

# **Just Kids Study Guide**

**Just Kids by Patti Smith**

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



# Contents

<a href="#">Just Kids Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 1, Monday's Children.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 2, Just Kids.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 3, Hotel Chelsea.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 4, Separate Ways Together.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 5, Holding Hands With God.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>



# Plot Summary

Just Kids by Patti Smith is a story of two friends and how they helped one another achieve their dreams of success. Patti Smith is a musician, poet, and artist who comes of age in the 1960's. She befriends Robert Mapplethorpe who becomes her friend, partner, muse, protector, and supporter. Patti and Robert becomes part of the art and music scene in New York at the height of the sixties. They have connections with Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, and Andy Warhol as well as many poets and writers of the day.

Just Kids tells of Patti and Robert's evolving relationship as they mature and find success in both the art and music worlds. Patti leaves her home in southern New Jersey to find success in New York City. What she finds is a hard existence where she lives on the street for a time even when she finds a job she can barely afford to buy food. She questions her reasons for being in the city until she meets Robert Mapplethorpe. He becomes her protector and takes her into his life. They challenge each other to grow creatively.

As they grow and mature, their relationship changes. In the beginning, Patti and Robert are lovers who want nothing more than one another. Patti soon learns that Robert is a homosexual who is ashamed of his feelings toward other men. He was raised Catholic and feels that what he feels is a sin. He tries to suppress these feelings for Patti, but they are part of who he is. In their innocence, they attempt to stay together and promise that they will always be there for one another.

Robert has always known that he is an artist and he lives and breathes art. Patti is in a constant search for who she is meant to be. The people she meets through her relationship with Robert and the creative world of New York in the 1960's try to guide her toward where they feel she should be. She attempts art, acting, writing and music. She is an exuberant personality and this inhibits her acting ability. Robert encourages her art and poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso encourage her writing. Patti begins to find success as a poet and musician and forms relationships with other men as Robert also embraces his homosexuality and starts forming relationships with men. Patti and Robert are living separate lives, but are always there for one another. Patti finds success first as Robert begins to delve into photography as a way to express his artistry. Patti forms a band and mixes poetry and rock and roll for an eclectic mix that finds a large following.

As the pair matures and finds lasting relationships, their own relationship suffers. Patti marries and has children. She moves away from New York to Detroit. Robert and his partner develop AIDS and Patti is drawn back to New York to offer her support to her lifelong friend. Just Kids tells of the bond between two people forged during an innocent time that changed both of their lives. When they met, they were young naïve children. Over time, they grew up into successful adults who together helped shape an entire artistic era.



# Chapter 1, Monday's Children

## Chapter 1, Monday's Children Summary

Just Kids by Patti Smith is the tale of two friends who forge a friendship that lasts a lifetime. Patti Smith escapes the constraints of life in southern New Jersey to become an artist in New York. She finds Robert Mapplethorpe a fellow artist and together they immerse themselves in the creative world of New York City in the 60's and 70's hoping to find success.

Patti Smith grows up in southern New Jersey. She is an intelligent child who likes to make up stories that delight her brother, sisters and the neighborhood children. She is classified as a daydreamer by her teachers and spends much of her school time being reprimanded for her behavior. Her true passion emerges, however when on a family outing to the Museum of Art in Philadelphia she is introduced to the art of Picasso. She decides then and there that she wants to be an artist. She also fantasies about being a mistress of an artist.

Robert Mapplethorpe is raised in Long Island, New York. He knows he is an artist at a very young age. He enjoys making jewelry for his mother. Robert's desire to become an artist leaves a rift between he and his father, a devote Catholic. His father does not see art as art as a career. Robert, however, commits his live to art. His mother hopes that he will become a priest, but Robert only likes the pomp and circumstance of the religion not religion itself. His father is a stern, judgmental man. These qualities are passed down to his son. Robert is reticent about talking of his childhood.

Patti becomes pregnant at nineteen after her first sexual experience. She gives the baby up for adoption because she does not feel that she is ready to be a mother. After being dismissed from college where she was studying to be a teacher, she takes a job in a factory where she is harassed by the other workers for her love of Rimbaud who they do not understand. They belief that she is a communist. This is a difficult and unfulfilling time for Patti. Hungering to become an artist, she leaves her life in South Jersey with a plan to seek out friends who have gone to New York to become artists. She takes only a few possessions, one being Arthur Rimbaud's book, Illuminations. He is a poet who influences Patti the most. In his writings, she finds hope and freedom. Once she arrives in New York, she cannot find her friends and is forced to live on the streets. She then bums around staying with friends until she wears out her welcome. She does this until she meets Robert Mapplethorpe.

## Chapter 1, Monday's Children Analysis

The reader is introduced to Patti and becomes enveloped in her life from the day she is born until she leaves her home for New York. Patti Smith is a precocious child and the reader can see her in the future as a writer or performer. Her ability for mesmerizing her



siblings and the neighborhood children with her stories shows that she has the talent to become a writer. Yet she is determined to be an artist. She finds her passion at the age of twelve when most children are playing in the schoolyard. While on a trip to the Museum of Art in Philadelphia, she is transformed by art. It is a way to express herself in a way that she had not imagined. This sense of freedom is encouraged by her parents. They are always there for her and help her through the difficult times such as her pregnancy and support her move to New York. This stable environment allows her to develop into a confident person who can take chances and ultimately follow her dreams.

Robert Mapplethorpe's childhood is vastly different from Patti's. His family is not supportive of his dreams, but has other ideas for his future. This leads to a rift with his family. They do not speak of their feelings and thoughts so that Robert does not know how to vent his feelings. He uses drugs to unlock his feelings and create his art because it is the only way he can acknowledge them. Robert's love of making jewelry for his mother is a precursor of who he is to become. His childhood makes him vulnerable. This leads to him not accepting himself the way he is and always trying to be perfect. It also makes him ambitious and unrelenting in his attempt to become an artist.

Patti's dreams lead her to New York. She is unsure what she will do once she is there, but she has the confidence to believe that she will succeed no matter what. Her first few weeks are not easy ones as she cannot find a place to stay or a job, but she does not give up on her dream.

