

Like the Red Panda Study Guide

Like the Red Panda by Andrea Seigel

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Like the Red Panda Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	6
Chapter 3.....	7
Chapter 4.....	8
Chapter 5.....	10
Chapter 6.....	11
Chapter 7.....	12
Chapter 8.....	13
Chapter 9.....	15
Chapter 10.....	17
Chapter 11.....	18
Chapter 12.....	20
Chapter 13.....	21
Chapter 14.....	22
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	28
Style.....	30
Quotes.....	31
Topics for Discussion.....	32



Plot Summary

Like the Red Panda is a novel by author Andrea Siegel. The story follows the main character, Stella, as she recounts the last two weeks of her senior high school year, and her life in Orange County, California. Stella is an orphan after both of her parents overdose on drugs on her eleventh birthday. Since she only has an elderly living grandfather, Stella goes to live with her foster parents, Shana and Simon Roth. Although Stella is intelligent, attractive and likeable, she has come to the conclusion that the monotony of life is not worth living.

When Stella moves in with her foster family, she also decides that this is the time to get to know her maternal grandfather, Donald. Donald lives in an assisted living facility. Stella starts taking the bus to visit Donald on Sundays so that she can skip out on attending temple with the Roths. Despite being related, Stella and Donald do not share a familial bond. In fact, Stella detests Donald. In the end, however, Stella realizes that she and Donald are more alike than they are different.

Stella writes down everything that happens to her during the last two weeks of her senior year. Not only is she memorializing these events, but she is also documenting her feelings because Stella intends on committing suicide. In addition to killing herself, Stella also assists her grandfather in ending his life with an overdose of drugs, just like her parents had done a few years prior.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Stella is in drama class, where the teacher, Mr. Nichols, has the students pretending to toss their beach balls around on the beach. Stella is tired and fed up and so she tries to hide. When Mr. Nichols asks her why she's hiding behind a "sand dune" and orders her to start tossing her ball again, Stella refuses. Mr. Nichols sends Stella to the principal's office, even though she never gets into trouble.

Mr. Frankel, the principal, is surprised to see Stella waiting outside of his office. Mr. Frankel mentions that Stella only has a couple of weeks until graduation and notices in her file that she's going to Princeton. He says he thinks this has more to do than throwing a ball. Stella thinks about how she's going to Princeton because it is the end to a logical equation and she says yes to Mr. Frankel without much enthusiasm. He says he thinks it's an isolated incident so he's not going to call Stella's parents. She corrects him with guardians.

On her walk home, Stella thinks about how all of the kids at school know her and are her acquaintances, but none of them are her friends. Stella also thinks about the planned community of Woodbridge that she lives inside of the city of Irvine. Stella says the orderliness and the constant stream of people running around makes her dizzy. Ashley hears someone call out her name from a car, but with the sun in her eyes, she can't tell who it is. The girls say that it's Ashley Wakefield and so Stella goes over to talk to her.

When Ashley asks if Stella is going to make flashcards for their English final, Stella realizes that she is not looking forward to going to college and she doesn't care if she passes their English final. While she doesn't share it with Ashley, there is already a thought process and plan forming in Stella's mind. Ashley offers Stella a ride, saying she has to pick up her best friend Ainsley at the bank first. Stella says she'll walk.

When Stella walks into her house, she tells the reader that her parents are dead, but says she doesn't want to get into that now. Stella says that she's exhausted and she's trying to explain what she's done.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Stella has obviously reached a crossroads in her life. All of her life, she has been working hard to get into an Ivy League college. Now that she is on her way to Princeton, she realizes that it is all a façade, and that she doesn't want to go to Princeton at all. This realization is causing her to act out and defy authority, even though it is the last two weeks of her senior year of high school.



Stella says that her parents are dead, which foreshadows her telling the story of how they died in the first place. She also mentions that she has guardians, so she will also reveal who her guardians are and how she came to live with them after her parents died. Stella alludes to the fact that she has done something wrong. In the chapters that come in the novel, she will reveal what it is she has done wrong and the consequences of her actions will also be revealed.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Stella remembers her last birthday, which was when she was in the sixth grade and turning eleven. She describes the frantic way that her mother tries to help Stella curl her hair with the curling iron. She also recalls her father dropping a bottle of wine on their white carpet and her mom frantically trying to clean it up, while her father paid the balloon man for the delivery of balloons for her Miami-themed scavenger hunt party. Stella reveals that her parents were using cocaine but she didn't know it at the time.

Stella and her team for the scavenger hunt are rounding the corner to her house when they see all of the police cars and ambulance. Stella tries to rush past the two cops that are guarding the top of the stairs. When she gets a view into her parents room, she sees her mom and dad lying on the floor. Her best friend, Katrina's mom is sitting and crying at the end of the bed. Two other parents are pacing and wiping their noses.

Back to the present, she says she thinks that it's romantic that her parents died within seconds of each other. Apparently, they had cut their cocaine with heroin, which caused their hearts to explode. Stella stays with her best friend's mom for a little while after their deaths. When Stella catches Dawn coming back in from buying drugs in the middle of the night, Dawn tells child services that they need to find a more permanent home for Stella. This is how Stella winds up with her foster parents, the Roths.

