

# **Keeping the Moon Study Guide**

## **Keeping the Moon by Sarah Dessen**

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# Plot Summary

Keeping the Moon is an award-winning novel by author Sarah Dessen. Keeping the Moon is an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Quick Pick and an SLJ Best Book of the Year. In this novel Nicole Sparks, who goes by the nickname Colie, goes to spend the summer with eccentric Aunt Mira in the small beach town of Colby. Colie's mother, Kiki Sparks, is a world-renowned fitness and nutrition guru that is touring Europe for the summer to promote her programs and fitness products. The novel focuses on self-esteem issues that children go through when they are overweight or different from the other kids in their school. The novel also deals with the issue of bullying taking place in schools and among children, and how bullying and torment breaks down the self-esteem of children. The summer that Colie spends in Colie teaches her that she has always had what she needs inside of her to feel and be a beautiful person; she just needed some kind and understanding people to bring it out in her.

Aunt Mira, which is Kiki's sister, is a very eccentric and overweight person. At first, Colie sees a lot of herself in Aunt Mira. The townspeople make fun of Mira, how she dresses and the fact that Mira helps some of the other townspeople that are in need, such as Norman. In the end, Colie realizes that Mira and Colie are nothing alike. Mira is and always has been comfortable with who she is and does not care what others think of her. Colie, on the other hand, has not quite gotten to the point where she feels comfortable in her own skin.

When Colie meets Isabel and Morgan, the two waitresses that work at the Last Chance grill in town, she learns what having girlfriends is like for the first time. The two girls help Colie to find herself and to share in things that girlfriends share.

Colie also learns what it is like to like a boy and have him like her back, when she sees Norman as more than someone who helps her aunt and works as the cook at the Last Chance. By the end of the novel, Colie has made a transformation from a caterpillar to a butterfly and feels right about herself for the first time.

# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

In Chapter 1, Colie, Colie's mother, Kiki, and Kiki's assistant are standing on the train platform when the novel opens. Colie is going to spend the summer with her Aunt Mira while her mother is touring Europe for her fitness business. As Colie settles in for her train ride, she remembers her childhood, when Colie was a little girl and her mother was obese. Colie's entire life, she and her mom were obese and moved around from place to place—even living in their car at times. During their time living in North Carolina, both Kiki and Colie lose a lot of weight. Kiki becomes certified to teach aerobics classes and become so popular that it leads to a local fitness show. This notoriety leads to a state show and then a national video, which spreads Kiki mania. When Colie gets to the Colby station, she is the only passenger that gets off. A man named Norman is waiting for her to take her to her Aunt's home. When Colie arrives, her aunt is looking for her cat, which is Norman the Cat. Norman comes out from under the porch to greet Colie and then the two go inside to greet Aunt Mira.

In Chapter 2, Aunt Mira and Colie watch wrestling on TV for about an hour and then Aunt Mira sends Colie to a cafe in town to get them something to eat. Aunt Mira tells Colie to use the bike on the front porch to get to the Last Chance Bar and Grill. Colie places the takeout order and one of the waitresses quits. and then Colie notices that the cook in the kitchen is Norman, the same one that picked her up at the train station. When Colie gets back to Aunt Mira's house, she decides to skip dinner and go to bed. Aunt Mira wakes Colie up to tell her she has a visitor, who turns out to be Isabel or the waitress that was mean to Colie at the Last Chance. It turns out that Morgan, the other waitress from the Last Chance, makes Isabel come to apologize to Colie.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The turning point in Kiki's life, and ultimately Colie's life occurs when Kiki rear-ended a Cadillac in North Carolina. The owner of the car was also the owner of a gym, so Kiki convinced the owner to let her work off the damages. The gym owner liked Kiki so much so she offers Kiki a full-time job, and presumably this leads to Kiki becoming the fitness and nutrition guru she is today. Colie has always used her obesity as a mask or a place to hide her true self. Even though the kids at school would tease Colie for being fat, Colie feels more self-conscious after she loses weight because she feels like she doesn't have anything to hide behind anymore.