Patti and Robert's childhoods molds them into the adults that they will become. Patti is happy in her own skin and is happy to create to for the joy of creating. Robert suppresses who he is and is shut off from his emotions. He strives to be perfect because he did not have the unconditional love of his parents. They wanted more from him than he could give. He is always striving to be accepted. This makes him obsessive in his attempt to find success as an artist.



# Chapter 2, Just Kids

## Chapter 2, Just Kids Summary

Patti Smith has come to New York City as the revolutionary spirit of the 60's is coming to fruition. She can feel the sense of revolution in the air. "There was an air of vague and unsettling paranoia, an undercurrent of rumors, snatched fragments of conversation anticipating future revolution" (p. 31). She sleeps on benches and goes hungry as she looks for work in the city. Patti finally finds work at a bookstore. During this time, she starts up a relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe. Neither have a place to stay, but Robert has a friend who is out of town and they stay there, while he is gone.

Robert is an artist and shows Patti some of his work. She is impressed by his work. The two instantly trust one another. They become inseparable except when they go to work. They rely on the kindness of Robert's friends for a place to stay. There is little money and Patti never staves her hunger. She is homesick, but will not return home to be a burden to her family. Patti has Robert to rely on and he has her. They save their money so that they can find a place to rent together. It is a small, dingy place in a bad neighborhood, but together they make it a home. Robert works hard to make the place a home for them. They have few possessions, but are not worried by this. They work on their art and encourage one another in their creative endeavors.

Robert has confidence in his work and their relationship, but worries about the future and about money. Patti lives in the moment and is just happy to be free. They enjoy one another's company and do not need money to be happy together. They share their love of poetry and music. Their relationship is give and take. When one is down, the other must be up. They take turns being there for the other. They each take whatever jobs they can to support themselves as they work to become artists. They do not enjoy these jobs, but it gives them money to pursue their dreams. Money is tight and they live the lives of starving artists having to choose between food or art supplies. It is a hard existence that tests their willpower, but together they feel they can face any problem.

Patti is happy to work in obscurity, but Robert seeks fortune and high society. They have many friends who are artists and poets. They jokingly refer to themselves as a "loser salon." Robert and Patti live together practicing art and encouraging one another. During this time Patti sees Jim Morrison perform. "I felt, watching Jim Morrison, that I could do that" (p. 59). She feels his confidence and his self-doubt and can connect with these feelings. Patti knows that she can do anything she dreams of doing, but feels ashamed of how the concert makes her feel. She questions why she would feel that she could be a rock star. She has never wanted this dream before now and tells no one of her thoughts.

Patti has a loving family who accepts her, while Robert's family is judgmental and will not accept his way of life. He has Patti pretend that they are married so as not to disappoint his mother and father when they go for a visit. Robert's awkwardness with his



father stems from his guilt about his sexuality. Robert is never truly happy for he is suppressing a part of himself. Patti feels Robert pulling away from her physically and does not understand why. This leads her to turn to someone else. Robert does not abandon her, but implores her to return to him. He threatens to go to San Francisco and turn homosexual if she does not return. Patti is confused by his behavior and does not continue their relationship.

Robert writes to her from San Francisco telling her that he loves her, while writing to her of his experiences with men. Patti feels she has failed him. Her naïve impression of sexuality is that a man turns homosexual because a woman did not save him. She does not understand the nature of homosexuality only what she has read in books. This leads her to blame herself for these experiences. She throws herself into her art, producing self-portraits as a way to examine her life.

Robert returns from San Francisco and takes his first real boyfriend. Patti feels alone for the first time. Robert tries to be there for her. The two are maturing and discovering who they are. Feeling a need to see the world, Patti and her sister, Linda, go to Paris. She enjoys her time in Paris. Patti has a sense of adventure that Robert does not share. He is happy to stay at home, but she feels a need to see the world. With Linda, she is able to experience Paris and submerges herself in the culture. Robert submerges himself in his work. He delves into sexual perversion to enhance his art, which takes on S & M imagery. Patti worries about him as he delves into the sexual underworld and complains about hunger and health issues.

Patti returns to New York to find Robert very ill. He has a high fever and has lost weight, but that has not affected his producing art. He has produced many pieces while she has been away. She stays with him, but after someone is murdered on the apartment's doorstep he insists on leaving. Patti takes him to a hotel and nurses him. He has signs of an STD. Patti and Robert have to flee the hotel because they do not have enough money to pay their bill. They promise not to leave each other until they can both stand on their own.

## Chapter 2, Just Kids Analysis

Patti yearns to be free and has come to New York at a time when everyone is feeling this sense of longing for change. Patti lives the life of a starving artist, yet is happy. She lives in the moment and works at any job she can so that she and Robert have money to practice their art. Art is the most important aspect of their lives. Patti is always the one who has stable employment. She feels that Robert's art is more important than hers. She is fulfilling her childhood dream of becoming the mistress of an artist. By supporting him, she becomes a part of his success.

Patti is happy just to be creating art, but Robert has a hunger for money and a more prominent place in society. This hunger drives him to create works that no one else creates. This need for success is driven by a need to show his family that he can be successful as an artist. Their lack of support makes Robert even more driven.



Patti comes from a loving supportive family and finds it difficult to understand Robert's reticence about his family. She has always been supported and does not understand his secretive life that does not include his family. When she feels Robert pulling away from her, she becomes hurt because she sees it as her fault. She feels she has done something wrong. Robert's pursuit of homosexual relationships does not ease her sense of hurt and failure.

Patti is young and does not understand Robert's sexual behavior. She feels that she has somehow failed him. Robert has suppressed his feelings and desires for men in an attempt to placate society, but he cannot suppress who he is. To be happy, Robert has to embrace every aspect of his personality. Robert and Patti must both come to terms with this. It is hard for Patti because she finds herself alone for the first time, since her early days in New York. She must look at the dream she had for herself and evaluate her life. This leads her to refocus on her art. She had become a stabilizing force in Robert's life letting her abilities suffer for his. He always supports her art, but she feels that his art is more important. His confidence in his success makes her believe in him and that he should have success.

The reader can see the subtle hints of Robert's sexual persuasion while reading and will not be as surprised as Patti is when he finally admits it. This foreshadowing is seen in his love for making and wearing jewelry, his proclivity for fashion and the sexual imagery in his art, which is always male. The fact that Patti is mistaken for a young boy by another homosexual is another indication that supports the readers suspicions of Robert's sexuality.