Chapter 2 Analysis

It seems that Stella's parents both die of a drug overdose. Stella thinks that her parents are always hyper and jazzed because this is part of their personality. She doesn't realize that their behavior and jumpiness relates to them being heavy cocaine users. Additionally, she just thinks that it's normal that her friends' parents come over to her house and go upstairs with her parents to their room. To Stella, this is a normal way of life because she doesn't know any differently.

Stella also thinks that it's good that her parents died together because one of them would not have been able to live on without the other one. Stella alludes to the fact that the Roths are not good foster parents. She doesn't yet reveal why, but this foreshadows her telling a story of how rotten or cruel they are as people and why this shouldn't be foster parents in the first place.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Stella describes the first time that she met the Roths, which is when Social Services drops her off at their home. They have expressions on their faces as if they are surprised to see her. Simon Roth keeps cracking jokes but with a straight face so that Stella can't tell he's joking at first. Shana Roth doesn't even seem to acknowledge that Stella is there until after the Social Services' woman has already left.

Stella admits that over the years nothing has changed. The relationship between her and the Roths is exactly the same and so is the décor in the house. Every time Shana sees Stella, it's as if she forgot Stella was living in the house, even though it is six years later. Stella also finds out shortly after moving in that the Roths are Jewish, which her family was not. She goes to temple with them but plots to get out of going in the future.

After her parents died, Social Services looked for family members. Stella only has a living grandfather that is in a convalescent home and some distant cousins she never met that live in Florida. Since Social Services couldn't find a suitable home with family, Stella winds up with the Roths. She also recalls a visit from her Grandpa Donald, where he tells her that he has cancer while her parents are upstairs doing drugs.

Stella decides to use visiting Donald as an excuse to get out of going to temple. When she explains her plan to Shana one day after school, Shana tells Stella that it's fine to visit him on Sunday mornings and when he is feeling lonely.

When Stella goes to visit her grandfather, she is back in the present. She finds him in the bathroom shower that he has stopped up the drain with stuff and filled the glassed in shower with water to drown himself. Stella calls in the aids from the home and they save him from drowning. When Stella goes home, she researches her own suicide methods and then finishes her homework.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Stella feels uncomfortable with the Roths right away. This foreshadows the next several years that Stella has to stay with them being equally uncomfortable. It doesn't seem as if they are going to be the type of family that is warm, fuzzy and loving with one another.

Stella is planning on taking her own life. She sees life as a repetitive, planned activity that there is no point in living. Without any true connections to people or relationships, she feels isolated and alone. Rather than reach out to the people that she does have in her life to try to form a stronger bond, Stella is choosing to push these people away and commit the selfish act of suicide. Since this is her plan, this is why Stella no longer cares about school, her grades or her commitment to go to Princeton.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Stella is dreaming that her grandfather is a dog while the crows outside of her window wake her up. An aide from the nursing home calls to let Stella know that Donald was checked into the hospital. When Shana asks who it was, Stella lies and says it is girl she knows who wants to walk to school with her. Before Stella leaves, Simon gives Stella a package of Nabisco crackers, the company where he works, and jokes about adopting another daughter.

As Stella walks past the Asian man that is always exercising in the park, she starts to realize how many different paths there are in life. When she gets to English class, Stella finds out they are having a pop quiz. Stella also introduces the reader to a school that is across the ditch from her school, called SELF. This is where the bad kids are sent to school. The kids that attend SELF get out at 1 p.m., so they tend to hang out to gawk at and tease the kids at Stella's school.

Since Stella no longer cares about school, let alone anything else, she doesn't answer any of the pop quiz questions. When Stella looks up, she sees Daniel at the classroom door, trying to get the attention of one of his friends that is in Stella's class. This is when Stella reveals that Daniel and she used to date, and that he is the only boyfriend she has ever had. When the teacher catches Daniel, he hauls Daniel to the principal, even though Daniel doesn't go to school there.

The teacher leaves Stella in charge, but she tells the class to do what they want. The kids end up leaving and Stella decides to leave as well. Stella passes the art room on the way out of school and decides to go into the class, where she finds Ainsley Cleveland is one of the students in the class. Stella watches Ainsley paint a seal and strikes up a conversation with Ainsley. Ainsley asks what Stella is doing there because she isn't in the class and Stella says drawing. Ainsley admits she cannot draw but actually traces and then fills in the details.

Chapter 4 Analysis

After six years of living with the Roths, Stella's relationship with them is exactly the same. Shana still acts as if she is surprised that Stella lives with them, and Simon continues to tell bad jokes with a straight face, which makes it hard for Stella to tell when he is kidding or not.

Ironically, even though Stella sees that there are many different paths you can take in life, she is planning on killing herself. It is especially ironic because Stella understands that there are different ways to deal with her problems, yet she chooses not to form any real bonds or relationships with her foster parents or classmates.



Due to Stella's decision to kill herself, she has a new attitude toward everything in life. While she has always been a straight A student, she purposely flunks her English pop quiz by not answering any of the questions. In light of committing suicide, Stella is evaluating the relationships she has had, as well as the lack of relationships she has had in life. The loss of both of her parents adversely affected Stella in that it holds Stella back from loving and caring about people again because she is afraid of losing them.

