

Go Ask Alice Study Guide

Go Ask Alice by Beatrice Sparks

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Overview

Go Ask Alice is written as the diary of a fifteen-year-old girl's day-to-day struggle with drug addiction. Created during the height of the drug era, the girl could be anyone from this time who found him or herself seduced by the mind-altering affects of marijuana, LSD, bennies, dexies, and heroin. When the book begins, the author of the diary is an ordinary teenager with ordinary teenage concerns. She is an innocent, yearning to see what life has to offer her, and she falls in with a group of kids headed on a destructive path. Wanting desperately to be part of the popular crowd, this "innocent" girl discovers drugs, and very quickly her addition becomes uncontrollable. The girl spirals downward and finds herself trapped in a world of pushers, prostitutes, and runaway teens too stoned and too out of touch with reality to find their way back home.

Go Ask Alice became a cult classic in the 1970s, revealing the inner thoughts of a teen in turmoil and detailing her attempts to pull herself out of her drug-induced haze.

Though the story was widely criticized as a "complete fabrication" and dismissed as propaganda, its message remained powerful. The book took the romance out of the drug culture that so dominated the 1960s and 70s, and is hailed still today as a groundbreaking book on teenage drug addiction.

About the Author

Beatrice Mathews Sparks was born on January 15, 1918, in Goldberg, Idaho. A Mormon and an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Sparks attended the University of California at Los Angeles and Brigham Young University in Utah, and has worked as a youth counselor, a teacher, a music therapist, a public speaker, and a writer. She continues to write books as well as columns for several periodicals, spreading her messages to teens around the country. Sparks became interested in young adult problems when she began working with troubled teens in 1955. She has spoken to teens in crisis all over the country—in the Utah State Mental Hospital where she worked as a music therapist, at Brigham Young University where she taught continuing education courses, and on a cross-country trip with her husband where she had the opportunity to talk with more than a thousand teenagers from all walks of life. Sparks was apparently touched deeply by the pain young people experience and the challenges they face on a day to day basis. She began writing books that deal with kids in crisis and that focus on how these kids cope with problem situations.

Sparks has written four "diaries," of which *Go Ask Alice* is the most popular. The book became a cult classic in the seventies, at the height of the drug culture, and its poignant message hit home for many teens who themselves found drugs titillating and nearly impossible to resist. *Go Ask Alice* and Sparks' other books all send powerful messages to young adults. By focusing on topics such as drug abuse, occult magic, suicide, homosexuality, and pornography, she hopes to educate kids, she says, and inform *Go Ask Alice* 125 them that they have choices and can control the outcome of their life. *Go Ask Alice* has retained its popularity despite numerous attempts to ban the book from schools.

Since its publication in 1971, it has been published in sixteen languages and has been made into a motion picture.



Plot Summary

This book presents itself as a diary, written over a period of about two years, by a girl in her mid-teens. It chronicles her hopes and fears, her loves and hates, and most importantly her use of drugs - principally marijuana, acid, and speed. Set against the background of the American cultural changes of the early 1970's, the writing is occasionally poetic, but is more often a hard-edged, apparently honest revelation of a lonely life's disintegration, reconstruction, re-disintegration, and tragic end. Some years after its initial publication, it was revealed to be something of a fraud, a carefully shaped and edited composite of the lives and experiences of several individuals.

The first several entries in the diary focus on the narrator's life before she begins using drugs. She describes her struggles with her weight and self-image, her conflicts with her mother, and her desire for involvement with an attractive boy named Roger. When her father receives a job posting in another town, the narrator rejoices in the possibility that a move to a new town will mean the beginning of a new life for her.

When the narrator arrives in her new home, however, she experiences difficulty in finding new friends and fitting in. She compares herself unfavorably to her younger brother and sister, both of whom have no difficulty at all in either of those areas. She eventually manages to make friends with a girl who seems to be a kindred spirit, and they form an immediate bond. The narrator's loneliness is intense when her friend goes away to camp for the summer. She eagerly accepts an invitation to a party, where she unknowingly takes a hit of acid which had been secretly placed in her drink. Her sensory experience while under the influence of acid is exciting and satisfying, and while she finds herself disgusted at having enjoyed being on drugs (which she had always been taught was a bad thing), she looks forward to having the experience again. This desire leads her into increasingly frequent use of acid, and also experimentation with other drugs, including uppers, downers, and marijuana. As her use of drugs increases, so does her language, her clothing and her attitudes. She becomes more and more rebellious, becoming close friends with a girl named Chris who works at a trendy boutique. Together they get more deeply involved in the drug subculture, start selling drugs, and become sexually involved with their dealers. Eventually, they both become disgusted with themselves and their situations and run away to San Francisco.

For a while, life in San Francisco for the narrator and Chris is relatively happy. It takes them a while to find jobs, but they eventually find employment in which they feel comfortable and make plans to open their own boutique. They manage to remain drug free for several months, until they're invited to a party by Chris' boss, where there are plenty of drugs available. The narrator and Chris are unable to resist temptation, and are soon back in the scene. Just as quickly, they leave the drug scene once more when a "friend" of Chris' boss sexually assaults them. They quit their jobs, move out of their old apartment, and move into a new place that they quickly convert into a jewelry boutique. The boutique soon turns into a hangout and refuge for disillusioned young people. Chris and the narrator become homesick and return home to loving welcomes from both their families. The narrator resolves to never again use drugs.



The welcome the narrator receives at school, however, is anything but loving. Her old drug-using crowd is resentful of her, and convinced that her being drug free won't last. They taunt and mock her, making her efforts to stay clean more and more difficult. At about this time, the narrator begins a friendship with a young college student named Joel, but then suddenly and jarringly the diary changes focus, revealing that the narrator has once again started taking drugs and has again run away, this time to Oregon. Descriptions of her time there are short and filled with vivid descriptions of loneliness and despair. Finally, a friendly minister at a church-run youth shelter helps her find the courage to call home, and once again she returns to the loving, forgiving support of her family.

As the narrator becomes daily more determined to stay off drugs, she is challenged by the deaths of her beloved grandparents and by flashbacks to her experiences on acid. Threats from her former friends continue to the point where they secretly feed her a powerful hit of acid. The narrator has a bad trip, does physical damage to herself, and ends up committed to a psychiatric hospital, where she has difficulty convincing the authorities there that she didn't take the drugs willingly. Eventually, however, the students who framed her confess, and she is allowed to return home.

The last few entries of the narrator's diary recount how she seems to be getting her life fully on track - preparing to appear in a piano recital, making new friends, and re-establishing her relationship with Joel. She resolves to no longer keep a diary, saying that as an adult she should be able to confide her feelings to real people. An editorial note following this entry recounts how, three weeks after the entry was made, the narrator was found dead of a drug overdose.



Part 1

Part 1 Summary

The diary begins with the narrator writing of her misery after being dismissed by Roger. She records a series of intense emotional swings in the aftermath of this incident, at times believing she's over him, and at other times feeling miserable without him. At one point she's convinced that if she doesn't lose her virginity to him, she'll remain a virgin for the rest of her life. She compares her (minimal) levels of sexual knowledge, desire and experience to the girls with whom she goes to school, referring to several girls who go "all the way" and wondering whether they feel as insecure about their bodies as she does. She expresses the wish that she could talk to her friends and/or to her mother about her confusion about sexuality, but believes they would think she's a "dope."

Another facet of this section involves the narrator's ongoing attention to her weight and physical appearance. At several points she refers to herself as fat, details the (mostly successful) attempts she makes at losing weight, indicates her determination to lose even more, and describes her ongoing conflict with her mother over how much she actually should lose. At one point the narrator considers making herself throw up after she eats, and at another she rants about how her mother makes her eat more than she wants to. This is one of the points when she speaks with intense negativity about her mother. At other points, such as in her joyful description of the family Christmas, she speaks with radiant adoration and respect and admiration of her.

The main through-line of this section involves plans for the narrator and her family to move to another city so that her father can take a better job. Again, the narrator veers back and forth between extremes of emotion. These include excitement at the prospect at starting a new life where no-one knows her for the loser that (she thinks) she is, and terror at the prospect of having to start over. She also experiences grief at leaving the only home she's ever known, worry over what the new owners of that home will do to it once she and her family are gone, and looming loneliness at the prospect of being so far away from her beloved grandparents. The section ends just after a new year begins, with the narrator tearfully praying for help in "making it" in a new town.

Part 1 Analysis

This section of the book establishes the narrator's emotional identity before she begins to use drugs. The impression given is of core insecurity, heightened by moodiness and extreme swings of emotion. At first glance this comes across as a portrait of a "typical" teenager, but within the context of the book as a whole it creates the sense of a deeply felt emptiness that, later in the chain of events, drugs and drug-based friendships seem to be the only thing able to fill. Also in this section, the entries give the clear sense that the narrator feels like an outsider, a sense heightened and perhaps defined by the way in which this section is written. The language used gives clear indications that the



narrator is intelligent and articulate, perhaps beyond her years (fifteen) - her vocabulary, her questions about her life and her expressions of insight about herself come across as fairly advanced. Following the revelation that the book was in fact not a diary but the creation of an editor, those looking for clues to its true origins might have cited this use of language as just such a clue. The point must be made, however, that there are teenagers who do have an advanced vocabulary, who know how to use it, and do. This aspect to the narrator's character might, in fact be quite telling, making the suggestion that even those with apparently advanced intellects can succumb to the allure of drugs just as easily as the (perhaps stereotypically) less educated or less intelligent or less middle class.

All that being said, there is a telling contrast between the narrator's intellectual sophistication and her emotional and sexual naivety. There is the sense that she has learned a lot (see "Quotes, p. 11), but doesn't actually know a great deal, in the sense that she hasn't experienced much of the world. The irony, of course, is that over the course of the next several months she's going to learn about the world in ways she never dreamed of, and eventually comes to dread.

Of all the glimpsed relationships in this section, connections that the narrator shares with her parents, grandparents, siblings and friends, the volatile relationship she has with her mother plays the most significant role in her life. Here and throughout the book the relationship is a complicated and powerfully ambivalent one. At times the mother appears to be an uncompassionate, insensitive monster, while at others she is an adored, almost revered source of love and support and examples of good behavior. It could be argued, in fact, that throughout the book the narrator acts in either direct or sub-conscious response to her mother, to either please her or reject her.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

The narrator and her family begin life in their new home. After misadventures with the movers and an uneasy settling in period in the new house, the narrator and her younger siblings start school. While her brother Tim and her sister Alexandria immediately make friends and do well, the narrator feels herself stared at, judged, immediately disliked, and very lonely. She records how she comforts herself by eating, comments that her father is away working most of the time, and complains that her mother is always nagging her about improving her appearance and her attitude.