The closeness that Patti and Robert share is not broken by the change in their relationship. They still feel a connection to one another. Patti and Robert's relationship matures to a caring one where they nurture and support one another no matter what. Patti cannot stop how she feels for him. She still worries about him and feels a need to nurture him. Her need to nurture him perhaps comes from having given her baby up for adoption. She needs someone to care for and Robert needs care.





# Chapter 3, Hotel Chelsea

## Chapter 3, Hotel Chelsea Summary

Patti Smith takes Robert to the Hotel Chelsea. The management has a reputation for helping young artists. She secures her and Robert a room by using their art as collateral and pays for it by returning to her job at Scribner's bookstore. Patti and Robert meet an eclectic group of individuals at the Hotel Chelsea. Patti promises to stay with Robert because of the vow they made to always be there for one another. This starts a new aspect of their lives. They are no longer the innocent children they were.

Patti enjoys her time at the Hotel Chelsea. She finds it to be a fulfilling time of her life. During this time, they meet people who will help shape their futures. Robert meets a fashion designer who inspires his fashion sense. They meet Sandy Daley who inspires them to look into photography. She also gives them entry into Max's Kansas City where Warhol used to hold court, but since being shot he is not seen out as much. Robert goes there in hopes of seeing his hero. He and Patti instead become disciples in the new court at Max's Kansas City. Through the people they meet at Max's Kansas City, Patti forms a connection with the world of acting. She is asked to audition for a play and finds yet another talent she possesses.

Robert returns to his jewelry making inspired by the fashion designer Bruce Radow. He hopes to sell them. The two are still struggling and are always hungry. Patti meets Allen Ginsberg, the National Poet Laureate. He becomes a good friend and teacher to her. Patti attempts to encourage Robert to take his own pictures for his art rather than rely on buying pornographic magazines to cut out the pictures and be disappointed by the contents. Robert does not have the patience for the developing of pictures. He can see his artistic pieces in his head before he begins and does not like to have to wait for the results. He is impatient for the finished product to emerge and this impatience makes him take the easy way to accomplish the finished art work.

Patti and Robert have a small room at the Hotel Chelsea. It is not place where the both can work on their art. Robert wants to move into a larger place, but Patti enjoys the Hotel Chelsea. It is filled with artists, writers and musicians that make the very atmosphere seem creative. She enjoys this atmosphere, but know that they need a bigger place for Robert to work. Robert and Patti move into a new place that is bigger and allows them room to pursue their art. To make money, Robert hustles on the street using his body to make money. Patti is not happy with it, but he wants to do his part in making money. She feels that it is dangerous for him to have unprotected sex with strange men. She is especially worried since they have resumed their sexual relationship at this time.

It is during this time that Gregory Corso introduces Patti to the poetry scene of New York. He enjoys her poetry and vows to find her a venue to share her poetry. He believes that she should be devoting her time to writing. Patti also dabbles in acting



doing some small plays, but this is not her passion. Her love of herself and her exuberant personality does not transfer well to the stage. She enjoys being herself not pretending to be someone else. Poetry and music become her passion. She meets many of the famous musicians of the day and writes a song for Janis Joplin. She begins to concentrate on writing songs. She is supported by her friends who believe that she should be concentrating on a music career. They feel that her talents for music is what will bring her success.

Robert is introduced to David Croland who is a model and actor. David helps advance Robert's career and they begin a relationship. Patti is devastated at first, but knows that Robert is not to be hers romantically. David leads him into high society where Robert has always wanted to be. He tries to bring Patti into this world with him, but she is reticent of it. She will not change her eclectic ways to fit in with the society that Robert covets. Patti and Robert still live together, but have separate rooms. It is their first time being apart.

Robert begins his journey into photography. He uses a Polaroid camera because he does not have to wait for the film to be developed. This allows him to produce work quickly. Patti starts different relationships. Her first is to an unemployed heroin addict. He hustles on the streets for money to support his heroin habit. She then dates Sam Shepard, a playwright and married man. He encourages her writing and music. Robert does not support her relationship with Sam because he is married.

After having a poetry reading where she mixes music with poetry, Patti receives offers to publish her poetry. Robert is focusing on photography at this time and David is helping him make important connections in the art world. John McKendry works at the Met and gives Robert a view into the world of photography. It leads him to an important turning point in his career and shapes the artist he becomes. He gives up all other art to devote himself to photography. His photography looks at the darker, sexual side of human nature.

Robert meets Sam Wagstaff who is to become his life partner. He is rich and can give Robert whatever he wants. Sam is twenty-five years older than Robert and feels the need to take care of him. Robert loves Sam for his money and Sam loves that Robert loves his money. They are a perfect match for one another. Patti is in a relationship with Allan Lanier from the Blue Oyster Cult. Robert supports this relationship. It is Patti's first stable relationship since leaving Robert. Allan is a change from her previous boyfriends. He has a stable job touring with his band and he is not married. Patti has finally moved on and is with someone that can take care of themselves and wants to be in a relationship that will last. It is a growing point in her life. With each in a stable relationship, Patti and Robert decide it is time to go their separate ways.

## Chapter 3, Hotel Chelsea Analysis

The Hotel Chelsea is a haven for artists and musicians who have yet to find success. Patti and Robert are able to rub elbows with the likes of Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Bob



Dylan's manager and Allen Ginsberg. This is an opportunity that Patti relishes. She understands the impact that these people have on society and their industries. She sees her time at the Hotel Chelsea as a dream where she meets her idols and is accepted by them. This gives her the courage to forge new dreams and work toward them.

Patti and Robert begin to have other influences on their lives besides each other. Patti forms relationships with other men some of who Robert does not approve. He is still looking out for her and wants only the best for her. He watches Patti choose men who are not openly available to her or who need nurturing. The need to nurture could stem from giving up her child and needing to care for someone. It could also be a need to not be hurt the way that Robert hurt her. By choosing men who will eventually leave her, she does not need to form an emotional bond and so will not be hurt when they leave. Patti's relationship with Sam Shepard is one she knows will not last because he will not leave his wife, but she still pursues it. Robert was emotionally unavailable because of his childhood suppression and Patti chooses a version of him in Sam who cannot give himself fully to her. She chooses men who cannot give her the love she needs or deserves. This might fuel her creativity, but does not satisfy her emotionally.