Something in Ainsley's character causes Stella to relate to Ainsley. This is what is propelling Stella to form a relationship with Ainsley and to get to know Ainsley better, even though Stella doesn't plan on being around for much longer. There is also foreshadowing that Stella is going to reveal the details of her relationship with Daniel, and that they might even rekindle their romance.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Stella decides to overcome her shyness to approach a boy at her school, Larome Nolans. The rumor around school is Larome tried to sell a gun to an undercover cop. Because of this, Stella decides to try to get a gun through Larome. Larome mistakes her approach as an interest in dating him, so he kisses her. After kissing her, Stella tells him her real reason for approaching him.

While Stella is in the library, the English teacher, Mr. Muthler approaches her. He asks Stella about why the kids in class hate him. Also, he wants to know why she left the class after he left her in charge the previous day. His taking the class's reaction to him as personal reminds Stella of a time when she and her mom saw her third grade teacher shopping in the grocery store.

Stella decides to skip her next class. Before she leaves the library, she realizes one of the pictures hanging on the wall is Ainsley's. Stella is looking forward to discussing the picture with Ainsley.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Stella chooses to break out of her shell in order to accomplish her goal of committing suicide. While Stella thinks she no longer cares and is changing, her planning suicide is just the planning and orderly conduct that Stella is trying to rebel against. Stella realizes she needs a plan for committing suicide and decides that she can shoot herself because she can gain access to a gun via one of her classmates, Larome.

Stella is also seeing that her teachers are real people too. Stella sees that Mr. Muthler is concerned about his popularity with his students, which is something almost all human beings long for - acceptance. When Stella thinks back to her third grade teacher, she realizes that the teacher was lonely, which was why the teacher was trying to seek companionship with Stella's mom.

Stella too seeks this kind of bond with Ainsley. This foreshadows Ainsley and Stella becoming friends. It might just be this friendship that stops Stella from carrying through her suicide plan.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Stella awakens to Shana standing over her bed with the phone, saying there is a man on the phone for Stella. It turns out to be Donald trying to get Stella to come visit him at the hospital. When that doesn't work, Donald calls Stella at school. He tells Stella to bring him two bottles of aspirin and that he'll tell her stories like a grandfather is supposed to tell her.

Before Stella leaves the office, Mr. Frankel calls her into his office. He asks Stella about her skipping drama class. Stella says she doesn't plan on attending again, to which Mr. Frankel thinks she is just being this way because it's the last few weeks of school and that she's already gotten into Princeton. In the middle of the conversation, Mr. Frankel gets a phone call that makes him very angry and causes him to cuss. He explains it's his ex-wife. Stella concludes his wife was having an affair with Mr. Frankel's brother and that they are separating, based on what Mr. Frankel is saying.

When Stella leaves the office, she goes to Ainsley in the art room. The teacher, not realizing Stella isn't enrolled in the class, assigns her and Ainsley as partners to paint each other's portraits. When Stella doesn't like the way Ainsley isn't even trying to draw her properly, Stella shows her how and Ainsley admires at what a good job Stella does in drawing her own eyes.

While they are in art class, the announce the speech winner over the intercom. It's Ainsley. She gets to deliver the speech at graduation instead of having a valedictorian do it. Ashley comes into confront Ainsley about not telling her she entered the contest in all of the times Ainsley helped Ashley with her own speech. Ainsley assures Ashley that Ashley's speech is much better than hers anyway.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Donald and Stella are really living parallel lives, although Donald is old and Stella is young. Both of them feel alone in the world. Both of them want to die. Stella actually has some resentment toward Donald for his want for committing suicide because she feels it will steal the thunder away from her own act of ending her life.

Ainsley and Ashley represent the division of social classes. Ainsley is the quiet one that does whatever Ashley tells her to do. Ainsley doesn't like to be in the spotlight, while Ashley relishes it. Ironically, it is Ainsley who is about to be standing in the spotlight, while it is Ashley that covets the position.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The next morning, when Stella wakes up, she decides to skip on Senior Skip Day to visit Donald in the hospital. She takes the bus there and the doctor says her grandfather is having a psychological evaluation while the doctor escorts her to Donald's room. Donald starts to tell Stella that he doesn't know if her mother is his biological child when the doctor interrupts again. They play like normal granddaughter and grandfather while the doctor is in the room.

When the doctor leaves, Donald resumes his story. Donald tells Stella that when he and her grandmother got back from their honeymoon how her grandmother spent one night out without coming home or telling Donald where she was. He assumed she had a lover. When a friend of the family came to visit, Donald told her that his wife left him and they have an affair. Donald's wife comes home while they are still in bed together.

His wife goes and stays out again all night to pay him back. When she comes back, she makes it clear that she slept with someone else. A month later, she tells him that she's pregnant with Stella's mom, which is why he isn't sure she was his biological daughter.

When Stella gets back to school, she finds a note in her locker. It's Daniel's handwriting saying that he misses her. She keeps reading the note as she attends classes for the rest of the day. She also continues to go back to her locker to see if there are any other notes there.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Donald and Stella both feel that their lives are meaningless and that they want to end them. While Donald vocalizes these feelings to Stella, Stella doesn't share her feelings with anyone. Ironically, Stella feels the same way Donald doesn't, yet she does not sympathize with her grandfather at all.