The first friend the narrator makes is a girl named Gerta, whom she describes as a similar kind of outcast to herself. Gerta is soon replaced by Beth, who like the narrator is bookish and shy. Unlike the narrator, Beth is Jewish. The narrator confides her deep interest in Jewish traditions and beliefs, particularly about sex, to her diary. The friendship between the two girls becomes very intense very quickly, and both are heart-broken when they discover they're to be separated for the summer. Beth goes to Jewish summer camp, while the narrator is being sent to stay with her grandparents, a prospect she once celebrated but now that it means she's going to be away from Beth, she dreads.

The narrator's forebodings about the summer soon come true - she confides to her diary that after only five days she's bored out of her mind and is contemplating asking to be sent home. A shopping trip with her grandmother, however, changes the narrator's mind completely. Jill, a popular girl at the narrator's former school, mentions that she's having a party and tells her she'll call later that night with an official invitation. The narrator waits anxiously by the phone, gets the call at exactly 10:32 PM, and makes plans to do her hair nicely and wear a pretty white dress. Once she arrives at the party she's drawn into a game by Jill and the other guests, which is described as a version of "button button, who's got the button." Confused when no game actually begins, the narrator drinks a bottle of Coca-Cola, and after a while begins to feel strange. At detailed length she describes her experiences of color, light, language and sensation (see "Quotes," p.35). Afterwards, Jill tells her that a certain number of the bottles of Coca-Cola that got passed around had tabs of acid in them.

As she records the pleasures of her acid trip in her diary, the narrator swears that would be her one and only experience with drugs - although she also expresses a desire to try marijuana, just once. She wonders whether she can subtly ask Jill whether she has any marijuana to try, and then plans to buy a strongbox with a lock so she can keep her diary and its references to drug use a secret. She makes plans to go to the library and read up on drugs, and is ecstatic when she's invited to another party with one of Jill's friends, Bill. She refers to herself as exploring "a completely new world," and compares herself to Alice in Wonderland, wondering if the writer of *Alice ...* was on drugs too.



Part 2 Analysis

Throughout this section, and indeed throughout the book, the central emotion that seems to be at the heart of the narrator's experiences with life is loneliness. In this section, her sense of isolation is at the core of her misery at school, her jealousy of her siblings, her desperate attachment to Beth, and her joy at feeling so much connection to the world around her when she's high. Later in the book the sources of her loneliness, her ongoing attempts to find some way of alleviating it, and her joy when she feels that she HAS alleviated it, all define key moments in her emotional and spiritual journey. This means that the loneliness at the core of this section can be seen as foreshadowing the loneliness that recurs throughout the book. Because the book has been found to be a composite of several experiences, this point is perhaps particularly telling - it may be that the editor, the compiler and shaper of those experiences, has found and is suggesting that loneliness is at the core of the experiences of many drug users.

The reference to *Alice in Wonderland* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the narrator's experiences with drugs. In the same way as Alice entered a strange, often frightening but often enlightening world when she goes down the rabbit hole, the narrator enters a similar world when she goes into the "rabbit hole" experience of drug use. This is why she wonders whether the author of *Alice ...* was also on drugs. The *Alice ...* reference can also be seen as a source for the book's title. At no point in the book does the narrator refer to herself by name, which means that her own name may or may not have been Alice. Calling the book *Go Ask Alice* suggests that the narrator's experiences, like Alice's, can only be truly understood by asking about them. The question comes to mind, however, was Alice ever asked about her experiences? And would the narrator's experiences have been different if she had been asked sooner? And would she have spoken of them even if she was? There is irony here, in that Alice's Wonderland was created by its author, Lewis Carroll. As it turns out, the Wonderland in *Go Ask Alice* has also been created - by the editor who gave the experiences of several young people narrative form and meaning.



Part 3

Part 3 Summary

On her date with Bill, the narrator has her first experience with speed, and records in her diary how much she loves it (see "Quotes," p. 38). A few days later, her beloved grand-father has a mild heart attack, and the narrator resolves to not use drugs so she can help both him and her grandmother cope. But she's unable to completely resist Bill and the allure of the drugs he offers, and one night when they're getting high together she and Bill have sex, which she describes as being wonderful. A few days after that experience, however, her feelings change - not only does she begin to worry that she's gotten pregnant, but she also has an encounter with Roger, whom she says is more attractive than ever and who asks her out for a date. She feels so ashamed about everything she's done, the drugs and the sex alike, that she rejects him in spite of the efforts by her grandparents to encourage the relationship. Roger continually writes her letters and phones her, but she continually refuses to respond. Her guilt and anxiety become so intense that she becomes unable to sleep. She steals her grandfather's sleeping pills and starts taking them. Meanwhile, her thoughts are also obsessively turning towards death, and she describes with increasing horror her fears of being buried and eaten by worms.

Once her grandfather has sufficiently recovered from his heart attack, the narrator returns home. Her imaginings about the worms become more intense, she becomes more anxious, and her supply of sleeping pills dwindles, with the result that she convinces a doctor and convinces him to give her a prescription of her own. She rejoices in the "nothingness" that sleep brings to her, but finds that her life during the day is still too filled with anxiety, so she convinces the doctor to prescribe some tranquilizers. Shortly after starting on them, she gets her period and happily realizes she's not pregnant. A few days later, she resumes school, and discovers with dismay that Beth has met a boy at camp and is now spending all her time with him. She soon makes a new friend - Chris, a young woman who works at a small boutique where she (the narrator) buys some beaded and fringed clothes. Chris shows her how to iron her hair straight, and starts her on uppers to balance out the tranquilizers and sleeping pills.

As the narrator revels in her new look, she complains about her parents lecturing her on starting to look and behave like a hippie, and about how they don't understand her. The language with which the narrator writes and speaks begins to change, as she starts using phrases like "man," "groovy" and "the Establishment." Her parents criticize her, and she becomes increasingly resentful, spending more and more time with Chris, eventually getting a job in the same boutique. Soon, they are spending all their free time together, and dating a pair of drug dealers named Richie and Ted. Richie teaches the narrator to smoke marijuana, and she quickly comes to love the freedom, relaxation, and sensations it brings her (see "Quotes," p.56). The narrator falls deeply in love with Richie, and wonders how she can be a good and supportive wife to him as he makes his way through medical school. She also starts dealing drugs for him, not only to her



classmates but also to children in elementary school. This last disgusts her and she resolves to not do it any more, a resolve that becomes even stronger when she and Chris discover Richie and Ted in bed together. The narrator becomes just as angry with herself for believing in Richie as she is with Richie for making her sell to children, and resolves to run away from home with Chris. Before she goes, however, she turns Richie into the police for selling to children. Together she and Chris make their plans to go to San Francisco. In her last diary entry before she leaves she bids farewell to her "good" family, and expresses her fear of what Richie will do to her if he finds out she told the police about him.

Part 3 Analysis

This section contains the first of several instances in which the narrator resolves to no longer use drugs but eventually finds herself unable to resist their appeal. On a narrative level, this is a key piece of foreshadowing. On the level of character, however, of the interaction between the narrator as a person and the drugs she's using, there are two key factors at work. The first and more straightforward is the physical and chemical addiction experienced by the body whenever an addictive drug enters the system. The second is the emotional addiction experienced by someone as obviously and as desperately lonely as the narrator. It's more clear in this section than ever to this point that doing drugs helps her feel as though she belongs, as though she has friends, as though doing drugs makes sex and relationships and friendship intimacy possible. Later in the book she begins to question whether such experiences are possible and what they would feel like if she WASN'T on drugs, but at this point in her life it seems clear that part of her core belief system involves the conviction that without drugs, friendships and other healthy relationships are, if not impossible, at least less likely.

There are two other important pieces of foreshadowing in this section. The first is the heart attack experienced by the narrator's grandfather, which foreshadows the fatal stroke he suffers in Part 6. The second, and perhaps more significant, piece of foreshadowing occurs in the narrator's reference to her imagining worms eating her grandfather's dead body. This image becomes something of an obsession with her, occurring when she is both on and off drugs. Later in the book, when she has a bad trip after being deliberately drugged (Part 7), she imagines her own body being eaten by worms, an experience which leads her to inadvertent self-mutilation as she tries to scrape the worms off her body and out of her hair.

One notable aspect of this section include the shift in the kind of language the narrator uses in her writing, as she begins to use the slangy expressions of early 1970's drug and/or counterculture ("man," "bread," "groovy," etc). One term in particular may require some explanation - "the Establishment" was a term used, often contemptuously, to describe the rules, attitudes and practices of society in general. These were all seen as conservative, restrictive, insensitive, close minded, and ultimately destructive. At the time, many young people saw their use of drugs, their choice of clothing and hair styles (of which the narrator's choices were typical) as manifestations of rebellion, of determination to no longer live according to the ways of "the Establishment," and of

desire for change. The following section contains a vivid description of how at least some anti-establishment rhetoric extended only to conversation without action.

Another notable aspect of this section is the way in which the narrator becomes involved with more and more drugs - specifically, the speed and ease with which it happens, the casualness with which she accepts it happening, and the way she becomes involved with passing the lifestyle on to others. If there is anything truly frightening about this book, this section can be seen as falling into that category. However, given the book's true nature (as a composite creation rather than a pure diary) there is some question as to the quality of that fear. It may be a small point, but there is a qualitative difference between shaped fear, fear manipulated and created by deliberate narrative choice, and the fear triggered by the knowledge that someone actually lived through the described experience.



Part 4

Part 4 Summary

In San Francisco, the narrator and Chris find a small, filthy apartment, spend long hours looking for jobs, and dreaming about opening their own boutique. Eventually both the narrator and Chris find work, with Chris working for a beautiful, sophisticated woman named Shelia, who runs a very expensive shop. This inspires the narrator to look for a better job. She finds one with Mr. Mellani, who runs a jewelry shop in the lobby of an expensive hotel. For a while, the narrator and Chris are both happy - drug free, with good jobs, and enjoying the sights and experiences of San Francisco. But then they're invited to a party at Shelia's, where there are several wealthy, sophisticated and famous people, all of whom are using drugs. They are unable to resist and find them-selves drawn back into "the scene" (see "Quotes," p. 71). It doesn't take long for them to be regular guests at Shelia's parties, getting more and more into heavier and heavier drugs, including heroin. One night Shelia's boyfriend gets both Chris and the narrator deeply stoned, and he and Shelia take turns sexually assaulting them.