Robert begins to be fulfilled emotionally and artistically. David gives him a place in high society and connections in the art world. He finds his passion for photography, while with David. This venue leads him to his ultimate success as an artist. Robert also finds his life partner, Sam Wagstaff. Robert is still emotionally stunted from his loveless childhood, but he loves Sam the best way that he can. Sam finds this enough to satisfy him. They are both narcissistic so the relationship is good for them both.

Patti finds her passion in poetry and music. She is encouraged by the people she meets at the Hotel Chelsea. It is a place that nurtures creativity and inspires those that live there to create and encourages others to be creative. It houses artists, musicians, poets and writers. Within its walls, Patti finds the courage she needs to admit that she wants to be a musician. She speaks of her reaction to Jim Morrison's performance and finds not ridicule, but people who believe she should pursue a music career. Robert encourages her in her new endeavors as she encourages him in his passion for photography. They still rely on one another for encouragement of their artistic abilities. Even though they have moved on in their relationships, they are still as close as they have ever been. Their relationship is important to them and they will always be there to offer support to one another.

The artistic community is a close knit one and they help one another. Corso starts Patti's career off by helping her find a place to read her poetry. Her friends at the Hotel Chelsea support her by attending the performance. Musicians such as Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix offer her words of encouragement. This community takes care of its own and helps them to succeed and rejoices when one of their own finds success. It is a time of love and hope not just for Patti and Robert, but for the whole nation.



# Chapter 4, Separate Ways Together

## Chapter 4, Separate Ways Together Summary

Patti and Robert live separately for the first time since their relationship began. The separation is not much of a separation. They live within walking distance of each other and continue their close friendship. They still work closely together encouraging one another's work.

Patti questions what she should be doing with her life. She feels at a stand still. While Robert moves forward with his art and prepares for an exhibition, Patti feels there is more she should be doing. She has her music, her art and her poetry, but still feels a void in her life. Patti tries to find a way to feel this void.

Patti becomes obsessed with Arthur Rimbaud, a French poet who influenced modern literature, music, and the arts. She has always enjoyed Rimbaud's poetry and it is what influences her most in her life. Her dream is to travel to Ethiopia to find the lost work of Rimbaud. Robert refuses to let her go. He feels it is too dangerous. As a compromise, Sam agrees to finance a trip to France so that Patti can visit where Rimbaud was born and buried. She follows the footsteps of Rimbaud to feel close to the man she admires and find a connection to him. Before leaving France, Patti visits the grave of Jim Morrison to pay her respects to the man who started her on her career as a musician.

The trip to France leads her to create a show called 'Rock and Rimbaud.' She and guitarist Lenny Kaye perform poems and songs about her love for Rimbaud. Their act is unprecedented so there are no suitable venues. Patti is excited by the show, but cannot find a proper place to feature her unique sound. People do not appreciate her innovation in the regular haunts of rock musicians. Patti adds a pianist to her band and they record an album. The album gives them the audience they are looking for and she and her band go on tour. They eventually are signed by Clive Davis after becoming a proper band with another guitarist and a drummer.

Patti has found success with her poetry and musician. The only ability that she has yet to cultivate is her art. This changes when Robert Miller offers her a show in his gallery. She agrees only if Robert can be part of the show. She wants to share her success with her friend for she knows it will help advance both of their careers. They work together on the exhibit so that their show has a feeling of continuity that shows their intimate relationship and the deep love that they have for each other. It is a show that many call 'A Diary of a Friendship.' The two get the success that Robert always wished they would have.

## Chapter 4, Separate Ways Together Analysis

Patti suffers from her separation with Robert. She feels that her life should have more meaning. This leads her to become obsessed with Rimbaud. Rimbaud is the poet who



has always inspired her. Even when she was working in a factory in New Jersey, Rimbaud brought her hope. She reaches out to him now to help her discover the direction of her life. She wants to feel hopeful about her future and what it holds. The writings of Rimbaud make her feel that all things are possible. To her he is a symbol of freedom.

Robert is her protector and will not let her go to Ethiopia as she wants. He believes it is dangerous and does not understand her need to travel. He does not feel this need and therefore does not understand it. Patti feels like Rimbaud who traveled extensively to create and she wants to also feel this sensation. She compromises to follow in the steps of Rimbaud in France. To learn about this man who she idolizes and see where he was born and lived most of his life. This leads her to create poetry in his honor so that others will see the greatness of the man who she believes deserves to be remembered.

Patti's love for Rimbaud makes her a full-fledged musician with a sound all her own. She, however, is not only recognized as a musician, but also as an artist. When offered her own art show, her first thought is of Robert and she has him included in the show. Their bond has not broken and they still encourage one another to create and succeed. Patti is accepted in all realms of the artistic world as poet, musician and artist. She has a great ability that she wields without changing who she is. She acquires her success, while maintaining the unique individualism that makes her art so special. Patti creates for the love of what she does not for the success or the money. This is what it means to be a true artist.

Patti and Robert's show is not only about art, but about them. That is why it is a success. They express themselves so much in what they create and how they create that people sense the bond between them. The show is a show of their creative selves and their intimate relationship that nurtures and strengthens the art they create. It has meaning and substance that is beyond the art itself. It is about life, love, and friendship.



# Chapter 5, Holding Hands With God

## Chapter 5, Holding Hands With God Summary

Patti leaves New York to begin her life outside the sphere of the artistic community of New York. This means leaving Robert behind and for the first time in her adult life living without the presence of Robert ever looming about her. Patti lives in Detroit with her husband, a musician, and their son. She sees it as returning to a normal life.

Patti learns that she is pregnant with her second child on the same day that she learns that Robert has AIDS. Robert and his partner, Sam both develop the disease. Patti and her husband and son travel to New York from Detroit to visit Robert. Even though they have not seen one another in years, it is as if no time has passed. Robert is happy with his life. He is optimistic that he will survive, is happy with his work, his success and his possessions. These are all the things that have always been important to him. Patti agrees that he did well. He has achieved what he set out to accomplish. He has a successful career, nice possessions and a place in high society.