Daniel putting the note in Stella's locker is the start of a new relationship between the two of them. The relationship between Daniel and Stella represents the two sides of life. While Stella is a straight-A student that always does the right thing, Daniel is a very intelligent boy that doesn't use his full potential to excel in school. Instead, Daniel attends the SELF school for problem children when he is actually very intelligent.

Since Daniel is reaching out to Stella again, this suggests that the two will pick up their relationship from where they left off. This foreshadows the reader finding out about their past relationship while the new one is unfolding.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The night before the first day of finals, Shana tells Stella that she and Simon are going to chaperone the Grad Night dance. The next day, when Stella arrives at school, Daniel is waiting for her at his locker. When she reminds him that it's the first day of finals, she thinks back to the last time she saw him.

Daniel was trying to convince her to skip school to go to Del Mar with him. When she didn't go, Daniel went anyway and he stayed there for awhile. Since they never exchanged phone numbers and don't know where each other live, Stella cannot go looking for Daniel, so their relationship just kind of disintegrates.

Stella also reflects on how there is a manmade ditch in between the two schools. Stella reveals that they met in a SAT prep class, even though both of them scored in the 1400 and 1500s on their practice exams. Daniel convinces Stella to skip the rest of the class to drive around with him. They end up having sex in his car and being together as boyfriend and girlfriend after that.

Within 20 minutes of Daniel and Stella meeting at her locker, they are having sex again in his car. When Stella looks at Daniel, she realizes how much she loves him. Stella thinks back to how her mom loved certain songs and how music influences lives. She thinks this because she and Daniel are listening to the soft station, which is both of their favorites because it reminds them of their childhood.

Daniel and Stella are talking about the meaning of the song on the radio when his pager goes off. Stella admits that Daniel is a drug dealer but that she likes to pretend that he isn't. Daniel says he has to go pick something up, so they go to a guy's house, Lenny, that Stella knows from high school, although he attends community college now. When she sees Lenny hand Daniel a bag full of a white substance, she goes to the bathroom.

Really, she gets her backpack out of Daniel's car and contemplates going home. Instead, she meets Daniel at the door of the house, kisses him and tells him she loves him. He apologizes for doing the pickup in front of her. He writes his pager number on her hand, tells her to page him later and that he'll come to where she is.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Ironically, just as Stella is contemplating ending her life, Shana seems to be trying to be more of a part of Stella's life than ever before. The manmade ditch between the two high schools is symbolic of the divider between the "good" students and the "problem" students. It seems as if Daniel and Stella are seeking solace in one another because of the traumas each of them has experienced in their own lives.

It is also ironic that Stella is in love with a drug dealer when her own parents died of drug overdoses.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Saturday, Stella wakes up at 1 p.m. when she goes downstairs, she overhears Simon and Shana playing a game of who am I? when she peeks around the corner, she sees them slow dancing with their eyes shut, but not holding each other very closely. Stella thinks about how much these two people are still strangers to her even though she has been living with them for the last six years.

She runs out of the house and hears Simon calling after her. Stella thinks about how much she wants to be related to Donald right now as she runs. Stella runs until she finds herself standing in front of the houses where Ainsley and Ashley live because Ashley's car is parked in front of the houses and the two girls are neighbors. A boy in her English class, Darren, asks Stella why she doesn't have shoes on and tells her he can see through her white, damp t-shirt from the rain. He takes off his own short and gives it to Stella.

As they walk toward one of the houses, Darren gives Stella his shoes to wear. When they walk in the house, Stella realizes she is there for a study group. Ashley is surprised to see her and says he thought Stella was dead because she hasn't shown up at finals for the past two days. Stella says she had a 24-hour flu and has a note. Stella claims she is still sick and leaves, going next door to Ainsley's house.

Everything inside of Ainsley's house is white. The framed picture above the couch is a family portrait that includes Ainsley and Ashley as kids, even though they are not related. As the woman who answers the door leads Stella to Ainsley, Stella notices that all of the pictures on the hall wall are of Ashley and not of Ainsley.

In some of the photos, Ainsley is present, but typically in the background. Stella asks Elizabeth, Ainsley's mother, about having Ashley's handprint in plaster. Elizabeth admits that the girls grew up together, are very close and that she considers Ashley to be like her own daughter.

Ainsley looks surprised to see Stella standing in her room. When Stella explains about getting wet and borrowing Darren's shirt, Ainsley gives her the thermal she was wearing in art the other day, telling Stella she can have the shirt. Stella helps Ainsley sort through clothes and accessories, which is apparently stuff that Ainsley is giving away to goodwill. Stella asks what Ainsley put in her speech and Ainsley says not a word of truth.