Chris and the narrator wake the following morning in complete disgust with themselves, and resolve yet again to make a new start. They quit their old jobs and decide to fulfill their dream of starting their own boutique, with Chris using the knowledge of marketing that she acquired from Shelia and the narrator using the knowledge of jewelry making she acquired from Mr. Mellani. They find an apartment near the university campus at Berkeley, decorate it appealingly, start their business, and are soon playing host to increasing numbers of students, whose presence make the place into a part-business, part-ongoing therapy session (see "Quotes," p. 77). Both Chris and the narrator, who remain clean of drug use, soon become disillusioned with the seeming aimlessness of the kids who hang out at their shop. They also become increasingly homesick, particularly as Christmas approaches. They soon resolve to return home, and make phone calls to their parents. When they arrive at the airport, they are both greeted with tearful joy, and both are made especially welcome by their families. The narrator says the families are all convinced that she and Chris ran away just because they wanted to be out on their own, and that neither she nor Chris plans to tell them anything else. In her diary entry for Christmas Day, she says she truly feels that she can sing the Christmas carol about being "joyful and triumphant" and really mean it.

Part 4 Analysis

One way to look at this section is as the continuation of the narrator's emotional, physical and spiritual roller coaster ride on drugs. She experiences the joys of being clean and free when she's not using, the dangers of too much drug-induced vulnerability, the sense of self-worth that emerges when she's actually doing something she wants to do and feels good about doing, and disgust when she sees others abusing and neglecting their potential. Another way to look at this section, however, is as a



deepening of the narrator's understanding of herself. For the first time in her life, when she's clean, she actually starts not only having real dreams and goals, but striving to make them come true. At these times she's no longer drifting, no longer caught up in frustratingly unfulfilled dreams of being popular and thin and loved - she's actually creating a life for herself, doing what she wants and likes to do and realizing that there's joy and fulfillment in that. This is what makes her return to drug use in this section and in later sections that much more frustrating and upsetting for her - she's actually discovered the value of living a forward moving life, and is finally aware of just how much damage using drugs does to her attempts to live that life. This doesn't mean that she's completely able to eradicate the influence of drugs on her life. Her struggle to do exactly that drives and defines the action of the rest of the book, and indeed the rest of her short life.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

The happiness and strength the narrator feels on Christmas Day continue through New Years, as she continues to feel welcome in her family. But when she and Chris go back to school, it's not long before they're both asked by other students to get them drugs. One of them, Lane, physically assaults the narrator and leaves bruises on her arm. Eventually, both the narrator and Chris get back into "the scene," first with marijuana and then, with the help of Lane (who turns out to be a dealer), into speed, uppers, and all the other drugs they were using before. In defiant language, the narrator asserts in her diary that she's happy about being back on drugs, saying she's never experienced any joy like it. That joy dissipates when Lane is arrested, Chris's home is raided by police, and all three young people are placed on probation. When Lane is sent to prison, the narrator is surprised to discover that this was his third offense. Meanwhile, because it's their first offense, Chris and the narrator are sentenced only to probation. This leads to a period in which The narrator is watched closely and with increasing intensity by her parents, who send her to a psychiatrist, make strict rules about her behavior, set tight curfews, and even tell her little brother to accompany her on trips to the grocery store. The narrator wonders how he would react if she slipped him a candy with a hit of acid on it, and then comments that a friend of hers at school slipped her a couple of pills when she (the friend) was handing out exams. The narrator joyfully plans to get high that night in her room, alone.

The next several entries in this section have no dates, and a note from the book's editors indicates that they were not written in an actual book, but on various found scraps of paper - old grocery bags, napkins, etc. The entries begin with a jarring reference to the narrator being in Denver, Colorado - there are no indications of how she got there or of the circumstances under which she left. All that's clear is that she's using again, and desperately so. Similar entries indicate that she goes to Oregon, where she hooks up with a fellow user named Doris. They find themselves a small apartment, get involved in the drug scene there, and eventually become unable to pay the rent and end up living on the street. The narrator experiences a period of sexual confusion, in which she's forced into performing sex acts on her dealer in exchange for drugs, and also struggles with feelings of attraction to other women, which disgust her. She finally convinces herself to visit a church-run shelter for young people, where one of the ministers puts her back in touch with her parents. She expresses disbelief and gratitude that her parents are still able to profess their love for her and are willing and able to welcome her home. While she's waiting for her father to come and get her, she makes an effort to get to know some of the other homeless, drug-addicted young people in the area, including a young woman named Alice (see "Quotes," p. 107). Finally, just before she starts for home, she decides that once she finishes high school she's going to make a career out of counseling young people. This ends the narrator's first diary.



Part 5 Analysis

This section serves as a vivid contrast to Part 4. In that section, the narrator discovered several positive aspects of her life, and rejoiced in them. In this section, however, the narrator hits an emotional and physical and spiritual rock bottom, in spite of her best intentions collapsing into a desperate, completely addicted, degrading and humiliating life, all in the name of getting the next hit of drugs. It's important to note that by the end of this section, the narrator seems to realize that that's exactly what she's done - hit bottom, and there's no way to go but up. This point is supported by the narrative action of the following section, in which she struggles with more determination than ever to stay clear of drugs. To look at it from another perspective, in terms of the book's narrative and story, the action of this section is a turning point. From now on the narrator makes more of an effort than ever to send her life in a different direction.

There is an interesting stylistic element to this section, the the fact that the early entries in this section were apparently written on fragments of paper, in equally fragmented words and ideas. This illuminates and illustrates the fragmented state of the narrator's mind, and indeed her entire existence, at this point in her life - brief moments of lucidity and awareness emerging from a drug induced haze of hallucination and oblivion. In other words, the way the images are presented reflects the way those images were experienced. In that sense, this section gives one of the two clearest examples of how the drug-affected mind works.

If this technique were employed in a novel, it would probably be viewed as a vivid example of style deliberately being shaped to illuminate substance. The point is not invalid, since that's exactly what the writing here does. It's also valid to suggest that the writing in this section is another of those points in the book where the writing feels almost TOO shaped to be a diary. The stylistic technique, as is the case with Anonymous' almost too-expansive vocabulary, comes close to giving the author/editor's game away. Ultimately, however, the author/editor's point and intent seems to be to paint as frightening a picture of drug use as possible. It could be argued that any technique, literary or close to fraudulent, is valid if even one life is saved. This is the key question posed by the book's very nature - does the end justify the means?



Part 6

Part 6 Summary

The narrator begins her second diary with claims about how happy she is and about how good it feels to be at home. She refers to the joy of seeing her grandparents, who are due to arrive for a visit in a few days time. She also has a conversation with her younger brother, Tim, in which she tells him about some of her history and urges him to avoid drugs at all costs. She comes out of that conversation with a new respect for her brother, his perspective, and his wisdom.

For several months, the narrator lives a double life. At school, she struggles to stay clear of the drug-using crowd, who refuse to accept that she's trying to stay clean, and with increasing resentment and violence try to get her back into the crowd. Their ringleader, Jan, is particularly vindictive, especially after an incident when the narrator is baby-sitting, Jan shows up stoned and puts a child in danger, and the narrator calls Jan's parents to get them to take her away. From then on, Jan and her friends try to get the narrator in trouble with the school principal, threaten to give the narrator's little sister some drug laced candy, and to plant drugs in her father's car. Throughout all this, the narrator longs for a normal high school life - for a boy to date her, and to have real intimate sex instead of the drug-infused sex she's experienced in her past.

The other half of the narrator's life is focused on rebuilding relationships with her family. For a while, it seems easy, as both she and her parents seem to be making an effort to be open, honest, respectful and loving. But as she's making plans for a surprise birthday dinner for her mother, the narrator experiences an acid "flashback," a hallucinogenic episode that has all the hallmarks and experiences of an acid trip without any acid actually being used. Frightened and upset, the narrator nevertheless carries on with the birthday dinner, which is a great success. However, she tells her parents nothing of what she's experienced at school or in the flashback, fearing they'll reject her completely.

As part of her efforts to improve her grades, the narrator starts studying at the library of the university where her father teaches. While there, she encounters a student named Joel, and they begin to spend a lot of time together. The narrator's father discovers Joel is only eighteen, and is there because he's exceptionally bright. He warns the narrator to not distract him from his studies, and she promises not to, but nevertheless continues to spend time with him at the library.

Joel is a genuine source of compassion and support when, within a couple of months, both of the narrator's grandparents die - her grandfather suffers a stroke, while her grand-mother dies in her sleep from loneliness, stress and grief. Throughout this period, the narrator's dreams and thoughts are haunted by images of her grandparents' bodies being buried, rotting, and being devoured by worms. Her time with Joel is some comfort to her, since his father died when he was very young and he's come to a very mature,



spiritually grounded understanding of life and death. At one point, he kisses her, and the narrator is thrilled - but his presence and his comfort aren't quite enough, and the narrator continues to be troubled.

As the school year ends, threats from Jan and the other drug-using students increase, to the point where the narrator is the victim of physical violence. She finally tells her parents what's been happening to her, and warns her brother and sister to be extra careful of strangers. She confides to her diary that it seems none of them are taking her too seriously. They say the kids hassling her aren't really a threat. The narrator then confides both her concerns and some of her history to Joel, who is understanding and loving and tells her she can handle it because she's a good and strong person. He gives her the gold watch his father had given him, and she gives him a ring her grandmother had given her. Even so, she says she still feels awful. Joel goes home for the summer, and the narrator ponders the way school, and life, work (see "Quotes," p. 143).

Part 6 Analysis

Several elements established as thematically and narratively important in earlier sections of the novel reappear here. These include the narrator's attempts to rebuild and/or redefine her life, an aspect to her personal journey that she seems to be accomplishing with a bit more success here than she has in the past. Specifically, she seems better able to resist the temptations of drugs, and of "belonging" with a group of friends. What's important to note at this point is that she doesn't seem to give herself credit for her successes. She seems more focused on berating herself for having done what she feels are awful things rather than celebrating the fact that she's rising above them. This relates to the second important element that recurs in this section - the core sense of loneliness that the narrator experiences, here and throughout the book. In this section that loneliness appears to be alleviated somewhat by the presence of her grandparents, her family, and particularly of Joel, but that doesn't seem to be enough, even when he expresses confidence in her continued ability to resist drugs. The picture at this point is of someone (the narrator) who feels that she doesn't have enough strength and/or enough of a positive self-image to be able to conquer her demons on her own. Instead, she relies on outside sources - the love and support of other people, the presence of drugs in her life. It's also important to note, however, that in this section the seeds are planted for a stronger self-image, the fragility of which receives its strongest test not in the deaths of her beloved grandparents, but through the events of the following section.

Other repeated elements in this section include the narrator's ambivalent relationship with her mother. On the one hand, the narrative includes references to the narrator's ongoing belief that neither her mother nor her father (but particularly her mother) wouldn't love her if they knew the whole truth not only of her past, but also of her present. On the other hand is the eagerness and determination with which the narrator approaches her mother's birthday party. There are references here to the narrator's total devotion to, and adoration of, her mother. Once again, the narrator seems torn between two extremes, another indication of her emotional changeability, which is in turn another



possible, albeit partial, explanation for why drugs become such a dominating part of her life - when she's stoned, the drama of her life, and her frustration with that drama, leaves her.