The ironic part is that Colie was happier when she and her mom were obese and moving around from place to place. Now her mm is always busy and always on tour. While they now have money and a house, Kiki is never home and Colie misses her. When Colie arrives at Aunt Mira's house, Colie notices index cards and post-it notes everywhere. This foreshadows that Aunt Mira may be suffering from an illness that is



making her lose her memory. When Colie arrives at the Last Chance, she finds food on the menu that she is not supposed to eat. After one of the waitresses tells Colie that her lip ring is repulsive and that she is sure Kiki can afford for Colie to get her hair done professionally, Colie realizes that nothing has changed, even if she is in another place. Morgan insinuates that Isabel is a relative and this is why Morgan puts up with Isabel's moodiness.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

In Chapter 3, when Colie wakes up the next morning, she finds more instructional index cards all over the bathroom. Colie describes the relationship between Mira and Kiki, who are sisters. Mira is a few years older than Colie's mother, and was the "good" daughter, while Colie's mother was the "bad" one. Mira is the one that inherited all of her parents' things when they passed away. Mira is still overweight and her eating habits are atrocious. Colie learns that her aunt is a card artist, so she creates greeting cards. Colie discovers that her aunt was the creator of Nonni cards, which were very popular for a decade or so. Norman comes by to Mira's and tells her about his finds at the yard sales today. Colie finds out that Norman collects sunglasses. As Norman and Colie are heading to the library, Norman notices that two tourist buses are parked in front of the Last Chance, so he stops the car, puts on his shoes and tells Colie to come because they're going to need her help with all of the customers.

In Chapter 4, after pitching in at the Last Chance, Morgan offers Colie a job as a waitress and Colie accepts. While Colie is standing across from the Last Chance later that afternoon, she sees Aunt Mira riding up on her bike, ringing her bell. At the same time, Aunt Colie is passing in her crazy outfit and ringing the bell on her bike, college girls that are visiting the beach for the day laugh and make fun of Aunt Mira. On Colie's first real day of work, Morgan trains Colie on how to do things.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Colie foreshadows that she may gain back the 45 pounds she lost if she eats everything that Aunt Mira makes for her. In order to keep this from happening, Colie tries to continue to keep up her exercise routine, such as running on the beach. As Colie speaks with her aunt, there is an inference that Colie will continue to discover secrets about Aunt Mira, Colie's family and even Colie herself, as the summer unfolds. Even though Isabel and Colie have gotten off to a rocky start, Colie pitching in to help with the tourist crowd at the Last Chance indicates that Colie may win Isabel over by the time the summer ends. Colie may even be the one that finds out why Isabel is the way she is and help Isabel to change her outlook on life.

In Colie's life, it has always been everyone against her because she was fat or she was different. For the first time, when she is helping with the lunch rush at the Last Chance, she is part of the in-crowd, rather than the out crowd. Colie also realizes that she can be invisible as a waitress because customers do not tend to look at waitresses but instead are busy with their own world at their table. Even though Aunt Mira has enough money to buy new things, or at least things that work properly, Aunt Mira instead chooses to buy things second-hand. Colie also discovers that her aunt has numerous projects that



she starts but never seems to finish, which indicates that she may have some sort of a memory problem.



# Chapters 5 and 6

## Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

In Chapter 5, after work one day, Colie goes to the post office to pick up the mail. Collie overhears some women talking a few rows over about Aunt Mira. The women are saying how quirky Aunt Mira is and that it seems as she is taking in strays. When Colie returns to her aunt's house, she does not tell her aunt about the conversation she overheard the two women having in the post office. When Colie tells Morgan about what she overheard the women saying about her aunt, Morgan sheds some light on why people think of Mira as eccentric. When Mira taught a painting class at the local community center, Mira had the 70-year-old mailman pose nude. Mira also fought the school board when they tried to ban certain books from the school library.

In Chapter 6, Aunt Mira and Colie run into Bea Williamson and her big-headed baby at the Quik Stop. Bea makes an off-handed remark about how Aunt Mira looks today. Just before closing time, while Colie is hanging out in the back of the restaurant, she hears the bell ring on the door of the Last Chance. Colie can see two girls at the counter and Isabel takes their order. Colie runs into Caroline Dawes, a girl that torments her at school. When Caroline returns to the counter, she tells her friend, loud enough for everyone to hear that Colie is the biggest slut in their school. Isabel invites Colie back to the little white house and tells Colie that she needs a makeover. Isabel plucks Colie's eyebrows and dyes her hair so that it is all one color. While Colie is in Isabel's room, she notices a mirror surrounded by real pictures and pictures of models. One picture stands out to Colie, which is a yearbook picture of an overweight girl. When Colie asks Isabel who the girl is, Isabel says it's her cousin.

## Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The women talking about Aunt Mira in the post office about taking in strays reveals that Colie is not the first person that is under the town's scrutiny when it comes to with whom Aunt Mira interacts. The conversation suggests that Norman, Isabel and Morgan may be the "strays" the women are talking about. Colie realizes that no matter where you go, there are always people that look down and gossip about the ways that other people and the way that other people live. Colie also realizes the wrestling matches her aunt watches are symbols for her aunt that good does win out over evil sometimes. When Isabel comes in late, Morgan is mad. When Isabel explains she is late and didn't come home the night before because of a guy she had previously met, Morgan's anger changes to excitement. While Colie moves to the kitchen to finish putting the silverware together, she sees what friendship is supposed to be like while watching Isabel and Morgan interact with one another. Even when Colie watches the two girls interact in the little white house they live in behind her aunt's house, it is as if Colie is living vicariously through the girls because Colie has never really had a true friend.





While nothing more happens between Aunt Mira and Bea Williamson at the Quik Stop, Colie feels as if it is the calm before the storm. Colie senses that Bea is up to something and that Bea is going to do or say something that adversely affects Aunt Mira. Ironically, when Clie comes back in to the restaurant, she realizes that one of the girls is Caroline Dawes, which is one of Colie's biggest tormentors in school. While Colie believes what Caroline Dawes says will provide Isabel with more ammunition for Isabel to hate her, ironically, it brings Isabel and Colie closer, with Isabel inviting Colie back to the little white house where Isabel lives. There is a foreshadowing that the yearbook picture of the overweight girl is Isabel and that is why Isabel is taking pity on Colie—because she relates to Colie's demons.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In Chapter 7, as Colie is leaving Isabel's house, she accidentally runs into Norman, Norman is carrying a large painting, which is of Morgan and Isabel. Both girls are wearing sunglasses in the painting. Norman explains that painting is one of the mediums he is using to put together his portfolio for art school. While Norman and Colie are talking, a storm is rolling in, and Aunt Mira comes out of the house searching for Cat Norman. As Norman and Colie look for Cat Norman, they wind up at the back of Aunt Mira's house, but the back door is locked, so they hold hands and run through the thunderstorm to the front of the house. They find Cat Norman on the front porch.

In Chapter 8, Colie continues to witness how mean people in town are to her aunt, and how they make fun of her either to her face or behind her back. One afternoon, Morgan runs into the Last Chance excited because Mark is coming in for the weekend. As Colie and Norman are leaving the Last Chance after closing, Norman gives Colie a pair of sunglasses he bought for her, saying they reminded him of Colie. When Colie arrives home, she finds Isabel sitting on her aunt's front porch. Isabel tells Colie that Mark is almost five hours late and that he's not coming. Colie glances over at the little white house and sees that Morgan is still getting everything ready for Mark's arrival. As Colie accuses Isabel of not understanding her because Isabel is different from Colie, Mark pulls up in the driveway and Morgan runs out to meet him.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

While Colie thinks of Norman as a hippie and not her type, Colie feels some kind of connection when Norman and she are holding hands running through the thunderstorm. Colie realizes that she is transitioning from a caterpillar to a butterfly. She shed her cocoon when she shed her 45 pounds of extra weight. Isabel plucking her eyebrows and dying her hair all one color is just another step in her transition.

Colie begins to realize that she and her aunt are a lot alike. Even though Colie has lost her weight, and Mira has not, Colie and Aunt Mira still struggle with the heckling and the sneers—the way that others look at them and think of them just because they do not fit into what the townspeople consider "normal." Isabel insinuates that something is going on with Mark because the last time he said he was coming to town he stood up Morgan and her family, never apologizing or giving Morgan a reason as to why he did it. The sunglasses that Norman chooses for each character in the novel represent the personality of each character. Isabel also says that Isabel tells Colie that they are alike, that Isabel was just as afraid in high school as Colie is now. This is further affirmation that the overweight girl in the picture hanging on Isabel's bedroom mirror is Isabel in high school.



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

In Chapter 9, Colie calls her mom in Spain. She asks her mom if she knew how eccentric Aunt Mira is. Kiki confesses that Mira has always been different, had a hard time connecting with people, and had a few run-ins with the locals. Colie asks her mom if Kiki has always been so brave and Kiki admits that she was not always brave. Morgan arrives at the Last Chance with homemade deviled eggs, which is what she makes when she's upset. She says that things didn't go well with Mark the night before, he doesn't want to talk about the wedding and that he left before breakfast. Isabel comes in and sees the deviled eggs, a sign that the night with Mark did not go well, and tells Morgan to come straight home after work for a Chick Night. Isabel invites Colie too.