She says she wrote it as if she is the underdog or an outsider looking in at everyone else living their life. She says she got the idea when she was making Ashley's flashcards for English class about one of the characters in one of the novels. She gives Stella the highlights of the stories the speech contains, but admits that none of the



stories is true. Stella asks Ainsley if she likes Ashley and why. Ainsley says deep down she does and it's because she's great at everything while Ainsley isn't good at anything.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Stella feels the need to belong. This is why she starts to think about how important it is to her that she and Donald are related to one another. Subconsciously, Stella also wants to feel as if she knows and is related to Simon and Shana. Part of the reason Stella has kept their relationship at arm's length is because Stella is afraid of hurting again when and if she loses Simon and Shana, similar to the pain she felt when she lost her biological parents.

The thermal shirt Ainsley gives Stella is a symbol of the connection that bonds the two girls together, at least in Stella's mind. In essence, Ainsley admits that she and Ashley are such good friends because they are so opposite from each other. As Stella walks home with the items Ainsley gave her, she ponders if Ainsley is giving away her things because she plans on killing herself too.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Sunday morning, Stella is in temple with Shana and Simon. The night before, when she got home, Stella enjoys being home alone. When she hears the garage door go up, she runs up to her room to pretend she's sleeping. She's still wearing the thermal top and pearl necklace Ainsley gave to her. On Sunday morning, when Stella hears the garage door go up, she feels compelled to go to temple with them and tells them she wants to go.

Because they have to walk into services late, Stella can tell that Shana feels very uncomfortable. The first thing Stella thinks of in temple is Ainsley, and if she's planning to kill herself how Stella won't try to stop her. Stella thinks back to a conversation she had with a woman at an ice cream shop, and an article Stella once read in one of her mom's magazines about how each person experiences the best times of their lives at different times.

After temple, Stella follows Shana and Simon into the room where they eat. She runs into John, a boy from drama class with bad acne. After talking to him for a few minutes, she tells Stella and Simon she's going to catch the bus to visit her grandfather and leaves.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Shana is a creature of habit. She might even have obsessive compulsive disorder, which causes her to like things as routine as possible. This is why she is so uncomfortable when Stella comes to live with them and when anything doesn't go according to plan. It seems as if Stella is seeking religion in the last days of her life.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

When Stella wakes up on Monday, she has the feeling you have when you know it's going to be your last Monday doing something. When Stella gets to school, she sees Daniel in his car. He pulls her in on his lap. He tells her it's supposed to be his last day of school. Daniel drives to the Woodflower community pool with Stella still sitting on her lap.

They jump the fence and then jump into the pool. When they start to make out in the pool, Daniel says he doesn't have a condom. Stella lies saying she went on birth control. After they have sex, Daniel says he talked his mother into spending some of the money from his dad leaving to rent a condo in Del Mar for the summer. He invites Stella to go with him. He also mentions that he has enough money from dealing for them to do some things too. He asks Stella what she's doing for the summer.

Daniel says he has to go back to school to take a cumulative exam at 10 a.m. Stella asks Daniel what he wants to be when he grows up. When he asks Stella the same thing, she says dead. Daniel mistakenly thinks she's kidding. Daniel writes his number down on a piece of paper this time because Stella says his number washed off. When Daniel drops Stella off, he tells her she should drive down to Del Mar on Thursday after graduation, and Stella agrees.

When Stella arrives at the home, Lupe, the receptionist, shows Stella a crude picture her grandfather drew. Lupe tells Stella she's sorry that she has a grandfather like Donald. Stella hugs Lupe, thanking her for everything and telling Lupe she's been like a mother to Stella. Stella finds Donald standing in his closet in his room. He says he thought she was Gumer, who check son him every 30 minutes now.

Donald asks Stella if she has anything for him. When she says no, he says he has something for her. He gives her a box with envelopes in it. He says each time he slept with a woman, Katherine, his wife put one of the envelopes under his pillow. As they talk, Stella removes the object from each envelope, which ranges from a business card for a dentist to a shard of amber-colored glass. When Donald says something that makes Stella angry, she cuts him with the shard of glass.

Donald asks if Stella is volunteering to kill him. She asks why he doesn't kill himself. He shows her that he can't grip the shard firm enough and create enough pressure to do it. Stella agrees to help him. She leaves when Gumer comes in and tells Donald she'll see him on Thursday.



Chapter 11 Analysis

In Stella's case, she knows that it is going to be the last Monday that she's alive. Since Stella plans on killing herself, it doesn't matter to her if she has sex with Daniel without a condom. She's not worried about getting pregnant or catching a disease because she plans on being dead by next week anyway. It seems as if Stella agrees to drive to Del Mar to appease Daniel, since she really has no intention of being alive after graduation.

Donald keeps expecting Stella to bring him pills or something he can use to commit suicide. Stella finally realizes why Donald needs her help to kill himself. She relents and decides to help him.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

When Stella arrives at school the next day, the school has been transformed into an Arabian nights theme for Grad Night. Stella glances around as she sees a bunch of kids passing around yearbooks for signing. When Stella gets to the library, she finds Larome there trying to get his yearbook from the teacher, who tells him he can't have it until he pays the money he owes.

Stella goes to English class to take her final. She has a photographic memory, like her dad, so she works through each test question one by one. Stella finishes 30 minutes early and takes a nap until the bell rings. Mr. Muthler asks Stella to stay behind to talk to her about the essay she wrote the week before about the way the English classroom smells. She confirms that she took today's test seriously and leaves.