Robert enjoys photographing Patti. He spends his time photographing her, while she is in New York. She has always been his favorite subject. Robert is excited to show her his new work. He still works with nudes in situations that will shock his audience. He believes his work is genius and Patti agrees that her friend has an artistic ability that is genius.

Patti must return to her life in Michigan. She and Robert contact one another by phone, but she misses his presence in her life. Robert's partner Sam dies of AIDS. The death of Sam leaves Robert distraught and without any hope for his own survival. Andy Warhol also dies around this time. Robert becomes upset at the death of his hero. To Robert, Andy Warhol was immortal and for him to die shows that we are all destined to die. When he envisioned his life, death was never a factor.

Patti wants to make Robert immortal so she writes a song for him. It is the only way she knows that he will always be remembered the way she sees him. She spends as much time with Robert as possible as he nears the end of his life. Robert takes portraits of Patti's family so that she will have keepsakes of her family that he produced. She will have something that is a memento of his family and a memory of her best friend who was always there for her no matter what.

Robert has his ups and downs. This time is heart wrenching for Patti. She travels back and forth from Detroit to New York. She watches Robert suffer as no one should suffer. His death brings her great grief. She sees Robert everywhere and consoles herself with gifts that he gave her during their life together.





## Chapter 5, Holding Hands With God Analysis

Patti leaves New York to start her normal life. It is a life about her family. She is now married with children and they take precedence in her life. She is happy living with her family and has little contact with Robert at this time.

Patti and Robert's story ends with his death. They were both naïve about their lifestyle in their youth. They did whatever felt right and did not think of the consequences of their actions or whether their actions had consequences. Like all young people they thought they were invincible. As Robert faces his death, he realizes this is not true. He wonders if art was the wrong choice for his life. He wonders if art caused all the problems in his life. He questions his life choices. Watching him suffer, Patti does not know what to say. How can she tell him that all their suffering was worth it, while watching him in such pain? They knew that the life of an artist would not be an easy one, but they did not expect to suffer so much or to watch one another suffer.

It was a difficult life for them. They struggled in the early years with not enough money for food and rent. Robert did questionable things for money and this could have led him to the circumstances he now faces. He prostituted himself for money not using protection to protect his health. He was innocent and did not think about STDs and AIDS. Only when he is faced with death, does he think about the choices that he made. This retrospect does not help in the present circumstances.

Robert never saw himself dying so his death is difficult for him to face. The death of his hero, Andy Warhol, who he believed to be immortal, only adds to his distress. Robert lived as most youth with no fear of dying, but as he grows older and faces his death he recoils from it. It was not something that he planned for in his life and not at such a young age. He is not ready and has so much more to give the art world. His death affects Patti greatly. Robert has been such a strong force in her life driving her toward success and the future he wanted her to have. Now that she has received the success that he wanted and has found someone to love and who loves her, Robert has lost his influence on her life, but she still clung to him.

His death leaves a void in her life, but she has her husband and her children. Robert will always be there for her. She can sense his presence and his influence in her life can be seen in her art and her music. The two had a special bond that benefited the artistic world and made their lives richer.



# Characters

## Patti Smith

Patti Smith is a precocious child who becomes a poet, artist, and musician. She leaves her home in southern New Jersey to become an artist in New York. In New York, she finds a close knit artist community that nurtures the creativity of young artists. Patti meets Robert Mapplethorpe and forms a lifelong friendship that will shape her young adulthood. She is a naïve young woman who loses her innocence and uses this to fuel her art and writing. Patti meets famous artists of the 60's and 70's. Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin help shape her as a musician. Such poets as Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso become her teachers and friends. Her dream of becoming an artist takes her on many avenues of the creative world.

Patti is influenced by these people and shaped into a musician who has her own unique sound. She mixes poetry and rock and roll in a way that has never been attempted before. She has many relationships with men, but the most prominent is her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe. He challenges her to succeed and drives her to create. Their relationship is tumultuous. They start out as lovers and end as best friends. Their intimate bond is envied by those around them.

Patti leaves for New York wanting to become an artist. She leaves New York as a poet, artist, and musician. She came to New York for freedom and found a community that accepted her for who she was and did not judge her. She became a part of the era that helped heal a nation.

## Robert Mapplethorpe

Robert Mapplethorpe knew from an early age that he was destined to be an artist. He was creating jewelry for his mother when he was a young boy. His family's devout Catholicism however could not approve of Robert's lifestyle choices. He suppressed his sexual preferences for many years because he is told that it is a sin. This leads him to repress a side of his nature, which makes him unhappy. He eventually accepts that he is homosexual and is happier not having to repress part of himself.

Robert creates art that will shock viewers. He looks at the darker side of human sexual behavior and depicts this in his art. He starts by finding pictures in pornographic magazines that he uses in his art. When he turns to photography, he begins to delve into the sexual perversion of society. Robert wants to show what no one else will depict.

Robert is confident in his work. He knows he is meant to be an artist and he is driven to succeed. He is ambitious and uses people to get the knowledge and connections he needs to succeed. When he is dying of AIDS, he questions if living for art was the right thing to do. He wonders if he was too selfish in his life.





## **Harry Smith**

Harry Smith is the first person that Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe meet when they enter the Hotel Chelsea. He bums off anyone. Patti likes him because he can talk about anything and he loves to read.

## **Janet Hamill**

Janet Hamill is a friend of Patti's. She helps her deal with her accidental pregnancy and helps her find employment in New York. Patti stays with Janet when she and Robert break up after she cheats on him.

## **David Croland**

David Croland is a model and actor. He helps Robert meet people who will advance his career. Robert uses him for his connections to high society.

## **Sam Wagstaff**

Sam Wagstaff is a rich man who admires Robert. They become partners and spend the rest of their lives together. He develops HIV and dies shortly before Robert.

## **Allen Lanier**

Allen Lanier is a boyfriend of Patti's. He is part of the band Blue Oyster Cult and encourages her songwriting. He is often on the road touring with his band so they seldom see one another.

## **Jim Morrison**

Jim Morrison is a famous musician. After watching one of his performances, Patti becomes inspired to be a musician. She sees his confidence and his self-doubt and feels that she could be a performer. She visits his grave in Paris to pay her respects.