In Chapter 10, when Morgan and Colie arrive at the little white house, they find Isabel complete with the supplies for their girls' night in. While the girls are doing facemasks, the phone rings and it is Mark. After Isabel and Morgan have a fight over Mark, they quickly recover from it, dance for a little while and then tell Colie it's time to get ready to go out.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Kiki admits that she faked a lot of her confidence and that when the world saw her in a different way after introducing her products and her own success story that this is when she truly believed in herself and found her braveness. Colie asks her aunt if she ever wants an item that works perfectly. Aunt Mira puts things in perspective for Colie, so Colie comes to understand that just because something or someone doesn't work perfectly, it doesn't mean it doesn't have its place in life or in the world. Colie is entering into a world where she has never been before—friendship with girls.

While Morgan thinks that Mark really loves her, Isabel believes that Morgan is just setting herself up to get hurt. Isabel reveals that Morgan found Mark with a stripper in his hotel room when Morgan went to surprise him on their anniversary, never gives Morgan a number where she can reach him and never takes her to his games. Morgan reveals to Colie that Isabel is her best friend and the reason that Isabel is friend-impaired is that Morgan is the first friend Isabel ever had, which further implies that the overweight girl on Isabel's mirror is Isabel.



# Chapters 11 and 12

## Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

In Chapter 11, Colie watches Morgan and Isabel get ready to go out. Then, the two girls turn to Colie, putting on makeup and fixing her hair—giving her the makeover she needs for a girls' night out. It's the Fourth of July, so the big night out in Colby is at the beach to watch the fireworks. Isabel sends Colie to the car for another six-pack of beer and a boy named Josh accidentally collides with Colie. Norman calls Colie over to the group he's sitting with and asks her to sit for a portrait for his series. Josh keeps motioning for Colie to come over to where his group of friends are. As Colie is about to go, she sees Caroline Dawes tap Josh on the shoulder and tell him something. Isabel urges Colie to go anyway—to stand up for herself and stop letting Caroline Dawes ruin her life, and Colie goes. When the girls arrive home, Mark is waiting on the porch. Morgan heads into the little white house with Mark. Isabel walks to a clambake a boy she met at the beach invited her to and Colie goes into Aunt Mira's house.

In Chapter 12, Colie and Aunt Mira go to the annual church bazaar. When Colie overhears Bea Williamson saying bad things about Aunt Mira again, she is just about to confront Bea when Aunt Mira comes up with her bike and her purchases and asks Colie if she is ready to leave. In the afternoon, Colie is at work and answers the phone to find Josh on the other end. Josh asks Colie out on a date for when she returns to Charlotte where they both live. Norman storms out the door and Isabel tells Colie because he is jealous and Colie realizes that she accidentally blew off Norman the night before for hot chocolate and sitting for him to paint her portrait. Norman and Colie take up a routine, where he paints her portrait at night in his apartment and during slow times during the day at the Last Chance. Aunt Mira points out to Colie that the eclipse of the moon is coming. When Colie tells Norman this, he tells Colie a story about when he was camping during the eclipse when he was a kid and thought that someone stole the moon.

## Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

While Colie had always been an outsider in going out, she compares getting ready with Isabel and Morgan to helping her mother get ready for dates over the years. The irony is that at the end of this makeover, Colie is a part of the going out rather than being left out of the fun. Colie remembers back to where Caroline Dawes got the impression that Colie was a slut and when Colie earned the nickname "Hole in One," which is one night when Caroline and the popular kids catch Colie and a new boy in town talking on the golf course. The ironic part is that nothing happened with the boy, but the rumors spread anyway that Colie is a slut. Josh and Colie running into each other at the beach and Josh saying he'll catch up with her later foreshadows that Colie may have her first real boyfriend during her summer in Colby. While Norman is talking to Colie, Colie only has eyes for Josh, which predicts some kind of a love triangle where Josh hurts Colie and



then Colie realizes she should have been with Norman all along. When Colie gets to Josh's group of friends, Caroline tells Josh Colie is a slut, but Colie stands up to Caroline. It turns out that Josh and Caroline are cousins and Josh follows after Colie, hoping to see her again before he leaves the following day.