Stella finds Ainsley in the art room. She feels happy as if she has found a long lost stuffed animal. Ainsley notices Stella is wearing the pearls Ainsley gave her. The two girls talk and agree to meet the following day to go on the fieldtrip to the zoo. Stella then goes to her drama class. Mr. Nichols tells Stella she isn't welcome because she isn't a receptive audience. Stella throws her imaginary beach ball at Mr. Nichols, which lightens him up. He offers to allow Stella to be the stagehand while everyone is performing their final projects.

Stella starts to count down her final minutes and seconds of school and her life. When Stella leaves school, she meets Shana parked in her car where Shana said she would pick Stella up to shop for dresses for the Grad Night dance.

Stella asks about Shana's day. Shana said Simon fainted at work so he had tests run at the hospital. She says they'll get the test results tomorrow and that she's trying to talk Simon into taking a vacation. As they shop at the mall, Shana gets angry with Stella because of Stella's indifference. Shana says that since the day that Stella stepped foot in their home, she has been judging them on everything that she and Simon do.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Stella is going through the mundane routine of the last few days of school. Although Stella plans to commit suicide, she still finds happiness in the time that she spends with Ainsley. Stella has no intention of attending the zoo fieldtrip the following day. Since she is counting down the minutes and seconds she has left in school, it infers that she plans on killing herself tonight.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Stella meets Ainsley at the school the next day. They board the bus and go to the zoo. While they're walking through the zoo, Ainsley admits that she's planning to leave before graduation, before she gives her speech. Stella gives her the address of Daniel's condo and says they can stay there for the summer. Stella tells her she can get a summer job at SeaWorld to realize her dream of training and swimming with the dolphins. When they get to the exhibit of the red panda. The sign says it's hard for them to spot the red panda because it hides night and day. Stella points out that Ainsley is like the red panda because she will not be spotted at graduation the following day.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Stella is wrapping up loose ends. She feels good about the fact that she has given Ainsley a place to stay for the summer. She thinks that Ainsley and Daniel might even be able to form a friendship or a bond of some sort before they realize that Stella isn't going to show up for the summer. The red panda is a metaphor for Ainsley because she is as elusive and rare as the red panda is in nature.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Stella meets Lenny, the drug dealer, on Thursday morning. She hands him two thousand dollars in cash for eight grams of freebase. She cashed in her savings bonds at the bank the day before. She asks Lenny to throw in a pipe for the extra two hundred dollars she's paying him. She takes the drugs to the home, where she tells her grandfather she has something for both of them. He pulls a quote from Seneca to include in his suicide note.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The implication is that Stella buys enough drugs for herself and Donald to overdose. Stella helps Donald prepare his suicide note, which includes a quote that man should live as long as he wants rather than as long as he can. The ending infers that they both overdose on drugs. Ironically, Stella has hated drugs since both of her parents died because of it and she chose this way to die herself. It symbolizes her solidarity with her parents, even though Stella doesn't agree with their drug use in the first place.



Characters

Stella

Stella is the main character of the novel. She is a senior in high school who is writing down the events and memories during her last two weeks of high school. Stella also intends on committing suicide, so it is also the last two weeks of her life that she is documenting. When Stella was eleven, her parents both died of drug overdoses during her birthday party.

Stella came to live with her foster parents, the Roths, at that time. She has been living with them ever since. Stella has been accepted into Princeton University, which she plans on attending the college in the fall. Stella is very smart, attractive and has always been a diligent student.

Once Stella decides to kill herself, however, she decides that she doesn't have to play by the rules anymore. Since she lost her parents, Stella also avoids forming bonds and relationships with people. So, while everyone knows who she is and she knows who everyone is, she doesn't really have any close friends.

During the last two weeks of school, however, Stella reaches out to a couple of her classmates. One, Ainsley, she befriends. The other, Larome, is in hopes that he can obtain a gun for her to use in her suicide. Stella also rekindles her romance with Daniel and agrees to spend the summer with him and his mom at a rented condo at the beach, even though she doesn't attend on being alive long enough to meet Daniel there.

Shana Roth

Shana Roth is Stella's foster mother. From Stella's point of view, Shana always seems startled to see Stella. This happens from their first sight of each other when social services drops each other off, up until the last day of Stella's life. Stella thinks Shana is quirky and strange.

Shana reveals while shopping for graduation night dresses that she has felt uncomfortable with Stella since Stella arrived. Shana claims that Stella always looks at her with such disapproval that Shana has never felt as close to Stella and she should be as her mother.

Shana is a creature of habit, however. She does the same things and the same way over and over again. Shana and her husband, Simon, are Jewish so they also attend temple on a weekly basis. when Stella tells Shana that she would like to visit her grandfather instead of attending temple, Shana agrees to allow Stella to do this.



Simon Roth

Simon Roth is Shana's husband. He is also Stella's foster father. Simon is the type of person that is always cracking jokes. He does it with such a straight face, however, that Stella cannot determine when he is joking or being serious. Simon works as a product development person for Nabisco.

Donald

Donald is Stella's biological grandfather. He is her mother's father. Stella thinks that Donald is a terrible person. He is living in an assisted living facility. One day, when Stella goes to visit Donald, she finds him trying to drown himself in his shower. Throughout the novel, he begs Stella to bring him something so that he can kill himself.