## **Fred Sonic Smith**

Fred Sonic Smith is a musician. He marries Patti and together they have two children.



## **Janis Joplin**

Janis Joplin is an up and coming musician. She has self-doubt, which Patti tries to alleviate. Patti writes her a song, but Janis dies before she can sing it for her.

## **Jimi Hendrix**

Jimi Hendrix is a famous musician during the 60's. Patti met him shortly before his death. He gave her encouragement to become a musician.

## **Lenny Kaye**

Lenny Kaye is a guitarist. He joins Patti's band and helps give it their eclectic sound.

## **Sam Shepard**

Sam Shepard is a playwright and musician. Patti has an affair with him and together they co-write a play.

## **Gregory Corso**

Gregory Corso is a poet. He gets Patti her first poetry reading and becomes her teacher and friend.

## **John McKendry**

John McKendry works for the MET in their photography department. His influence leads Robert Mapplethorpe to concentrate his artistic ability in photography. He is introduced to Robert by David Croland.

## **Harry Mapplethorpe**

Harry Mapplethorpe is Robert Mapplethorpe's father. He is a stern, judgmental man who is disappointed in his son's choice to become an artist.



## Objects/Places

### Rimbaud's Illumination

Rimbaud's Illumination is the book that inspires Patti to become a writer. The book influences her writing and helps her fulfill her dreams. Rimbaud is her personal hero and her love of his writings brings her success in the music industry.

### Hotel Chelsea

Hotel Chelsea is a hotel in New York where struggling artists and writers would stay. The manager would take art work or writing as collateral for a room. Patti met many artists and musicians that would become famous in later years.

### Max's Kansas City

Max's Kansas City is a restaurant in New York where Andy Warhol and many famous artists and musicians would frequent. Patti and Robert went there in an attempt to meet Andy Warhol because he is a hero of Robert's. They became part of the new court at Max's Kansas City.

### Jim Morrison's grave

Patti visits Jim Morrison's grave when she is in Paris. His performance leaves her with the inspiration to become a musician. This makes her feel a connection to him and while she is in Paris she pays her respects to him.

### LSD

LSD is used by many artists and musicians during the 60's and 70's. Robert uses LSD to inspire his art and help him create. It helps him feel to create.

### Necklaces

Necklaces play an important role in Robert's life. He created necklaces for his mother when he was young and later for himself. He used these necklaces to accessorize his outfits as a fashion statement. They give him courage and a uniqueness that is his own.



## **Art**

Art is important to Patti and Robert. Robert has sworn to live his life only for art. Patti sees art as a way to express herself and encourages Robert in his artistic endeavors.

## **New York City**

New York City is a place of art and freedom for Patti. She goes to New York City to fulfill her dream of becoming an artist and feels this is the only place that will accept her as one. It has an artistic community that is rivaled by no other.

## **Records**

Records are how Patti experiences music. Music is an important part of her life and inspires her career as a musician.

## **Pornographic Magazines**

Pornographic Magazines are used by Robert to create his art. He uses pictures from adult magazines to create art that shocks.

## **Detroit**

Detroit is where Patti calls home with her husband and her family. She feels normal when she is there.

## **AIDS**

AIDS is an immune disease that takes the life of Robert and his partner, Sam. It slowly weakens the body and causes death.

## **Poetry**

Poetry plays a major part in Patti's life. She mixes poetry and rock and roll to influence a new era of music.

## **Camera**

Cameras are used by Robert to create his art. He becomes passionate about photography and devotes his life to photography.



# Themes

## Obsession and Ambition

Obsession and ambition are themes of this novel. Robert is ambitious. He is obsessed with becoming a successful artist. This ambition comes from his father who does not accept his son's life choices. He wants his son to be successful and feels that art is not a proper occupation. Robert wants to show that his choices are right for him and only success will prove this. This leads him to strive for success at all costs.

Robert uses people who can help him advance his career. He courts the rich for he needs money to advance his career. He tries to make Patti change to fit in with the people he strives to befriend, but she will not change for anyone. She does not have his ambition. Success is what he strives to achieve, while Patti only wants to live her dreams.

Ambition leads him to try and change his friend. She does not understand this ambition or what her friend will do for success. This is one aspect that strains their relationship. Patti feels that ambition is detrimental to Robert's art. Art should be created for art's sake not for success.

Robert uses David Croland to meet influential people who can help him become successful. Through him, he meets John McKendry who makes Robert see that photography is an art form. This leads Robert to find his passion. David introduces him to Sam Wagstaff who becomes his lover and strongest supporter. Through Sam's connections and money, Robert has all he needs to succeed. Robert loves Sam's money and Sam loves that Robert loves his money. Robert's ambition is so obsessive that he loves Sam for his money rather than for him. Sam does not have a problem with this, but enjoys it. Their ambition affects how they love and how they feel love. This is not an ideal love for it is based on money and possessions.

Ambition causes obsession, which can destroy relationships. Robert's ambition strains his relationship with Patti because she is not ambitious. Sam is like Robert so his ambition is a reason that Sam likes him. Robert's ambition is detrimental to a loving relationship, but by finding someone like Sam he is able to have a relationship that lasts the rest of his life. Robert wants success so much that he is willing to sacrifice a loving relationship mostly because he does not understand what love is. His parents did not accept who as he was and did not offer him the love he needed to form a relationship based on love. His closest relationship is with Patti, but this is mostly based on the support they give one another to succeed. She believes in his ability and his ultimate success. This ultimately is what a successful relationship is.



## Sexuality

Sexuality is also a theme of the novel. The 60's were a time of sexual revolution. Patti embraces this as she begins her relationship with Robert. They live together without being married. This is seen as a sin and something Robert keeps from his parents. He asks Patti to pretend they are married when they meet his parents.

Robert Mapplethorpe is tortured by his sexual feelings. He is a homosexual, but he suppresses it due to his guilt for his sexual feelings. Robert was raised Catholic and was taught that homosexuality is a sin. This leads him to attempt to have relations with women, while wanting to have relations with men. His relationship with Patti, who is said to look like a young boy, helps him to keep from succumbing to his feelings for men. Yet he is not happy in the relationship because he cannot truly be himself. When she cheats on him, he goes to San Francisco and has his first sexual encounter with a man. He, however, does not see himself as a homosexual after these experiences. He still will not admit what he is and Robert and Patti continue their relationship when he returns as if nothing happened.