The final important repeated element in this section is the return of the narrator's near-obsession with the image of worms devouring dead bodies - in this case, the bodies of her grandparents. The image is a reiteration of previous, similar visions first seen in Part 3, and which reappear again with horrifying effect in the following section.

All these repeated elements are further manifestations of literary technique, as the author/editor works to give structure and meaning to the various stories being compiled into the story of Anonymous. This raises another question related to the book's core nature - does a narrative NEED such structure and technique to be effective? Would *Go Ask Alice* have been as powerful if it had been a genuine, unshaped and unedited diary? What effect DOES structure and technique have on the overall impact of a piece of writing?



Part 7

Part 7 Summary

This section begins with several fragmented entries with no dates, the contents of which refer to the narrator being in hospital with several broken bones, nails ripped out of her fingers, hair ripped out of her head, self-induced claw marks on her face, and continuing hallucinations about being eaten by worms. Eventually a more lengthy entry reveals that one night while the narrator was babysitting, she ate some chocolate covered peanuts that had been laced with acid, and had hallucinated that the worm-eaten body of her grandfather had come for her. Later entries reveal that neighbors heard her screaming, saw that she was doing violence to herself, and locked her in a closet so she wouldn't harm the baby. The police were called, and the narrator was taken away. Later, the diaries record how Jan and other drug-using students falsely told police that the narrator was trying to sell drugs at school. This combines with the narrator's actions and history to cause a judge to order her committed to a psychiatric hospital.

The narrator is locked into what she describes as a filthy, foul-smelling ward with other psychiatric patients. At first, she reacts with complete terror, refusing to say anything to anyone, including a therapist and social worker. She manages to convince her parents that she didn't take the acid herself, and that she was entrapped. As her parents struggle to convince Jan and the others to retract her story, the narrator gradually becomes used to life in the institution - but never becomes less disgusted with the place. She makes friends with a young girl named Babbie, who tells the narrator her history - drug use, running away, child prostitution, incarceration. Other youthful inmates of the institution attempt to get the narrator to join their plans to escape and get drugs, but she refuses. She eventually opens up to her therapist, who is happy to hear of her plans to become a counselor and social worker. She also befriends an inmate named Tom, who tells how he became addicted to drugs. She comments that as he tells his story, she can see in his eyes that he's still enthralled and excited by them.

The narrator's father tells her they've convinced Jan to retract her statement, and are working on the others. There is also a letter from Joel, which the narrator reads in private. She's overjoyed to read that he still cares for her, and understands her situation. She hopes for a life with him, but remains convinced that she's unworthy of both him and her family. Soon afterwards, the narrator gets the news that she's to be sent home. As she rejoices, she imagines that one day she and her family will be allowed to take Babbie home, but then she realizes that life doesn't really work that way.

Part 7 Analysis

Like the entries in the middle of Part 5, the entries that begin this section are fragmented in both style and substance. The language used, with its jarring, jagged terseness is stylistically evocative of the state of the narrator's mind, and on one level



can be considered as effective story telling - perhaps another manifestation of the author/editor's intent to give meaning and shape to otherwise random life experiences. These entries give a vivid, visceral sense of being while at the same time creating a powerfully engaging sense of mystery as to how and why that state of being exists.

This section contains the book's climax, the high point of emotion and crisis for its protagonist. What's interesting to note is that the crisis comes as the result of an external action, as opposed to the choice or actions of the central character or protagonist. It might not be going too far, in fact, to suggest that the actions of whoever laced the peanuts with the acid (Jan? one of the others?) is in fact a symbol of the overall effect of drugs on the narrator's life, and indeed on the lives of people like her. Drugs are an external force that can completely and violently re-define an individual's life, when taken once as they are in this instance or taken over a series of incidents, as the narrator has done throughout the book. In other words, the incident with the nuts and the narrator's reaction to them can therefore be seen as embodying the book's thematic point warning about the dangers associated with drug use.

It's interesting to consider at this point what might be an invented incident, created to add narrative and thematic impact to the story, and what actually happened - what are the real life incidents compiled by the author/editor into the narrative that became Anonymous' life. There is the sense here that the incident with the spiked nuts that Anonymous describes is too bizarre to be real. On the other hand, it might be exactly the kind of bizarre incident that DOES happen in life, and may be one of the book's anchoring real-life experiences.

One significant point about this section is that, in spite of having succeeded in convincing her parents and the other authorities of the truth of her statement that she was a victim, she remains UN-convinced that she's a good person, worthy of all the good things that are happening to her. This is particularly true of her relationship with Joel - she continues to believe, as she did even before she got into drugs, that she's unworthy of genuine regard from another human being. Here is more evidence that the core issue at the heart of both the narrator's experience of life and her experience with drugs is loneliness and poor self image. The thematic warning here is that drugs are not the solution to such a problem. At best they are, if a pun can be excused, a temporary "fix."



Part 8

Part 8 Summary

Shortly after the narrator is brought home by her parents, her father is asked to cover for a suddenly ill colleague at a university in the east. He takes the whole family with him, and they spend a happy few weeks together, even though the narrator has a torturous run-in with poison ivy and the summer heat on a shopping expedition in New York City proves overwhelming. Shortly after their return home, the narrator makes friends with Fawn, a popular and non drug-using girl from school. She spends increasing amounts of time with Fawn and her friends, to the point where she (the narrator) almost forgets her father's birthday. At the last minute, she buys him a sweater and writes him a poem and records in her diary that he's almost in tears when he receives both gifts. The next day is the narrator's birthday, and her family stages a big party for her, with a surprise guest - Joel, who has arrived early for registration at the university. The narrator records how happy she is that she and Joel spent most of her birthday party holding hands, and also looks forward to spending more and more time with him once school starts. Finally, she celebrates being asked by her piano teacher to headline a recital in a few months once her hands have completely healed. She rejoices in being considered that talented, and resolves to practice both intensely and frequently.

As the beginning of school approaches, the narrator frets over what, if anything, she should tell Fawn and her friends about her past. She expresses the hope that Jan and the other drug-using students will leave her alone, and then debates whether to start a new diary. She finally decides not to, saying that while her diary has been her best friend over the last several months, it's her belief that as a person gets older she should confide her feelings and thoughts to real friends. She expresses her gratitude to her diary for always being there for her, and signs off with her habitual "see ya."

After this entry, a note from the editors reveals that three weeks later the narrator was found dead of a drug overdose. There were no apparent indications whether it was deliberate or accidental (see "Quotes," p. 189).

Part 8 Analysis

This section of the book essentially serves as an epilogue, or a summation of what happened after the story's climax was achieved. But while most epilogues carry with them a mostly straightforward sense that life for the characters is achieving a kind of new equilibrium or balance, the epilogue to this book is threaded with a powerful sense of suspense. The reader is left in a place of wondering whether the narrator will once again fall into the habit of using drugs, or will she remain clean. The irony, of course, is that the narrator dies just as she seems to be coming to a deeper and healthier understanding of herself. This is awareness that she doesn't have to be lonely, that she is in fact a worthwhile human being, and that she does have something of value to



contribute to the world, as well as to the lives of her family and friends. The tragedy, of course, is that such awareness was not within her from the beginning of her life, and that its budding presence in her life was nipped by her return to the dark, self-destructive, self-loathing experience of drugs. Whether the overdose from which she died was deliberate or accidental is irrelevant. What's relevant is that in spite of all the good that was going on for her, she went back to the drugs, and herein lies the core of the book's central thematic point. Drugs are sneaky and alluring, but ultimately dangerous, destructive, and ruinous. Again, all of this is effective and engaging storytelling. And again, the question is raised of how much is invented, how much is shaped, and how much is "real". The literary technique here is undeniably effective, but it is still technique. Does the possibility that it may NOT have been genuinely lived as recorded have been shaped make it any less so?

In the book's final moments, the editors indicate that it offers no clear "solutions" to the questions posed by the narrator's story. What it does offer is a warning, in its clear and uncompromising betrayal of a victimized, vulnerable, valuable life. The irony in these final comments is that because it's shaped and edited, not a pure diary, that in its very existence it DOES offer a solution. The author/editor created it with a solution in mind, and a very clear intention - to scare young people away from drugs. As always when considering this book, the question is this ... is its impact lesser or greater because it's NOT a diary but actually carefully edited and shaped. Does the end justify the means?



Characters

The Narrator (Anonymous)

The central character of *Go Ask Alice* is never named, or rather she never writes her name into her diary. At the beginning of the book, the author/editor suggests that the choice to not include her name (and change some of the names of those involved with the narrator) was done to protect those with whom she shared her short life, but who nevertheless wanted the self-narrated story of that life to be told. On another level, however, this lack of named identity combines with the sense that the difficulties she experiences early in the book (youthful crushes, struggles with self-esteem, conflicts with parents) are similar to those that many adolescents of either gender go through to make an important suggestion. This is that the narrator is a kind of "every-person," someone with similar perspectives and attitudes and experiences to those of any/everyone else, not just adolescents. In this context, it's possible to see the story of what happens to the narrator as a kind of warning or caution - that what she experiences can/could happen to anyone. On a third level, that of the actual nature of the book (as a compilation of experiences rather than a direct revelation of individual experience), this choice to not give the central character a name functions as a DISGUISE of that nature as well as creating a sense of universality.

All that aside, the core character/personality of Anonymous, as portrayed in her writings when she's not using drugs, comes across as intelligent, thoughtful, and insightful for her age. She also seems, in her writing both off and on drugs, as desperately lonely. She refers repeatedly throughout her diary to the desire to have someone to talk to, someone who not only wants to truly understand but can understand.

There are moments at which she seems to find that kind of person, but her low self-esteem and lack of self worth leads her into actions that sabotage any hope that those positive relationships will deepen, develop and continue.

In short there is a clear pattern of self-destructiveness in the writing and in what is described of Anonymous' behavior. While there is also a drive to self improvement, that drive seems to have not been strong enough to fully and effectively counteract the drive to self-obliteration. The nature of the book, that of a compilation of the experiences of many drug users, suggests that these negative experiences are common to many people who get caught up in drugs, and therefore serve as a warning to those who experience similar feelings of alienation and loneliness that drugs are a particular danger to them.

Mother

Of all the relationships Anonymous experiences, including her relationship with herself, her relationship with her mother is the most multi-faceted and emotionally demanding. It



is the source of a seemingly contradictory intertwining of pressures and intense feelings. At various times, often within days (or diary entries) of each other, Mother is adored and/ or reviled. She urges the narrator to behave according to the family's standards and yet encourages her to be true to herself. She pleads with the narrator to simply let herself be loved at the same time she is insistent that the narrator accept ostensibly constructive criticism. Mother is a deeply ambivalent figure, whose presence, example and attitudes influence both the narrator's behavior and attitudes about herself throughout the book. This variety of attitudes is perhaps a manifestation of the book's basic nature - it's possible that because its source material comes from many different drug users, the many different attitudes towards the mother came from a similar variety of sources, and relatively little attempt was made at integrating them into a portrayal of a single individual.