When Donald is in the hospital, he tells Stella that he isn't even sure that her mother was his daughter. He tells about the affairs that he and his wife Katherine had on each other. He also gives Stella a box of envelopes. Each envelope contains an item that Katherine would slip under Donald's pillow each time he would cheat on her with another woman.

Ainsley

Ainsley is a fellow senior at Stella's school. Ainsley is the best friend of Ashley, who is one of the smartest and prettiest girls in Stella's class. Ainsley, however, is the direct opposite of Ashley, so Ainsley is quiet. Stella chooses to befriend Ainsley during the last two weeks of school.

Ainsley and Stella become friends while Stella is crashing Ainsley's art class. Ainsley also wins the contest to be able to give the speech at the graduation ceremony. Ainsley confides in Stella that she is going to leave before graduation so Stella gives Ainsley the address to the condo where Daniel is staying for the summer so that Ainsley can go there. Stella compares Ainsley to the red panda at the zoo, because everyone will be looking for Ainsley at graduation but Ainsley won't be in sight.

Ashley

Ashley is one of the prettiest and smartest girls in school. She and Stella have the same AP classes and the same GPA. Ashley is also Ainsley's best friend. By the end of the novel, Ashley no longer wants to hang around with Ainsley, even though the girls have been friends and neighbors since they were small.



Larome

Larome is one of the only African-American guys at Stella's school. the rumor is that Larome spent time in juvie for trying to sell a gun to an undercover officer. When Stella decides to kill herself, she goes to Larome to try to get a gun. He misunderstands her intentions and kisses Stella instead.

Mr. Nichols

Mr. Nichols is Stella's drama teacher. When Stella refuses to pretend like she is playing with a beach ball during class, he sends Stella to the principal's office. At the end of the novel, Mr. Nichols allows Stella to attend the last day of class because she pretends that she is playing with the beach ball, so Mr. Nichols takes it as her way of apologizing to him.

Mr. Frankel

Mr. Frankel is the high school principal. He seems to be going through a divorce because his wife cheated with his brother. He has an outburst in his office after getting off the phone with his wife, while Stella is sitting in his office. Mr. Frankel thinks that Stella just has a case of senioritis because she has already been accepted to Princeton. He tries to get Stella to change her behavior so that she doesn't lose her acceptance.

Daniel

Daniel is the one and only boyfriend Stella has ever had. She met Daniel when they were both taking a SAT prep course. He is very smart, but he is also a drug dealer. His behavior forces him to go to a special high school for delinquents, which is right across from the regular high school. Stella loses her virginity to Daniel. While the two are broken up, they rekindle their relationship before the novel ends and Daniel invites Stella to spend the summer at a beach condo with him.



Objects/Places

Orange County, California

Orange County, California is the primary setting of the novel. This area is made up of suburban neighborhoods and communities that are planned and wealthy. This is where Stella goes to live after her parents die and she moves in with the Roths. One of the things that strikes Stella during the last few weeks of her life is how everything in the area is so routine.

STEP

Step is a special high school where delinquents attend. The school is right across the creek from the regular high school. STEP is where Daniel attends school. even though Daniel is very intelligent, he has bad behavior and doesn't apply himself in school. Additionally, the students that attend STEP are released for the day a 1 pm, so they typically taunt the regular high school students after their release.

Note

Stella finds a note in her locker that says someone misses her. Stella recognizes the handwriting as Daniel's writing. She continues to read the note over and over again throughout the rest of the day. This is the note that rekindles the relationship between Stella and Daniel.

Daniel's Pontiac

Daniel's Pontiac is where Stella and Daniel have sex for the first time together. They continue to have sex in the car when they rekindle their relationship. Daniel often parks the car somewhere and they listen to their favorite radio station and talk about how the songs remind them on their childhood.

Assisted Living Facility

The assisted living facility is where Donald lives. Stella goes there once or twice a week to visit Donald. It is while he is in the assisted living facility that Donald tries to drown himself. At the end of the novel, Stella takes the drugs she buys to the assisted living facility so that she can help Donald kill himself while she also kills herself.



Zoo

The senior class trip is to the zoo. It is while at the zoo that Ainsley and Stella visit the red panda exhibit. Stella compares Ainsley to the red panda because everyone will be looking for Ainsley to give her speech at the graduation ceremony, but Ainsley won't be there.

Envelopes

Donald gives Stella a box full of envelopes. Each envelope contains an item in it. Donald explains that his wife Katherine slipped the envelope under his pillow each time he had an affair. The envelopes contain items such as a business card and a shard of glass.

8 Grams Freebase

Stella buys 8 grams of freebase and a pipe from Lenny, a drug dealer, at the end of the novel. Stella takes the 8 grams of freebase and the pipe to the assisted living facility. She plans to help Donald overdose on drugs, while she also overdoses on the drugs to end both of their lives.

Del Mar, California

Del Mar, California is where Daniel runs off to, which is what initially breaks him and Stella up. It is also where Daniel convinces his mom to rent a beach condo for the summer. Daniel invites Stella to spend the summer with him in Del Mar.