Collie confronts Aunt Mira about how she can stand the way the people in won treat her and talk about her. Ironically, while Colie always thought that her and her aunt were the same, Colie realizes they are very different. Aunt Mira knows who she is and is happy with it. Colie is still trying to figure out whom she is and to find her happiness. Isabel points out to Colie that Norman likes her and Colie starts to realize that she has been looking at Norman the way that all of the mean girls have been looking at her all of her life. Now that Colie sees Norman in a different light, she is starting to have feelings for him. She cannot tell if he has feelings for her or if it is just his need to paint her portrait for art school.



# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

In Chapter 13, Morgan asks Colie to cover her shifts for a couple of days so she can surprise Mark in Durham. Morgan tells Isabel and Colie that she wants to surprise Mark. Morgan wants to get Mark to drive to Dillon, South Carolina where they can apply for the license and marry the following day. Colie confesses to Norman about her reputation in Charlotte and explains why she treated so poorly when Norman picked her up at the train. As Colie returns to Mira's house, Morgan speeds up the driveway. Morgan found Mark in his hotel room with his pregnant wife.

In Chapter 14, the following day, Colie and Norman open and close the Last Chance like normal. When Colie returns to Aunt Mira's, she finds Isabel there telling Mira that Morgan has locked herself in the house playing Patsy Cline. Mira comes up with the idea to create a card that Isabel can give Morgan. After Norman unveils Colie's portrait, they kiss. They hear loud music coming from the little white house and see Morgan dancing around the little house. While Colie and Norman are dancing with Morgan, Isabel, and her date come home. Isabel and Morgan make up and they all dance.

## Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Morgan surprising Mark and trying to convince him to elope foreshadows disappointment and possibly even Morgan getting a surprise instead of Mark. Morgan is not seeing the signs that reveal that Mark is cheating on her and/or has no intentions on really marrying her. It's possible that Morgan will catch Mark with another woman again or that Mark will flat out refuse to elope, which may crush Morgan, and her already low self-esteem.

When Colie goes to Isabel so Isabel can help Colie get ready for her dinner date with Norman, where he is unveiling Colie's portrait, Isabel will not help Colie. Isabel tells Colie that her beauty has nothing to do with how Colie looks on the outside; that what makes Colie beautiful is how she is on the inside and not how she looks on the outside. Isabel tells Colie that Colie believing in herself is what makes Colie beautiful and that she doesn't need Isabel to get ready for her date with Norman. Norman has a dinner menu with each food symbolizing something about the moon to relate to the eclipse that will take place later than night. When Norman unveils Colie's portrait, Colie sees a beautiful girl and asks Norman if this is how he sees her and he says that this is how she is. Morgan realizes that her life has changed and she has to start over again. Morgan understands that crying is not going to change that, so she has to pick herself up, brush herself off, and get back up on the horse.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

In Chapter 15, Mira, Isabel, Morgan, Colie, and Norman all head to the beach to watch the eclipse. Morgan and Isabel talking about moving away somewhere they can reinvent themselves like they did in high school.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

When Morgan mentions a frog necklace that Isabel wore in high school, Colie realizes the overweight nerd "cousin" in the picture on Isabel's mirror is Isabel. Since Isabel lived the life that Colie lived, this is why Isabel understands Colie so well. As Colie watches the eclipse of the moon and glances at the faces of all of those that are important to her in Colby, Colie realizes that she has finally become the person that she truly is and has always been on the inside.



# Characters

## Nicole Sparks

Nicole Sparks is the main character of the novel. Her nickname is Colie. Colie has her lip pierced with a small loop earring. She was an overweight child and teen. After she lost her weight, she earned a reputation for being promiscuous, but it is just a rumor that the popular kids in school spread. Colie is 15 and her mother is a famous nutrition and fitness guru.

## Kiki Sparks

Kiki Sparks is Colie's mother. Kiki is also a health and fitness guru by profession, so she has her own line of health and nutrition food and other products. She sends Colie to Colby, which is a beach town where Kiki's sister lives, to spend the summer while Kiki is on tour in Europe.

## Norman

Norman is an art freak that runs errands for Aunt Mira. He lives in an apartment behind Mira's house. Norman is the one that comes to the train station to pick Colie for the summer. Norman is also one of the cooks at the Last Chance, which is a grill in the town. Norman collects sunglasses. It turns out that Norman is a great artist and has applied for art school. His father has disowned him because Norman has decided to go on to art school instead of taking up the family business of selling cars.