Father

As a presence, Father is more of a cipher than Mother. Most of the comments Anonymous makes about him have to do with his frequently being absent, although there are a number of occasions when she expresses her deep affection for him and gratitude to him. This latter is particularly true of her feelings towards him in the book's final few entries, when he's one of a small handful of people who believe that the bad trip she took while babysitting was the result of someone feeding her drugs, rather than her choosing to take them.

Tim and Alexandria

These are the narrator's two younger siblings - Tim is two years younger, while Alexandria (Alex) is several years younger. In the book's early stages, they are portrayed by Anonymous as outgoing and gregarious, and as such are painted as a vivid contrast to her and therefore as an example of success to be both lived up to and reviled. Later in the book, however, as part of her new-found appreciation for her family, Anonymous writes of her respect for Tim's intelligence and compassion, and for Alexandria's good-heartedness and industriousness. As is the case with almost all the characters and situations described in the book, there is some question as to whether these characters are more literary creation than actual individuals, whether they've been shaped and developed to provide narratively effective contrast to the central character.

Gramps and Gran

Anonymous's grandparents are the sources of both unconditional love and utter horror. The first is deliberate on their part, as they come across in the various diary entries as purely loving and generous. Their deaths, however, are a considerable source of anxiety for Anonymous, particularly as she vividly imagines the ways that decomposition affects their bodies. In particular, her visions of Gramps' body being devoured by worms



plays into both her fears of death and her acid-triggered hallucinations of her own body being similarly devoured.

Roger

Roger is the attractive, popular boy that Anonymous has a big crush on, and is rejected by, at the beginning of the diaries. He reappears throughout the book's early sections, always as a romanticized, idol kind of figure.

Beth

Beth is the first true friend Anonymous makes when she moves to her new home. She and Anonymous share several important traits - they're bookish, solitary, intelligent, and lonely. They quickly form a deep and intense bond, a bond which just as quickly becomes unraveled when Beth is sent to camp for the summer and returns with more interest in boys than in Anonymous. Lack of interest from Beth is one of the reasons Anonymous decides to go to the fateful party where she is introduced to drugs.

Jill

Jill, a popular girl at Anonymous's school, invites her to the party where she experiences drugs for the first time.

Chris

Once Anonymous becomes involved in drugs and begins to rebel against life in her parents' home, Chris becomes her best friend. They do drugs together, revile their respective parents together, run off together to San Francisco, and share several highs and lows as they both struggle to stay clear of drugs. An interesting note about Chris, made by Anonymous, is that once the two girls return from San Francisco, Chris' parents move with her to another community where no-one, particularly the drug dealers, knows who she is. It's tempting to imagine what might have happened to Anonymous if her parents had been able to do the same.

Shelia

Shelia is Chris' employer in San Francisco, a mature, sophisticated woman who hosts the party at which Anonymous and Chris are lured back into the drug scene. Later, after they become regular attendees at Shelia's regular parties, Anonymous and Chris are sexually entrapped and assaulted by Shelia and one of her (male) party guests.



Joel

Joel is the young man with whom Anonymous becomes involved after returning from her second attempt at running away. He's a few years older than she is, intelligent, compassionate and understanding. His father died when he was seven, which has leant him a sense of wisdom and perspective on death that Anonymous finds healing and helpful in the wake of her grandparents' deaths. Later, when she is hospitalized, he continues to support her and express his affection for her. Anonymous, however, repeatedly doubts her worthiness to receive such support.

Jan and Lane

Jan and Lane are members of the group of young people at Anonymous's school deep into the drug subculture. Lane is the principal dealer, while Jan is the ringleader. Both attempt to lure Anonymous back into drugs. Lane physically threatens her, and when Anonymous has her bad trip late in the story, Jan lies and says that she (Anonymous) had been trying to sell drugs at school. Under pressure from Anonymous's father, Jan eventually recants and admits she was lying. As a result, Anonymous is released from the psychiatric hospital.

Babbie

Babbie is a fellow patient in the psychiatric hospital in which Anonymous is placed following her bad trip. Several years younger than Anonymous, Babbie has lived an even harder life as a child addict and prostitute. Anonymous never mentions it, but it's possible to infer that in learning about Babbie, Anonymous is considering the elementary school-children to whom she sold drugs.



Objects/Places

The Diary

As Anonymous herself says, the diary is her one consistent best friend. In it she records her thoughts and feelings, her hopes and fears. It's important to note that the diary isn't always in the form of a book - there are certain segments in which it's written on whatever piece of paper (grocery bags, food wrappers, etc) that Anonymous could find. This suggests that the means of expression wasn't as important as the fact that Anonymous had at least some kind of vehicle to express herself at all. The irony, of course, is that over the years the diary has been revealed to not be a diary at all but a creation / compilation of the experiences of several individuals in similar, drug addicted circumstances. In other words, the honesty that Anonymous professes to experience when writing is, in fact a kind of lie. On the other hand, this aspect of the book can possibly be seen as a metaphor for the experience the book is portraying - after all, drugs themselves and the "happiness" and "freedom" they bring are themselves a lie.

The Lockbox

This is where Anonymous keeps her diary once she starts using drugs. It represents the secrecy and shame within which her secret use of drugs, as well as her desperate loneliness and sense of isolation, are locked. As is the case with all the principal objects and places described in the book, there is some question as to whether their metaphoric / symbolic importance has been shaped and / or defined by the author / editor.

The First House

The first home in which Anonymous lives, where she spent her childhood and grew into her mid-teens, provides her with a clear sense of safety and security. The loss of that security in moving to a new home is perhaps one of the psychological factors in her becoming involved with drugs.

The Second House

At first the second house feels strange to Anonymous. Later in her story, however, after she's run away from the life that the house represents, she comes to realize its value as a home, a symbol of the kind of family life she's desperate to make for herself. In the book's later chapters, her room in this house becomes a sanctuary, a goal, a place of safety in which she can truly begin each new phase of her drug-free life.



The Grandparents' House

Anonymous's grandparents live some distance away from both homes in which Anonymous and her family live. Their home, however, is still a (perhaps somewhat romanticized) place of sanctuary, where she can receive unconditional love. When it's sold following the deaths of her grandparents, Anonymous experiences the sale as a profound, personal loss.

San Francisco

This city on the west coast of California is for Anonymous and Chris, the way it was for many people in the 60's and 70's, the ultimate symbol of freedom and socio-cultural rebellion. Anonymous and Chris make their home here in celebration of their freedom from their parents and also from their involvement with drugs.

The Boutique

The small, brightly decorated storefront where Anonymous and Chris set up shop is a powerful symbol of freedom, success, and independence for both of them. For a while, it's successful for them, both financially and emotionally. Later, however, after their experiences with Shelia and the boutique becomes little more than a hangout for teenaged drop-outs from life, the boutique becomes a symbol of the emptiness of their lives and they can't get away from it fast enough.

School

Throughout the book, school of any kind is portrayed as a source of emotional torture and extreme pressure for Anonymous. Whether she's perceiving pressure to conform to the "good girl" rules or experiencing deliberate pressure to return to the world of drugs, school is never a place where Anonymous can explore and/or discover and/or be herself. At school she always carries the burden of expectations, either her own or those of other people. As such it's a clear contrast to San Francisco, where there is no pressure from anyone - or at least that's what she thinks at first.

The Psychiatric Hospital

This is where Anonymous spends several months recovering from the bad trip she experiences after being fed a hit of acid, presumably by those at school that hate and resent her. Described in terms of physical, emotional, and spiritual bleakness, the psychiatric hospital feels as though it's a place from which all hope has been drained, and any hope of positive renewal in and/or of life fades with each passing day.

Setting

The girl who wrote this "diary" lived in two different worlds, the real world and a fantasy world. The real world encompasses her home with her parents, her home with her grandmother, the homes of parties she attends with her friends, the streets of San Francisco and Berkeley, and eventually, a psychiatric hospital ward. The fantasy world encompasses all she sees and believes in her hallucinations. The girl thinks and acts differently when she resides in each place.

At the beginning of the book, the girl lives in the real world, and she is unhappy there.

She has not yet learned how to feel comfortable with herself or how to create her own contentment, so she seeks to find contentment elsewhere, in another world. She wants to escape the real world as she knows it and find a place where she can be someone else.

This girl becomes a different person once she discovers "wonderland." In this fantasy world, her senses are heightened and she feels uninhibited and free. This world is the world within her head; it is not real, but it seems real, and this world comes to life only as she retreats into her drug-induced hallucinations. Readers cannot help but see the comparison between the fantasy world and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Everything is distorted and crazy in wonderland; but it is there where she feels fantastic.

Sparks contrasts these two worlds in part by emphasizing the conflict within the girl's mind. She is happy and free in her fantasy world, then once she returns to her real world, she swears she will never return to "wonderland" again. By emphasizing the vast difference between the girl's life when she is straight and the girl's life when she is stoned, Sparks sets apart reality from fantasy. This girl moves back and forth from place to place, from reality to hallucination, trying desperately to find her place.

She cannot possibly reconcile the two worlds, so she becomes confused. Will she come back to reality or retreat further and further into "wonderland"?

Social Sensitivity

Some reviewers suggest that the book is too moralistic, perhaps, parroting the typical warnings that parents and drug counselors typically use to scare kids away from drugs. For this reason, *Go Ask Alice* has received mixed reactions. Many teens that read the book loved it, considering it both frightening and realistic. Others commented that it was propaganda, obviously written by an older person outside the world of drugs who made it sound frightening on purpose. Many were outraged to discover that Sparks wrote the book and not the girl they came to refer to as "Alice." Some teenagers simply refused to believe it.

Readers must to ask themselves if it really matters who wrote this book. Is the message powerful enough that the book is effective whether it is true or not? Or it so unrealistic that it refutes the author's intentions? Is it realistic that the girl first trips without knowing it, and that her friends become so cruel as to harm her? Is it realistic that she lives such an extreme life, becomes a pusher so quickly, and even pushes drugs to grade school kids? Though at the time it was written, *Go Ask Alice* took the romance out of the drug culture hailed by the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s, today's readers may not consider it a realistic portrayal of teenage drug use.



Literary Qualities

Sparks wrote *Go Ask Alice* in a diary format, which proved to be an effective way to convey her message, whether or not the "diary" was real. Sparks assumed the perspective of a teenage drug user realistically, using teenage language and parroting teenage concerns. She likewise leaves blanks to omit names and make her diary more convincing. It is interesting to read the first sentence of girl's first diary entry again after finishing the book. This first sentence alludes to the ups and downs drug users experience every day. The quote on the back of the book foreshadows what will become of this unnamed girl. "After you've had it," the quote reads, "there isn't even life without drugs."