Pearl Necklace

Ainsley gives Stella a pearl necklace when she's cleaning out her stuff. The pearl necklace was a gift from Ainsley's grandmother. Stella wears the pearl necklace for the rest of the novel.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The two primary relationships the novel tackles are romantic relationships and relationships between friends.

Friendship is one of the primary types of relationships the novel tackles. Even though Stella knows a lot of people, they are more her acquaintances than they are her friends. Stella decides to change this during the last two weeks of high school and her life. This propels Stella to form a friendship with Ainsley. It is the one and only true friendship that Stella has before she kills herself.

The novel also touches upon romantic relationships. Daniel is the only guy Stella ever dates, kisses, and has sex with in her life. She realizes in the last two weeks, however, that she really does love Daniel. Her love for Daniel, however, is not enough to keep Stella from killing herself. The author also briefly highlights the romantic relationship between Shana and Simon Roth. Stella eavesdrops on them and sees them touching for one of the only times since she moved in with them. The Roths are dancing and laughing together, but Stella sees their relationship as less intimate than her own parents were when they were alive.

Finally, the romance between Stella's biological parents is also revealed. Stella says she always thinks of how romantic it is that they loved each other so much that they even died together. Her parents overdosed on drugs and both of their hearts stopped within seconds of each other.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as losing both parents to a drug overdose. Stella struggles with the aftermath of both her parents dying. Because of this fact, Stella has a hard time forming bonds and relationships with other people. Instead, Stella's coming of age forces her to focus on what the right things to do are, including getting good grades and getting accepted into Princeton.

Stella tries to bury her feelings about her loss by throwing herself into her school work and doing what is expected of her. She concludes that life is just a mundane routine that she no longer wishes to be a part of, so she plots to kill herself at the end of her senior year, right before she attends the graduation ceremony. Stella also faces the fact that the only family she has left is Donald, even though she thinks he is a complete jerk.



Stella comes to realize that she and Donald are more alike than they are different. In the end, Stella succumbs to Donald's wishes. She helps him kill himself and then she kills herself.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—Stella's biological family, and then her foster family. While every family has their trials and tribulations, each of Stella's families has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, Stella realizes that her only true family is her grandfather Donald and that she is responsible for him.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view from the perspective of the main character, Stella. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Stella. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Stella's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. 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 other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel takes place in Orange County, California during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the daily life of living out the last two weeks of their senior year of high school.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the main character is planning to kill herself right before the graduation ceremony. However, as events unfold, the suicide is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

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

Structure

The novel is divided into 14 chapters. Each chapter ranges from 10 to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel. The narrator switches back and forth between the past and the present.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships—romantic ones and friendships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Stella. Another subplot is family.



Quotes

"My name is Stella and my favorite animal is a porcupine" (Chapter 1, p. 20).

"Spilled what? What did you spill, Lance" (Chapter 2, p. 25).

"This is our new child, yes" (Chapter 3, p. 35).

"Then what are you doing here" (Chapter 4, p. 80).

"I pulled you aside because I wanted to know if you could get me a gun" (Chapter 5, p. 90).

"Ainsley, you're giving the speech at graduation! That's phenomenal" (Chapter 6, p. 117).

"This is the tragedy of man. The end" (Chapter 7, p. 125).

"I'm sorry. Man, I shouldn't have been doing that around you" (Chapter 8, p. 159).

"Oh my god, Stella! I thought you were dead" (Chapter 9, p. 171).

"You know when you've had the best days of your life" (Chapter 10, p. 190).

"Sometimes I get the feeling that you don't want to invest in things, because you're not sure what you'll get for your efforts" (Chapter 11, p. 209).

"Let's sit together" (Chapter 12, p. 242).

"You're like the red panda. Tomorrow everybody will be staring at the crowd and looking for you and you won't even be there" (Chapter 13, p. 273).

"The wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can" (Chapter 14, p. 280).



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Stella? Why do you think she decides to kill herself? Do you think Stella realizes she is the one that has cut people out of her life and not made an attempt to get close to anyone? What do you think happens to Stella after she helps Donald write his suicide note?

Discuss the relationship between Stella and Shana. Why do you think Stella assumes Shana forgets that Stella lives in the house? Why do you think Stella never attempts to form a bond with Shana? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Stella feel about Shana? How does Shana feel about Stella? How do Stella's feelings change after Shana yells at her at the mall?

Discuss the relationship between Stella and Ainsley. Are they best friends, acquaintances or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Stella feel about Ainsley? How does Ainsley feel about Stella? How do Stella's feelings change? What does she do about it? What happens to Ainsley?

Discuss the relationship between Stella and Daniel. Are they friends, lovers or boyfriend and girlfriend? Is there true competition in their relationship? Why do you think Stella doesn't tell Daniel about her plans to commit suicide? Why does Stella agree to go to the beach house when she knows she's not going to go?

Who is the true Donald? Why do you think he is so horrible? Do you think he tells Stella the stories he does to make her hate him? Do you think Donald kills himself in the end?

Who is Ainsley? Is she a tortured soul or just a girl that gets lost in the shadow of her best friend, Ashley? Why do you think she befriends Stella? What role does Ainsley play in helping Stella change her life?

Discuss Stella's plan to kill herself. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?