## Aunt Mira

Aunt Mira is an eccentric old woman, who is also overweight. She has long red hair that she ties up with a pencil. She rides around town on a red bicycle, clanging her bicycle horn and with her long red hair flying out behind her. Mira is Colie's aunt and Kiki's sister. Mira is also an artist. She creates greeting cards. She is also a collector of items from yard sales and bazaars, so everything in her house is second-hand, slightly broken and doesn't work perfectly.

## Bea Williamson

Bea Williamson is one of the women that Colie overhears talking bad about Aunt Mira in the post office. Bea also has a two-year-old toddler that has an overly large head that everyone in town talks about. Morgan tells Colie that the Williamson family is one of the oldest ones in town. Morgan also tells Colie that it seems as if Bea has some vendetta against Aunt Mira.





## Isabel

Isabel is one of the waitresses at the Last Chance. Isabel is thin, blonde and pretty. She also seems angry all of the time. Isabel is always late for work and is constantly arguing with Morgan, who is the other waitress at the grill, which turns out to be her best friend. Morgan and Isabel live together in the little white house behind Aunt Mira's house. It turns out that Isabel was overweight and a nerd in high school and Morgan was her first and only friend. Isabel too transformed herself over the years into the person that she is today.

## Morgan

Morgan is one of the waitresses at the Last Chance. She is engaged to a semi-pro baseball player that is traveling out of town most of the time. Morgan seems to be anal or OCD because she likes every neat, orderly and in its place. Morgan lives with Isabel in a little white house behind Mira's house. Morgan also struggles with a low self-esteem, which blinds her to the clues that Mark is cheating on her and probably never has any intentions on marrying her.

## Mark

Mark is Morgan's fiance. He is a semi-pro baseball player, so he is hardly ever in town. Morgan catches him twice in his hotel room with other women when she surprises him. The last time Morgan catches him, she finds out the woman is Mark's wife and that she is pregnant with his child.



# Objects/Places

## Colby

Colby is a beach town where Kiki sends Colie to spend the summer with her Aunt Mira. It's a small town, but it's also the town that allows several of the characters of the novel to discover their true inner selves.

## The Last Chance

The Last Chance is the grill in the beach town of Colby. Aunt Mira loves the chicken salad from the Last Chance. Colie ends up working as a waitress at the Last Chance for the summer. Isabel and Morgan work as waitresses at the Last Chance and Norman works as a cook.

## The Little White House

The little white house sits behind Aunt Mira's house. It's the house where Isabel and Morgan live. Colie often goes to the rooftop of her aunt's house to watch how the girls live their lives as if Colie is watching a movie or a real-life drama unfold in front of her. Eventually, as the girls become friends, Colie finds herself inside of the little white house and in the lives of Isabel and Morgan.

## Sunglasses

Sunglasses represent several things in the novel. First, sunglasses are an item that Norman collects. Second, sunglasses represent a symbol or way for the characters in the novel to hide behind. As the saying goes, "the eyes are the windows to the soul," and when the eyes are hidden by sunglasses, the people behind the glasses can hide who they truly are or how they truly feel. When Norman is painting his set of portraits for art school, the people in his portraits all wear the sunglasses he has chosen for them.

## Music

Isabel and Morgan relate everything and every mood to music. They are members of the Columbia House music club. They play particular genres of music. depending on what mood they are in or what is going on in their lives.



## **red Bicycle**

The red bicycle is Aunt Mira's form of transportation. She rides the bicycle around town to run her errands, hunt items to buy at garage sales and the church bazaar. She has a little basket on the front where she totes around her finds,

## **Bicycle Bell**

The bicycle bell is attached to Aunt Mira's red bicycle. As Aunt Mira rides around town, she is perpetually ringing the bicycle bell.

## **Portraits**

The portraits that Norman paints serve many purposes in the novel. One, it allows Norman to express his feelings through his art. Second, it permits Norman to reveal to the people who are the subjects of his paintings their inner souls.

## **Junk**

The "junk" that Norman buys and collects is not junk to him at all. Norman uses the objects he picks up at yard sales and the church bazaar to turn into pieces of art.

## **The Eclipse**

The moon eclipse occurs at the end of the book. The eclipse marks the transformation of Colie. It also marks the transformation of each of the characters in the novel in their own way.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that runs throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age. In some way, each of the characters learns lessons about growing up and dealing with responsibilities in life. Primarily, Colie learns from each of the other characters in the novel that she is a beautiful person, inside and out. Some of the characters in the novel - Aunt Mira, her mom, Norman, Isabel and Morgan - influence Colie's change in a positive way. The popular kids that make fun of her and her arch enemy help Colie to come to the same conclusion, but from their negative behaviors toward her.