There is a little girl quality about Alice; the way she speaks, the way she reasons, the expressions she uses. The author of her diary lets her teenage protagonist convey thoughts that adults wish to pass on to teenagers without preaching at them. For instance, the girl writes in her diary that she realizes that what she has heard about drugs came from people like her parents who obviously did not know what they were talking about. That people who do LSD are not "low-class, unclean [and] despicable."

They are regular kids, children within her own socio-economic group. This seems to be one of the author's messages.

Perhaps the most obvious literary device Sparks uses is the allusion to Louis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The title alludes to Carroll's character, and the teenager "author" of the diary recognizes the connection as well. "It's a completely new world I'm exploring, and you can't even conceive the wide new doors that are opening up before me," she says. "I feel like Alice in Wonderland. Maybe Lewis G. Carroll was on drugs too."

Go Ask Alice was written long after *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and after the rock group Jefferson Airplane wrote the song "White Rabbit," which also alluded to Carroll's book as well as added to the interpretation of that book as a portrayal of a drug-induced hallucination. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the young girl ingested some strange substance, or mushroom, as the song says, and then spiraled down the rabbit hole to a fantasy world where nothing was as it seemed. In what kind of world does the girl in *Go Ask Alice* find herself? It is not reality, but pure fantasy. It is a world both frightening and fabulous, like a hallucination. This girl also ingests strange substances, spirals downward, and finds herself in a world where nothing is as it seems.

Close examination of *Go Ask Alice* reveals that several presumptions have been made about this book that Sparks may never have intended. It is presumed that Alice died of an overdose for example, yet Sparks says only that the cause of the girl's death was unknown. Furthermore, it is widely presumed that Alice is the name of the girl who wrote the diary, and the movie *Go Ask Alice* did in fact feature a girl named Alice as the main character. Nevertheless, Sparks never names the author of the diary at all. In fact, it seems that she wished to keep this girl unnamed. "Alice" it appears, is no one in



particular, but simply a symbol for the drug culture and for any one of millions who found themselves caught in its trap. In this sense, the diarist is Alice, for she too is a symbol.

In the book, the girl does encounter the true Alice, the symbolic Alice, who is simply some girl sitting stoned on a street curb at Berkeley. At this point in the story, the author of the "diary" is wandering the streets aimlessly, and like millions of other runaways, lost in a strange land with no idea what day it is or what direction she is heading. "Then I talked to Alice, who I met just sitting stoned on the curb," the girl writes in her diary. "She didn't know if she was running away from something or running to something, but she admitted that deep in her heart she wanted to go home."

This passage seems to encapsulate Sparks' message. Anyone who falls into the "wonderland" of drugs lives in a state of confusion and longs to find their way out. The Alice on the street corner, like the diarist in Sparks' book, fell down the rabbit hole as surely as Louis Carroll's Alice did, and she too found herself living in "wonderland."

This "wonderland" seems to represent a 130 Go Ask Alice hallucinatory state where everything is an illusion and nothing seems to make any sense at all.



Themes

Dangers of Drugs

This idea, that drugs are dangerous and destructive, is at the core of the book's very existence. The fact that the book has been revealed to be somewhat fraudulent (a deliberately edited shaping of the experiences of several experiences, as opposed to the diary of a single individual) is, in this context, irrelevant. The book's core theme and essential purpose would be the same if it had in fact been inspired by one single life. At this point it's important to note what the author / editor says in a brief introduction, that "[the book] is not a definitive statement on the middle class, teenage drug world. It does not offer any solutions. It is, however, a highly personal and specific chronicle. As such, we hope it will provide insights ..." The implication can be read in that the author / editor is hinting that this is not in fact a diary, a "definitive statement". It's also important to note that at no point is the opinion explicitly or directly stated that doing drugs is, quote unquote, a "bad thing." That doesn't mean the statement isn't made - it is, in fact, inherent in the story. The evidence is plainly there, in the way the narrator's life is completely and repeatedly derailed by her use of drugs, the way her goals and intentions become completely sublimated to her addictive craving for the next high, the way her physical and emotional and spiritual health are compromised. It's also important to note that this theme isn't embodied only in the life and experiences of the narrator. The lives of other characters, particularly those with whom the narrator finds herself in the psychiatric hospital, provide equally vivid examples of how ruinous and destructive drugs can be. Babbie's life in particular is evidence of how the body, mind, heart and soul of a person can be consumed by drugs. The repeated image of worms consuming dead bodies can, in this context, be seen as a powerful symbol and/or embodiment of drugs' destructive, relentless power. All in all, the book's undeniably powerful statement, no matter what its origins, can be seen as valid. Perhaps in this case the end DOES justify the means.

Loneliness

As previously discussed, at the core of the narrator's experience throughout the book, both on and off drugs, is a deep and painful sense of loneliness. The early entries are filled with references to feeling alone in her family, and in both her old school and new school. This loneliness is at the core of several of her actions, decisions, feelings and relationships. Her desire to be with Roger and her despair at his rejection are both manifestations of her loneliness, as are the intensity of her relationship with Beth and her eagerness to accept Jill's invitation to the party where she (Anonymous) experiences drugs for the first time. It may not be going too far to suggest that loneliness is also at the core of Anonymous's deep joy at experiencing the highs of drugs. Yes there is a chemical reaction involved, but there is also the sense that while she is on drugs Anonymous no longer feels as though she is alone in the universe. Not only does she have friends, but she also experiences a connection with God or spirit or



the force that lives and moves through all things. The intensity of her loneliness ebbs and flows throughout the book, abating when she becomes friends with Chris, deepening when her grandparents die, abating again on the occasions she returns to her family after running away, deepening again when she has the bad trip and is locked in the psychiatric hospital. The trip itself, interestingly, is one of only a few occasions in the book where drug use leaves her feeling lonely rather than fulfilled. It seems that when she's having a good time on drugs she's REALLY having a good time, but when her trips are bad she feels more alone in the horrifying hallucinations such trips trigger in her than she does when she's actually fully conscious and drug free. This sense of the aloneness in drug use is perhaps part of the reason why she resolves, admittedly repeatedly, to go off the drugs - fully aware alone-ness seems to be better than aloneness on a trip.



Themes/Characters

This diary of an unnamed teenager begins just before the girl's fifteenth birthday, September 16th, year unknown. It begins with the sentence "Yesterday I remember thinking I was the happiest person in the whole earth, in the whole galaxy, in all of God's creation.... Now it's all smashed down upon my head and I wish I could just melt into the blaaaa-ness of the universe and cease to exist." In this sentence, the girl is referring to something that happened at school that humiliated her, but it exposes her insecurity, her emotional vulnerability, and her rather typical feelings of teenage angst. Readers understand that Roger is the girl's boyfriend, and that he hurt her deeply when he failed to show up for a date. The girl appears to be the typical American teenager in many ways. She is raised in the middle class, and she has typical teenage concerns.

She worries about her weight and about boys and friends. She is curious about sex.

She dreams of having a husband and a family someday. But these early diary entries seem perhaps overly dramatic. This girl has low self-esteem, and it appears that she views Roger's rejection of her as a validation of her own feelings of inadequacy.

By the second short diary entry readers get a clearer picture of the girl's insecurity.

She feels unattractive, lacks confidence in her friendships, and seems to be unhappy with her life. Though most adolescents struggle with feelings of insecurity and experience ups and downs, for this girl the ups and downs seem a bit extreme. She exhibits many characteristics typical of drug users.

However, when the book begins the girl is innocent. Then over the course of her writing, readers witness a corruption of that innocence as this troubled teenager, in her longing to feel accepted, dives headfirst into a world she finds both fabulous and frightening.

Early on in the book, the girl's writings show signs of an addictive personality. This girl seems to be overly concerned with her weight and self-conscious about her appearance, appearing to have somewhat of a food addiction. She fits the stereotype of the troubled child destined to flirt with danger.

She so longs for acceptance that she is particularly susceptible to peer pressure, and she wants desperately to change her lifestyle and be a part of the popular crowd.

Careful examination of the girl's character permits readers to recognize the danger she will inevitably fall into, particularly because of her ambivalence about her life. At times in her early writings she expresses an interest in many things, her friends and her religion for instance, and she looks forward to Christmas with a refreshing childhood excitement. Then quickly she reverses stances.



She says that she seems to be "kind of losing interest in everything." She has no interest in school, seemingly because she feels unattractive and unpopular. This makes her susceptible to feeling worthless, and perhaps even prone to depression.

The girl's personality changes drastically during the course of the book. As she gets further and further into the drug life, "she develops a crass attitude, and becomes paranoid." This change begins rather abruptly after she experiences drugs for the first time. While staying with her grandmother for the summer, she is thrilled to be invited to a party with the popular kids, and she eagerly prepares for what she hopes to bring about a change in her life. Certainly her life changes after the party, but it turns out to be quite different from anything she could have imagined. In a dangerous game called "Button, Button, Who's Got the Button," the girl unknowingly takes her first hit of LSD, and this is the catalyst for her loss of innocence.

The acid trip the girl experienced that night confuses her just as much as it enchants her. Because she had no idea she was given acid and certainly no idea what to expect, she at first feels afraid that she might have been poisoned, but then she quickly relaxes into the wondrous world that seems to open up to her before her very eyes.

Reliance on drugs comes quickly after that first night, though she tries to tell herself that she will never take drugs again.

This experimentation then becomes a pattern, and before readers know it, she tries all kinds of substances, pushing drugs for her boyfriend, and even selling drugs to young children in elementary schools. The girl has a problem with her behavior, but she seems to have no willpower to stop it.

Soon, in addition to doing drugs, she starts having sex with many different men, always when she is in an altered state.

The girl lost her virginity one night while she was tripping with her boyfriend Bill "one last time." This first sexual experience was all a part of her drug trip—she could not separate the two. Then the regrets sink in. She had wanted Roger, not Bill, to be the first. She worries about becoming pregnant and fears that Bill will think she is easy.

Beginning to hate Bill and her new friends and her summer home with her grandparents, the teenager wants to go home. She says in her diary that she is "living with doubts and apprehensions and fears that [she] never dreamed possible." These doubts, apprehensions, and fears cause her to take her grandfather's sleeping pills to relax.

Soon readers find out that she regularly relies on sleeping pills and tranquilizers to help her deal with her stress. The equation of sex with drugs means that Alice seeks out both for the same reasons—escape, pleasure, altered states, and the need to remove oneself into a fantasy world. Soon, like Alice in Wonderland, the world in which she finds herself is nothing like the one she knew before.



The girl's boyfriend Richie is a frightening portrait of the kind of person this confused young girl finds appealing. The girl thinks she is in love with Richie, but he has a controlling personality, treating her with little or no respect. Readers understand that he only uses her to push his drugs. The girl knows it too, deep down, but she continues to deny it. She claims to be disgusted with her life but is unable to reverse it. When the girl finds Richie having sex with his roommate Ted, however, the haze lifts a little, and she finally gets the courage to leave him. Unfortunately her decision as to how to do it leads her into more trouble, more drugs, and farther away from self-contentment.