Patti feels that Robert's homosexuality is her fault because she believes that men become homosexual because the right woman did not save him. She does not understand what homosexuality is, but instead only knows what she has read in poems and books. To her it is mystical and she cannot understand what it is and how Robert is feeling. She does not understand why he feels the way he does and how he hates part of himself for feeling the way he does and for suppressing his true self. His trip to San Francisco helps him to become himself, but does not help him to accept himself for who he is. It takes time and acceptance for him to embrace every aspect of his personality. Having people around him who are openly homosexual helps him to release his guilt and accept who he is. He can then openly date men and let Patti go so that she can find a relationship with a man who wants to be with women.

Patti and Robert are naïve in their sexual relations and how it can affect their health. This is shown when Robert hustles on the street whenever he needs money. From his different relations, he obtains a STD and passes it to Patti. They are young and do not understand the consequences of their actions. By having unprotected sex with various partners, they jeopardize their health and the health of their partners. Robert and his partner Sam learn this when they both contract AIDS which ultimately kills them.

## Love

Love is a theme of the novel. The love that Patti and Robert have for one another lasts their entire lives even though their intimate relationship does not. Robert tells Patti that he will always be there for her even if they are not in a relationship. They remain friends throughout their lives. Even though they are in different relationships, they still live together until Robert moves in with Sam Wagstaff, the man who becomes his life partner. Still they are not separated. Robert helps her to get a house near his new home and they continue to be there for one another when the need arises.



Their friendship is shown to the world when they prepare an art exhibit together and their love and devotion for one another is shown in their work. They help each other to obtain success. Robert supports Patti's writing and her music, while she supports his art when they are together and when she is offered an art show will only accept it if Robert is also part of the show. This shows their love and devotion to one another.

Patti and Robert's friendship and love for one another lasts all their lives. She and her family return from Detroit to be with her friend when he contracts AIDS and is there for him when he lies dying. Their bond is strong and their love withstands the breakup of their relationship due to infidelity and separation. Even though the two find love with others, they always have a special relationship that cannot be broken.

## Coming of Age

Coming of Age is a theme of the novel. The story tells of the life of Patti Smith and her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe. It starts with her childhood and progresses to Robert's death. Patti is a precocious child who is labeled as a troublemaker by her students. She likes to make up stories to entertain her friends and siblings. Her love for art is kindled on a family trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts. She sees the paintings of Picasso, which inspire her to become an artist. At nineteen, she leaves her southern New Jersey home for New York City to fulfill her dream of becoming an artist.

Robert Mapplethorpe knows he is an artist at a young age. He makes jewelry for his mother and becomes an altar boy in the church to appease his mother. He does not believe in religion, but likes the pomp and circumstance of the ceremonies. He becomes estranged from his parents when he declares that he is going to live for art.

Patti struggles in New York, but finds Robert Mapplethorpe, an artist that she believes will be a success. Together they grow from naive teenagers to adults. Patti believes that they are in love, but finds out that Robert is homosexual. This stuns her and makes her question how this could happen. In her naivety, she believes his homosexuality is her fault and she therefore stays with him and supports him in his career. Patti and Robert grow as people and artists together. They live the lives of starving artists never having enough money for food and rent. Through the friends that they make in the artist community, they find venues for their artistic abilities. This allows them to find some success. Robert thrives in producing photography, while Patti becomes a poet, musician, and artist. They encourage one another's work and support their various relationships.

Patti and Robert separate and pursue other relationships when they feel that each can make it on their own. Robert embraces his homosexuality and has a successful career as an artist. Patti has several relationships eventually getting married and having children. Her success leads to many albums, books, and art shows.

Their story chronicles the pains and hardship of their early lives and their eventual success. They support one another through the hard times as well as the good times.

They are always there for one another. At the end of Robert's life, Patti travels to see him and immortalizes him in song. She loves him to the end and wants him to always be remembered.





# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of the novel is primarily the first-person perspective with parts of the third-person perspective. Patti Smith is telling her story, but when telling about Robert Mapplethorpe's childhood she writes in third person for she was not there to witness what happened. By switching from first person which limits the author to only what she has experienced to third person, it helps the reader get an understanding of Robert's life before he met Patti. The first person point of view is limited, but is essential to the story for it is the story of Patti Smith and her relationship with Robert. The reader gets to experience all the emotions that Patti experienced and react to other's actions without knowing what they are thinking or feeling. To understand her life, the reader has to see it through her eyes.

The story is told through exposition interspersed with dialogue. This is to keep the reader focused on the story unfolding. What happens is more important than what is said between the characters. Dialogue is used to relate important information or emotions. Patti is reflecting back on her life so exposition is the most logical choice as it helps the reader to follow the passing of the years and understand her actions as the reader is taken through the years of Patti Smith's life.

## Setting

The novel is set on the East Coast of the United States. The majority of the novel takes place in New York City in the artistic community. Patti and Robert live in the less affluent areas of New York City where the starving artists reside. It allows them to mingle with the up and coming artists of the day and the struggling veterans such as William Burroughs.

Patti Smith was born in southern New Jersey. Her artistic ambitions lead her to New York City where she lives on the streets for a time. After meeting Robert, they move in together in a small apartment in Brooklyn. In this small space, they nurture one another's artistic abilities. Patti and Robert frequent Max's Kansas City, which is a landmark of the artistic community.

Patti travels to France several times. The last time is to follow in the footsteps of Rimbaud, her personal hero. While she is there, she visits the grave of Jim Morrison to pay her respects.

In the final chapter, Patti has moved to Detroit with her family. She travels from Detroit to New York to be with Robert when he is diagnosed with AIDS. She travels back and forth between the two cities as she comforts Robert as he suffers from his illness and she works on her newest album. After Robert's death, Patti's husband takes her to the beach in the south to help her deal with her grief.



## Language and Meaning

The language of the novel can be formal, yet simplistic. Patti Smith is a poet and musician and this can be seen in the writing. The sentences are formal, but the melodic ring of her words makes the novel enjoyable to read.

