens from being who they really are and instead forces them to conform what the other kids in their high school deem "normal."

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view from the perspective of the main character, Russel Middlebrook. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Russel Middlebrook. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Russel's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in a small town near Boise, Idaho during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the daily life of living in a small town as gay and lesbian teenagers that have to hide their sexuality. Russel is constantly trying to find a way to fit in and seem normal to his classmates so that they don't find out that he is really gay.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the main character is gay. However, as events unfold, the sexuality of the teens is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters, and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 15 chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter ranges from five pages to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects his own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing his opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships—friendship and romantic. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Russel Middlebrook. Another subplot is sexuality.



Quotes

"Middlebrook! You are such a fag" (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"Kevin, knock it off. I know you're GayTeen" (Chapter 2, p. 20).

"We're all alone" (Chapter 3, p. 39).

"It's well documented that the primary cause of condom failure among teenagers is the fact that many kids don't know how to use them properly" (Chapter 4, p. 50).

"We could call it the Geography Club" (Chapter 5, p. 63).

"Just last week I talked to one of them about a support group for gay teens" (Chapter 6, p. 91).

"Well, I wanted to know how I could go about joining" (Chapter 7, p. 106).

"What? Are you gay or something" (Chapter 8, p. 118).

"We're an after school club. We're not supposed to discriminate" (Chapter 9, p. 139).

"I'm just saying I can't remember you ever being interested in any girl" (Chapter 10, p. 152).

"But don't think this is the end! I'll get you for this" (Chapter 11, p. 178).

"We're a team, you and me. Don'tcha know I'd do anything for you" (Chapter 12, p. 180).

"What are you saying" (Chapter 13, p. 201).

"He was sacred. A lot of people have been scared late" (Chapter 14, p. 206).

"There's already one Brian Bund. There d-d-doesn't need to be one more" (Chapter 15, p. 216).

"Russel, I'm not that strong! The pressure—it's just too much! I like being popular" (Epilogue, p. 221).

Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Russel Middlebrook? When do you think he figures out that he is gay? When Russel has a chance to find out who the other gay teen in his high school is, why do you think he opts to expose his own sexuality to find out? Why do you think Russel decides not to continue his relationship with Kevin in secret? What does Russel ultimately realize about his relationship with Kevin?

Discuss the relationship between Russel and Kevin. Are they schoolmates, lovers, boyfriends or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Russel feel about Kevin? How does Kevin feel about Russel? How do Russel's feelings change after Kevin breaks up with him? What does he do about it? What happens to Russel?

Discuss the relationship between Min and Terese. Are they friends, girlfriends, lovers or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Min feel about Terese? How does Terese feel about Min? How do Terese's feelings change? What does she do about it? What happens to Min?

Discuss the relationship between Gunnar and Russel. Are they friends, foes or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? Why doesn't Russel tell Gunnar that he is gay? Why does Gunnar not tell Russel that he knows Russel is gay?

Who is the true Brian Bund? Why do you think that he just ignores what everyone does to him instead of standing up for himself? Why is Brian so forgiving of Russel? What happens to Brian Bund?

Who is Kevin Land? Is he a tortured soul or simply a normal teenager going through a difficult time with his sexuality? Why do you think Kevin tries to convince Russel to continue their relationship in secret? What role does Kevin play in Russel joining the gay-straight-bisexual alliance?

Discuss Russel's sexuality. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?