The girl makes a decision with her friend Chris, who has also vowed to mend her ways. The two decide that the only way they can change their lives and get off the drugs is to run away to San Francisco, a poor choice in the height of the drug era, but the girls do go to San Francisco and they pledge to stay clean. The diarist writes a note to her parents to say goodbye and scribbles a note to the police to turn in Richie, before getting on a bus with Chris.

Despite their intentions, soon after arriving in San Francisco they get involved in the drug scene once again. The girl writes in her diary about the party they attended, saying that as soon as she smelled the pot at the party, she immediately wanted "to be ripped, smashed, torn up as I had never wanted anything before." At that moment, despite her original intentions when she moved to San Francisco, the girl wanted desperately to be a part of this drug crowd.

"Last night was the worst night of my shitty, rotten, stinky, dreary —ed-up life," the girl writes in her diary. Readers learn that she and Chris did heroin with a girl named Sheila and her boyfriend, and they fell prey not only to the drugs but also to a trap set by these new friends, who raped the girls and treated them "sadistically and brutally." Again the girls profess to look out for each other, realizing that doing drugs makes people out of control. The girl's entire world has become a downward spiral into a land where everything is distorted and unreal. The ecstasy of sex and drugs is just an illusion. "All my life I've thought that the first time I had sex with someone it would be something special, and maybe even painful, but it turned out to be just part of the brilliant, freaky, way-out pattern. I still can't quite separate one thing from another," the girl writes in her diary. At one point she refers to being brainwashed by Richie, and she clearly has been brainwashed by the entire drug culture. It robbed her of her innocence. At the beginning of the book, the girl had a healthy teenage curiosity about sex and an entire world of pleasure to explore. By the time she arrives at Berkeley, however, she says that she has never had sex without drugs.

Sparks makes a point to underscore the conflict that rages within the girl's mind.

After each of her drug experiences, she vows never to do them again. Then she is seduced by the drugs again, and each acid trip makes her feel totally uninhibited and wonderful. She likens her experience with torpedoes and speed to "riding shooting stars through the Milky Way, only a million, trillion times better." Then she feels guilty for doing these drugs the next day.



This kind of flip-flopping is typical of addiction. The girl is curious (just like Alice in Wonderland) and so she will always have to fight the urge to flirt with danger. She likes how uninhibited drugs make her feel, but then she hates herself afterward. She engages in these internal battles constantly.

Nevertheless, after her experience on her own in California, she appears ready to change her life. She goes home to her parents in December of that year, for Christmas.

The girl's parents play a very small role in the book. They are underdeveloped as characters. Readers know how the diarist feels about them but very little about how they feel about her. The emphasis here is clearly on the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of this metaphorical "Alice."

The girl's attitude truly seems to change when she returns home from California.

Soon her diary reveals that she is back with her old friends, and is being harassed and physically "abused" because one of them wants her to get him some pot. Then the next thing readers know is that the girl is in the hospital in horrible shape, apparently from an overdose of something one of these old "friends" gave her to teach her a lesson.

It is a sad story what happens to "Alice."

She says at one point that she became "old and hard." By the end of the book, she is dead. The message Sparks wished to convey became clear. The life of a drug addict is a frightening and tragic one.

Style

Point of View

Because this book is presented as a diary, it is written exclusively from the first person past point of view, giving the reader an immediate, visceral and highly evocative sense of what Anonymous is going through. This technique manifests with particular effectiveness in several of the book's key elements, including Anonymous's loneliness, her struggles to resist the temptations of drugs, and her determination to transcend the wreckage that drug use has brought into her life, right into the reader's own realm of experience. In short, reading *Go Ask Alice* is very much like being in the middle of Anonymous's experiences. It's interesting to note that this point of view gives that sense of immediacy and intensity to Anonymous's accounts of her various highs as well as to her experiences when she's not using. Her encounters with acid and marijuana in particular are narrated in extraordinary detail, the effectiveness of which is both heightened and fueled by her natural, innate intelligence, her well developed vocabulary, and her skill at constructing descriptive words and phrases. The most important result of this approach to point of view is that the reader is effectively and movingly drawn into the emotional state at the core of Anonymous's journey. Throughout the book, the sense of loneliness at Anonymous's heart is achingly well-drawn, with the result that the reader can hardly help but relate to it. On another level, there is a very strong sense that Anonymous is speaking not only to her diary, but directly to the person reading that diary. It might not be going too far to suggest that writing the diary was an act of hope, an expression of feeling and connection to a mysterious and longed for someone, anyone, who might understand. All these points, of course, must be considered within the context of the book's genuine origins - as a compilation of the experiences of several individuals, rather than an actual diary of the experiences of one. This means that everything about the book's point of view, its purposes and its effects, are in fact literary and narrative technique. That doesn't make it any less effective as a piece of writing - no matter what its origins, it still works.

Setting

The book takes place in several locations, some of which (the communities in which Anonymous and their family make their home) are not named. This combines with the previously discussed fact that Anonymous is not given a specific name to create the sense that her story could, and in fact probably does, take place anywhere and/or to anyone. It's interesting to note that a number of the communities that are named - San Francisco, Coos Bay Oregon and, later in the book, New York City - represent freedom to Anonymous, but only in one (New York) is the freedom and sense of escape actually real. The freedom in San Francisco and in Coos Bay is actually illusory, given that the freedom Anonymous experiences there (to use drugs) is actually a drug-induced trap, a prison that is in many ways worse than the prison-like life she imagined at home. This aspect to her experience with drugs is symbolized and embodied by the last place she



"visits" before she returns home, ostensibly for good - the psychiatric hospital, where she ends up as the result of her bad trip. Yes, the trip was not her choice - she was fed the drugs as opposed to deliberately taking them herself. The point, however, is that drugs are the cause of her being confined, in a place where she felt her life was being destroyed. The metaphor here is throughout her life and experiences, drugs have confined her, and this is where irony in the book's settings comes into play - only at home, where she has felt MOST confined, is she the most truly free.

Language and Meaning

There are several important ways in which language is used in *Go Ask Alice*. The first indicates the character of Anonymous, who as she herself says learned a great deal from books, with the result that her language is, on several occasions, very intelligent and perceptive. Her vocabulary, sentence structure, and expressions of her feelings and experience are all well written, economical but vivid. This is true more of her writing when she's off drugs than it is of the writing when she's using. On these occasions, the writing becomes somewhat sloppier. It's also threaded with slang words that are almost stereotypically familiar from the counter and/or drug cultures of the early 1970's. These include phrases like "bread" (used instead of money), "crumbs" (small amounts of "bread" or money), "man" (as in "Come on, man"), the Establishment (as in society and its rules), or "dig" (as in like). Her use of these words and phrases virtually disappears when she's not using, and herein is the second key way in which language is used - it delineates the differences in the way her mind actually works.

A third use of language occurs when she's using, in her descriptions of what she's experiencing when she's high. These passages are written in almost poetically descriptive language. Colors, music, sensations, feelings, ideas - all are written about in passionate, excited detail (for examples see "Quotes, p. 35 and 38). Interestingly, she uses similar passion and intensity of language on occasions when she's completely disgusted with herself for using (such as "Quotes," p 109). This is an example of the way Anonymous, on occasions when she's using and when she's sober, describes her emotions with an intensity of language that indicates deep, raging levels of feeling - joy, sensation, rage, gratitude.

At other times, when experiencing equally intense emotions, she becomes almost inarticulate - again, overwhelmed by feeling, but in a different way. Finally, there are several diary entries in which she concludes with a simple, casual "see ya." This is true of entries both when she's using and when she's clean. It seems as though she's doing her best to stay casual, to make nothing a big deal. This is, of course, a kind of denial, since what she's going through on many occasions is, in fact an extremely big deal. Again, as with every aspect of this book, these aspects to its writing must be considered and / or evaluated within the context of its origins.

The stylistic use of language in particular must be considered as the result of calculated work as much as, if not more than, an expression of an individual spirit and / or experience. Does that make it any less effective, or its impact less valid? In the context



of the book's point and purpose, no. In the context of its integrity and its purported origins, yes. The question is, which is more important?

Structure

If this book were a novel, it would be easy to suggest that it was structured in a straightforward and almost traditional way. There is exposition (Part 1), an initial incident (Part 2), increasing complication (Parts 3, 4, 5 and 6) building to a crisis or climax (Part 7) which is eventually resolved (Part 8) and which leads to denouement or falling action (also Part 8). In short, even though it is presented as a diary, all these structurally traditional components are present - there can be little doubt that the impact of Anonymous's story is heightened by it being laid out in a structure that, over centuries of storytelling, has proven to be quite effective. The reader is steadily propelled through the book by the questions "what will happen next?" and "why is this happening?" These questions are triggered not only by events and character but also by the way those events and character are put together into a coherent, narrative whole. In other words, the structure of *Go Ask Alice* makes for fine, effective, engaging story-telling, which in turn makes its thematic statements that much more apparent and easily comprehended. Ultimately, however, this sense of structure leads to the question of how much of the book's overall effect is the result of editing.

As the book's history has shown, more than initially presented - yes the obvious presence of those who put the book together is minimal, expressed as it is in a brief introduction, a couple of footnotes, and an even briefer epilogue. But given what has been revealed about the book's origin (as a compilation of the experiences of a group of individuals) it doesn't necessarily follow that the presence of those who shaped the compilation is just as minimal. The book's clearly defined and developed sense of structure is perhaps the most apparent manifestation of the deliberation with which the author / editor assembled its component parts, the real life stories stitched together to create the tapestry of a single experience. Further, this structure may very well be the ultimate evidence of what some would call fraud, and what others would call well-intentioned manipulation and portrayal of reality - which in itself might be called, by some, a textbook definition of art.



Quotes

"Can't I even have the privacy of my own soul?" p.8.

"I want so much to be someone important, or even just asked out by a boy every once in a while. Maybe the new me will be different." p10.

"Even now I'm not really sure which parts of myself are real and which parts are things I've gotten from books." p11.

"I'm partly somebody else trying to fit in and say the right things and do the right thing and be in the right place and wear what everybody else is wearing. Sometimes I think we're all trying to be shadows of each other..." p16.

"Well, like oil and water, I can't quite adapt or fit. Every so often I even seem to be on the outside just looking in on my own family. How can I possibly be such a dud when I come from this gregarious, friendly, elastic background?" p23.

"...the music began to absorb me physically. I could smell it and touch it and feel it as well as hear it. Never had anything ever been so beautiful. I was a part of every single instrument, literally a part. Each note had a character, shape and color all its very own and seemed to be entirely separate from the rest of the score ... my mind possessed the wisdom of the ages, and there were no words adequate to describe them ...for the first time that I could remember in my whole life, I was completely uninhibited." p35.