The language of the novel shows the artistic creativity of the author. Her use of words to elicit feelings and ideas shows the plight of her and Robert in a way that makes the reader a part of their story. The novel is told mostly through exposition from the view of the author, Patti Smith, so the reader gets to know her intimately. The other characters are only seen through her eyes and through minimal dialogue. The novel spends most of its time detailing the young adult years of Patti's life. These are the years where they mature and develop their artistic abilities.

Smith's style of writing is formal when she speaks of her love of poetry especially Rimbaud, but less formal when she speaks of Robert and their time together. Her style is more intimate. This makes the book easier to read and more enjoyable for the reader. Smith tells her story in mostly a linear fashion so that her life is chronicled as it would have progressed. She does leap around within a few years of one another, but stays mostly on track of the progressing years. This leaping can be a bit disorienting for the reader, but does not affect the overall read of the book. The style and language gives the reader a more intimate view of Patti Smith and her personality and makes them feel a part of her world.

## Structure

The novel is comprised of five chapters. They vary in length. The chapter depicting Patti and Robert's childhoods is the shortest with the longest chapter being over a hundred pages. This depicts the central part of Patti and Robert's relationship. Each chapter is titled with a name that gives the reader an idea of what the chapter contains. It gives a foreshadowing of the relationship detailed in that chapter. Each chapter contains a significant point in the relationship between Patti and Robert.

The plot of the novel is simple and there is no subplot. The book tells of the relationship between Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe. It goes from their childhood to Robert's death telling of how their relationship evolved throughout their lives. It is always changing, but never broken. Even through their various relationships with others, their friendship was the one constant on which they could both count. It sustained them throughout their lives. They pushed each other to be the best they could be and to pursue their dreams.

The novel's pace is slow and can be bogged down by the author's use of complex language and love of poetry. Her musical and artistic background lends a lyrical aspect to the book, but the descriptions of art and poetry slow the pace and make it difficult for the reader. The novel gives the reader a great understanding of the artistic world in New

York in the late 60's and early 70's with glimpses into the lives of many famous artists including Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix.



## Quotes

"I had no proof that I had the stuff to be an artist, though I hungered to be one" (Chapter 1, p. 11).

"I dreamed of meeting an artist to love and support and work with side by side" (Chapter 1, p. 12).

"He contained, even at an early age, a stirring and the desire to stir" (Chapter 1, p. 13).

"Rimbauld held the keys to a mystical language that I devoured even as I could not fully decipher it. My unrequited love for him was as real to me as anything I had experienced" (Chapter 1, p. 23).

"I can't say I fit in, but I felt safe" (Chapter 1, p. 30).

"He looked quite different in his white shirt and tie, like a Catholic schoolboy" (Chapter 2, p. 36).

"I had a romantic view of drugs and considered them sacred, reserved for poets, jazz musicians, and Indian rituals" (Chapter 2, p. 39).

"He exuded a mixture of beauty and self-loathing, and mystic pain like a West Coast Saint Sebastian" (Chapter 2, p. 59).

"In the end we were better off together" (Chapter 3, p. 96).

"I felt like Alice with the Mad Hatter, negotiating jokes without punch lines, and having to retrace my steps on the chessboard floor back to the logic of my own peculiar universe" (Chapter 3, p. 103).

"Laughter. An essential ingredient for survival" (Chapter 3, p. 104).

"I watched him plant a weeping willow in the backyard. It seemed to symbolize his sorrow for the direction our country had taken" (Chapter 3, p. 108).

"The Chelsea was a doll's house in the Twilight Zone, with a hundred rooms, each a small universe" (Chapter 3, p. 112).

"Who can know the heart of youth, but youth itself" (Chapter 3, p. 135).

"We went our separate ways, but within walking distance of one another" (Chapter 4, p. 213).

"I had imagined that I would write the words that would shatter nerves, honoring Rimbaud and proving everyone's faith in me, but I didn't" (Chapter 4, p. 230).

"It's the artist's responsibility to balance mystical communication and the labor or creation" (Chapter 5, p. 256).

"Robert was unabashedly proud of my success. What he wanted for himself, he wanted for us both" (Chapter 5, p. 258).

"He was optimistic and certain that he would survive, satisfied with his work, his success, and his possessions" (Chapter 5, p. 267).

"Smile for me, Patti, as I am smiling for you" (Chapter 5, p. 278).

## Topics for Discussion

How do you think that Patti and Robert's childhoods influenced their artistic endeavors? Robert has a strong ambition to succeed as an artist. Do you think this is a way to impress his family particularly his father who does not approve of his life choices? Why or Why not?

Is Patti and Robert's relationship detrimental or advantageous to their lives? Does Robert's involvement in Patti's life affect her positively or negatively? Does Patti affect Robert's life positively or negatively? Give specific examples from the book to support your answer.

Does Robert's sexuality affect his art? Why do you feel he depicts the darker sexual side of humanity? Is he exploring his own sexuality through his art or capitalizing on it? Explain your reasons for your choice.

Why does Patti return to her relationship with Robert knowing he is homosexual? Why does she risk her health pursuing a sexual relationship with him when he gets money through prostituting himself to men he meets on the street? Is this a reflection of her love for him or disrespect for herself?

Patti has relationships with men who are emotionally unavailable to her, but require nurturing. Do you believe this is a result of giving up her child for adoption? Why does she feel this strong urge to nurture and avoid relationships that require an emotional connection?

New York in both the 60s and 70s provided a great opportunity for artists. Why do you think there was such an open, supportive artistic community during this time? What historic occurrences affected people's attitudes? How did this atmosphere help Robert and Patti to accomplish their dreams?

Robert fulfills his dream of becoming successful and becoming a part of high society. Does this change him in any way? How does the man who is dying of AIDS differ from the young man who dreamed of becoming a successful artist?

Why does the death of Andy Warhol cause such distress to Robert? Is it the timing or is there a deeper motive? Why does he admire Warhol so much when he believes that he is a better artist than Warhol?

Why do you think Patti and Robert's friendship survives throughout their lives? Even when she has moved away from New York and is married with children, she still craves to have her friend with her. Why do they have such a strong connection to one another?