Isabel comes of age by realizing that being nice to people may be a better approach to helping them than by being mean. This leads Isabel to help give Colie a makeover and to help Morgan see Mark for who he truly is—trying to prevent Morgan from being hurt. Morgan comes of age by realizing that just because she loses Mark that her life is not over. She has an opportunity to start over and create a new life for herself. Norman comes of age by finally confronting his father about Norman's decision to go to art school and not work in the family business with his father and brothers

## Competition

Competition is another theme of the novel. Even though Isabel and Morgan are best friends, there is a lot of competition between the two girls. In fact, Isabel sometimes does things on purpose to perpetuate the competition and anger Morgan. In the end, however, the competition between Isabel and Morgan is a healthy one that the girls use to take care of each other. Colie seems to be in constant competition with everyone. Colie competes for her mother's time and attention with her mother's business. Every new school that Colie ends up at makes her the new, overweight girl in school, which pits the popular kids against her, and even the other girls like her against her because she is new and overweight.

Colie also has an inner struggle that puts her in competition with herself. Colie loses the 45 extra pounds she needs to be "normal" on the outside. At the same time, Colie sets herself apart from the crowd by piercing her lip and dying her hair a strange color. Colie's inner and outer beauty are in competition with one another. By the end of the novel, however, this competition is resolved and Colie believes she is just as beautiful on the outside as she is on the inside.

## Friendship

The underlying theme of the novel is friendship. The novel talks about the special bond and friendship that Isabel and Morgan share. Eventually, Isabel and Morgan also bring Colie into the fold and teach Colie what friendship and having girlfriends is like for the

first time in Colie's life. Even though Isabel and Morgan fight constantly and as if they are sisters, the two girls always have their best interests in mind. When Colie becomes part of their friendship, they act in her best interests as well.

While the bond between Isabel, Morgan and Colie is different than the bond that Morgan and Isabel have, both girls have a special bond with Colie as well. The true bond that ties the three girls together is their self-esteem issues. Morgan was always seen as a nerd and shy girl in school. Isabel was an overweight nerd. Colie was an overweight nerd that was also thought to be a slut. Since each of the girls had to deal with their own struggles, the tie that binds them is the common struggle that they both share and how to overcome it.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view, where Colie is the narrator. Throughout the novel, however, Colie tells the story at different points and ages of her life to reveal how she turned into the person she was when she first arrived at Colby. Colie goes back and forth from the present to the past while the story unfolds.

The point of view of this novel permits the reader to truly connect closely with Colie and some of the other characters in the novel. The point of view allows the reader to see each of the characters from Colie's point of view. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the main character and each character in the novel, without interrupting the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this novel and the author's writing style.

## Setting

The novel is set primarily in the small beach town of Colby. While the novel does not specifically state the time frame, it seems to be set in the '90s. The setting of this novel is important because the location allows Colie to get out of her normal town of Charlotte. Getting away for the summer gives Colie the time she needs to learn about things she has never known before - her inner strength, friendship, and relationships. The main character of the novel is struggling through her teenage years, now at the age of 15. Not only is Colie struggling with the normal issues of teenage girls, but she is also struggling to overcome her weight issues and the rumors about her being a slut.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware of the impact that Colie going to spend the summer in Colby will have, instead of spending the summer touring with her mother in Europe, or staying at home with a babysitter in Charlotte. Colby and the residents and visitors of Colby all help in shaping Colie's life, her self-esteem, and how she thinks and sees herself. Without getting away from Charlotte and meeting people that have had the same struggles as Colie but made it through them, Colie may never have realized her true self.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is fluid, modern, and easy to read. Although the language of the novel is not formal, it uses language consistent with young adults. Some of the language is not as modern as it was when the novel was published, but this does not detract from the story of the novel. The language is educated, strong and descriptive enough that it creates a flow that leaves the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel is done.



The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is accurate to the characters in the novel and the education level of the writer. The novel is not in love with its own words, but it is descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is not difficult to understand, however, and everything is clear in its context. For this reason, the language of the novel fits well with the plot of the novel.