"I felt great, free, abandoned, a different, improved, perfected specimen of a different, improved, perfected species." p38.

"Everyone in the whole universe was mad except me. I was the only sane and perfect being. Somewhere in my brain I remembered reading that a thousand years with man is as a day with the Lord and I had found the answer. I was even now in my new time length living the lives of a thousand men in the space of hours." p.56.

"...one of the worst things about this drug business. Practically every kid that uses also sells and it's just a giant round robin thing that keeps on getting bigger and bigger until I wonder where it will ever end! I really do! I wish I'd never gotten started. And now Chris and I have both pledged to each other that we're going to stay clean. We really and truly are! We've given our sacred oath and promise." p.61.

"...I turned around and one of the men passed me a joint and that was it. I wanted to be ripped, smashed, torn up as I had never wanted anything before. This was the scene, these were the swingers, and I wanted to be part of it!" p. 71.

"I'm lonely, I'm heartbroken, I hate this whole number and everything it stands for, I feel I'm wasting my life away." p.78



"I feel grown-up. I am no longer in the category with the children, I am one of the adults! And I love it! They have accepted me as an individual, as a personality, as an entity. I belong! I am important! I am somebody!" p. 81.

"It's good enough to just be alive. I love Coos Bay, and I love acid! The people here, at least here in our section of town, are beautiful. They understand life and they understand me. I can talk like I want and dress like I want and nobody cares." p. 97

"This life is beautiful. It's so goddamned beautiful I can hardly stand it. And I'm a glorious part of it! Everybody else is just taking up space. Goddamned stupid people. I'd like to shove life down all their throats and then maybe they'd understand what it's all about ... color intermingled with color. People intermingled with people. Color and people intercouring together." p.101

"I talked to Alice, who I met just sitting stoned on the curb. She didn't know whether she was running away from something or running to something, but she admitted that deep in her heart she wanted to go home." p. 107.

"...calling myself a wretched food, a beggarly, worthless, miserable, paltry, mean, pitiful, unfortunate, woebegone, tormented, afflicted, shabby, disreputable, deplorable human being isn't going to help me ... I have two choices; I must either commit suicide or try to rectify my life by helping others. That is the path I must take, for I cannot bring further disgrace and suffering upon my family. There is nothing more to say, dear Diary, except love you, and I love life and I love God. Oh I do. I really do." p. 109.

"I put the little gray [kitten], named Happiness, up to my ear, and felt the warmth in her tiny body and listened to her incredible purring. Then she tried to nurse my ear and the feeling inside me was so big I thought I was going to break wide open. It was better than a drug trip, a thousand times better, a million times, a trillion times. These things are real!" p. 112.

"It's strange how much sex I've had and yet I don't feel as though I've had any. I still want somebody to be nice and just kiss me goodnight at the door ... I am trying so hard to have a positive outlook, but I can't. I can't ... I want to go back and blot out everything and start over. But inside I'm old and hard and I'm probably responsible for I don't know how many junior high and grade school kids getting hung up ... how can God ever forgive me? Why would He want to?" p. 119.

"It's strange that a big high school like this can be divided into two completely different worlds which seem to know nothing about each other. Or are there many worlds? Is the school actually like a minor galaxy, with a little world for each minority group and one for the poor kids and one for the rich kids and one for the dopers, or maybe even one for the privileged dopers and one for the dopers who come from not so wealthy backgrounds? All of us being completely unaware of the other worlds until a person tries to step from one sphere to the other. Is that the sin? Or is the real problem in trying to get back to the original globe?" p. 143.



"...I got a look at some of the people here and now I know I don't belong here. I can't get over what it feels like to be in a world of crazy people, a whole world of them. On the inside and on the outside. I don't belong here, but I'm here ... there's nowhere to go because the whole world is crazy." p. 154.

"...after what I've been through, I think I'd believe anything. Isn't that sad, to be in a spot where everything is so unbelievable you'd believe anything?" p. 161

"I think it would be much easier to be a virgin, marry someone and then find out what life is all about. I wonder how it will be for me. I'm practically a virgin in the sense that I've never had sex except when I've been stoned and I'm sure without drugs I'll be scared out of my mind. I just hope I can forget everything that's happened when I finally get married to someone I love. That's a nice secure thought, isn't it? Going to bed with someone you love." p. 174.

"I have this very silly fear ... that one day I'll be old, without ever having really been young. I wonder if it could happen that quickly or if I've ruined my life already. Do you think life can get by you without your even seeing it?" p. 181.

"...in some ways that question [of whether Anonymous's overdose was deliberate or accidental] isn't important. What must be of concern is that she died, and that she was only one of thousands of drug deaths that year." p. 189.

Adaptations

A made-for-television movie version of *Go Ask Alice* was released in 1972. Directed by John Korty, the movie starred Jamie Smith Jackson as Alice and William Shatner as Alice's father. Andy Griffith, Mackenzie Phillips, and Robert Caradine also made guest appearances in the anti-drug movie.

Sparks wrote a series of four "anonymous" diaries, all of which attempt to educate young adults about the dangers they face and convey the message that falling into destructive patterns can destroy lives.

Go Ask Alice was the first of these diaries, and undoubtedly the most popular. *Fay's Journal* is about a young boy who gets involved with a satanic cult. *Almost Lost* is about a teenager's life on the streets. *It Happened to Nancy* is about a young girl who is raped and contracts AIDS, and *Annie's Baby* is about a pregnant fourteen-year-old and her abusive boyfriend.

Melvin Burgess's *Smack* (published in England as *Junk*) is another book about teenage drug use, this time about heroin addiction. Unlike *Go Ask Alice*, *Smack* is not passed off as a true account, but rather as an example or a realistic portrayal of a teenager's life as an addict. "Smack," American slang for heroin, was popular with the punk rockers in England in the 1980s, and it centers on a young girl named Gemma.

Gemma, her boyfriend Tar, and eight other teens narrate the story, as their lives intertwine and they become caught in the heroin trap.

Beauty Queen, by Linda Glovach, is another "diary" of a teenage heroin addict.

Sam, the protagonist, becomes a topless dancer to make money to support her drug habit, and she eventually dies of an overdose.



Topics for Discussion

1. How do you feel about the fact that Go Ask Alice was passed off as a true diary?

Do you feel that this was deceptive? Do you feel that it made Sparks' message more poignant?

2. Do you believe this is a typical experience for someone who gets involved in drugs?

3. Who is Alice? 4. Do you think the ending of the book made sense? Was it a surprise to you that the girl died after seemingly getting her life together? Was it ever clear exactly how she died?

5. What clues, if any, led you to believe that this diary was not truly written by a fifteen-year-old girl?

6. Describe the girl's relationship with Richie. Why do you suppose she is willing to settle for this?

7. Did you understand the incident that finally put the girl in the hospital? What happened? How do you suppose the girl died—from an overdose of what drug?

8. What was the most disturbing part of the book to you and why?



Essay Topics

"Can't I even have the privacy of my own soul?" p.8. Consider this quote from early in the book. Debate the question of whether Anonymous really does want to be private, or whether she wants to be known, acknowledged, valued. Relate your answers to her use of drugs - does she use drugs to be private or to be public? What inner state of being is at the core of either desire?

Consider the chain of events that led Anonymous to her early experiences with drugs. Examine the role her absence from Beth played in her decisions, and the nature of Anonymous's personality and self image. Was her use of drugs and her growing addiction inevitable? Would she have started using even if she hadn't moved? Attended the party with Jill? Met Chris?

Contrast Anonymous's adventures in the "wonderland" of drugs with those of Alice in Wonderland. Are there parallels between various secondary characters - wicked queens, unexpected friends, surprisingly meaningful encounters? What about between the various hallucinogenic events experienced by both Alice and Anonymous? Does either character ever learn anything, or is either transformed?

Consider this quote ("Sometimes I think we're all trying to be shadows of each other..." p16) and examine the ways in which Anonymous tries to be a "shadow" of another person. Consider all the persons in her life - her parents, her siblings, her friends both in and out of the drug scene, and explore the question of where, in all her experiences, is the core/real Anonymous.

Consider the breadth of emotional and sensual experiences of Anonymous's "good" highs, her expanded awareness of color, music, taste, etc. If drugs were not addictive, would these heightened experiences be worthwhile? Do they make people more human, or less?

In many ways, the early 1970's (in which the book is set) was a very different time from the present day. And yet, young people in contemporary society are turning to drugs in similar, if not greater numbers. Contrast the social, political, and cultural contexts of the fifteen year olds in *Go Ask Alice* and youth of a similar age today. What are the similarities and what are the differences in terms of the way they affect young people, both positively and negatively? What common factors in both contexts might lead to drug use? What different factors?

What is the appeal of drugs, both in *Go Ask Alice* and in contemporary adolescent culture? What factors of and/or aspects to a non-drug using environment can / could / should be emphasized in order to de-emphasize that appeal?

Would this story have a different impact if it was a novel and not a diary? Why or why not? Does the fact that it's been proven to not be a diary but a creation of an editor, albeit one based on actual experiences and/or case studies, lessen its impact?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Compare Go Ask Alice to Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.
2. Analyze the lyrics of the Jefferson Airplane song "White Rabbit." Relate them to this anonymous girl's experience with drugs.
3. Go Ask Alice was a highly controversial book and the subject of banning attempts by parents and school districts.

Explain why you think the book was so objectionable and give your opinion on censorship.

4. Columbia University has started a Web site called Go Ask Alice, which provides young readers a resource for some of the questions they may have. Explain the genesis of this site and how the book inspired teens to address these issues.
5. Compare and contrast the glamorous with the frightening in the world of drugs, as portrayed in the book.
6. Write a character analysis of the anonymous girl who wrote the diary. What do we know about her? Is she rebellious, self-confident, or easily influenced? Why do you suppose she was so easily lured into the drug world?
7. Chronicle the changes in the girl's personality and temperament as she moves from an innocent to "old and hard" as she describes herself.
8. The girl who wrote this diary exhibits some of the typical traits of someone with an addictive personality. Use examples from the book to explain how this anonymous girl fits this mold.
9. From the time of the book's publication, it has been presumed that "Alice" is the name of the girl who wrote the diary. Do you think this is true? Explain who you think Alice really is and what significance it has to Sparks message.
10. Choose one of the other "diaries" written by Sparks. What do you think about the message of these books?

Further Study

Homstad, Wayne. *Anatomy of a Book Controversy*. Bloomington: Phi Delta Kappa Education Foundation, 1995. Nonfictional account of one school district's controversial efforts to ban *Go Ask Alice*.

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A brief entry containing biographical information about Beatrice Matthews Sparks and a critical introduction to her work.

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