## Structure

The novel is divided into fifteen chapters. Each chapter is two to twenty pages long. The chapters tell the story both in exposition and dialogue. The author also injects her own voice in the chapters, giving her opinion of the events surrounding the setting of the novel as well as the actions taking place within the plot.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the coming of each of each of the characters in the novel, especially Colie. One subplot follows the competition between the characters in the novel. Another subplot follows friendship. All these plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



## Quotes

"Oh, that's even worse, with your hair that color and that thing in your lip you look terrible even when you're smiling." (Chapter 1, p. 1).

"Because, for the most part, she's all I've got." (Chapter 2, p. 31).

"Everyone is good at heart. It's true." (Chapter 3, p. 40).

"Even during those terrible years when you two were moving from place to place, she was never scared. And she'd never take a cent from our parents; just because she was too principled. She wanted to prove to everyone that she could do it. That was always very important to her." (Chapter 4, p. 59).

"She's been like this ever since she moved here. But it goes beyond just personality quirks, you know? With that bike, and the clothes she wears. Not to mention all the strays she takes in. It's like she's running some kind of weird commune down at the end of the road. It's embarrassing for all of us."  
(Chapter 5, p. 62).

"It's all about you, Colie. Believe in yourself up here and it will make you stronger than you could ever imagine." (Chapter 6, p. 88).

"That's right, Martin! I'm speaking to everyone out there who sees themselves as a caterpillar, but knows that somewhere in them lives a butterfly."  
(Chapter 7, p. 98).

"I was afraid. Just like you. It's so, so stupid what we do to ourselves because we're afraid. It's so stupid." (Chapter 8, p. 110).

"If something doesn't work exactly right, or maybe needs some special treatment, you don't just throw it away. Everything can't be fully operational all the time. Sometimes, we need to have the patience to give something the little nudge it needs." (Chapter 9, p. 118).

"Can't you see, Morgan? There's something wrong here." (Chapter 10, p.138).

"You're gorgeous tonight, Colie. Show yourself off a little bit." (Chapter 11, p. 154).

"I was saying that they took the moon. They were keeping the moon." (Chapter 12, p. 192).

"You knew the truth all along, Colie. That's all that matters. You knew." (Chapter 13, p. 201).

"You don't need me. You never did. I didn't do anything but dye your hair and smear on a bunch of make-up. What you were that night at the beach was just you, Colie. It was





all you. Because for once, you believed in yourself. You believed you were beautiful and so did the rest of the world."

(Chapter 14, p. 217).

"We could go anywhere. And reinvent ourselves, just like in high school." (Chapter 15, p. 226).



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Nicole "Colie" Sparks? Why does she spend the summer in Colby? Why doesn't she tell anyone in town about her struggle with her weight or the kids teasing her at school? Why does she agree to allow Isabel to dye her hair, put makeup on her, and convince her to remove her lip ring? What does Colie think of herself when she sees herself in the mirror for the first time? What does Norman being jealous of Josh do to Colie? Why is this important? How does it change Colie's life?

Discuss the relationship between Isabel and Morgan. Are they friends or confidantes? Is their competition in their relationship? How does Isabel feel about Morgan? How does Morgan feel about Isabel? Why does Morgan think she is in competition with Isabel? What does she do about it? What happens to Morgan? Explain.

Who is Kiki Sparks? Do you think she should have taken Colie on tour with her in Europe? Do you think Kiki intentionally sent Colie to Colby to help her through her troubles? How does Kiki stay connected to Colie, even though they cannot be together? Why does Kiki allow Colie to stay in Colby, even after Kiki finds out that Mira is more eccentric and having more problems than Kiki thought?

Who is Norman? Why does he end denouncing his family? Do you Norman falls in love with Colie? Do you think Norman always saw Colie as a beautiful person or it was after her makeover that he realized it?

Discuss friendship. What impact does friendship have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them? Why is friendship an issue to the girls in this novel? Does friendship have anything to do with the actions against Colie?

Who is Aunt Mira. Do you think she is crazy or just eccentric. What do you think she does with the money her parents left to her when they died? Why does Aunt Mira take in "strays" such as Norman, Isabel, Morgan and Cat Norman? Why does Aunt Mira name the cat after Norman? Do you really believe Aunt Mira doesn't care what the townspeople think and say about her? If not, why doesn't she care?

How is the eclipse related to Colie? Did you notice her transformation throughout the novel or at one particular part? What do you think will happen when Colie returns to Charlotte? Do you think she will go on a date with Josh? Do you think she'll maintain her romantic relationship with Norman? Do you think Colie will still have problems with the kids teasing her at school?