

My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, and Fenway Park Study Guide

My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, and Fenway Park by Steve Kluger

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Plot Summary

"My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, and Fenway Park" is a young adult novel by Steve Kluger, and focuses around the freshman year and lives of three kids living in Massachusetts.

Anthony "T.C." Keller is an all-American kind of kid. He is admired a lot. He is kind and also misses his mother, who has been dead for years. T.C. is best friends with a kid named Augie Hwong, who is an American-born Chinese student. Augie, who discovers that he is gay, has a penchant for theater and the performing arts. T.C., meanwhile, discovers he is in love with Alejandra Perez, a new student at the school.

Alejandra is beautiful and aloof, her father being the former ambassador to Mexico. Alejandra is being groomed for diplomacy, but she has her heart set on dance and theater. While Augie takes over the school talent show, and enlists Alejandra to participate, Alejandra is falling bit by bit for T.C., who is determined to go out with her.

By the end of freshman year, Augie is dating a boy named Andy Wexler, and Alejandra and T.C. are dating each other. Augie has decided to be a director and choreographer, while Alejandra has convinced her parents to let her go into theater. C.T., meanwhile, helps his single father find love in the form of Lori, a school counselor. C.T.'s father adopts a six year-old kid named Hucky who is deaf, and whom C.T. takes on as a little brother. C.T. himself has decided to go into politics.



Chapter 1 - 8

Chapter 1 - 8 Summary

Anthony "T.C." Keller is writing his 11th grade English assignment that will be attached to his college application, which he calls "My Most Excellent Year." T.C. lives in Boston, and he recounts his family history as being closely-tied to baseball. His father, Theodore is a world-famous batter, who now owns and runs a construction company. T.C. has a good friend named Augie, whom he considers a brother. He meets Augie when they are in first grade, just after T.C.'s mother dies. Augie lives in the Kennedy half of Brookline. They enjoy racing bikes. T.C. briefly mentions his ninth-grade year, which is his most excellent year, a year he was drop-kicked by a six year-old and the girl of his dreams.

Augie Hwong is also writing his 11th grade English essay about his most excellent year. His mother escaped persecution in China, while his father is an American-born Chinese. His mother is a cultural critic, and reviews plays, social events, symphonies, and other such things. After Augie and T.C. begin talking, they become fast friends. Augie recounts the first time T.C., or Tick as Augie calls him, notices Alejandra, the daughter of the ambassador to Mexico.

Alejandra Perez is writing her 11th grade English essay. Alejandra reveals her brother, twenty-five, is being groomed for diplomatic service, while she does not conform to her parents' idea of an ideal daughter. She is a social rights activist in the making, but wants to be a dancer. Alejandra's father retires to live in Brookline, Massachusetts, to teach at Harvard.

While studying Anne Frank in 9th grade, students are encouraged to keep a diary, and to name the diary. T.C. names his "Mama". T.C. reveals he is a B-student, that after his mother died, he and his father built a full replica of Fenway Park. T.C. is working to have Buck Weaver's name cleared of the 1919 World Series cheating scandal. T.C. reveals that Augie is gay, but Augie doesn't realize it yet. T.C., meanwhile, leaves a note for Alejandra in her locker, telling her he wants to go out with her, but Alejandra rejects him for the time being. Augie, however, strikes up a quick friendship with Alejandra. They both join the Young Democrats at school, but it doesn't impress Alejandra.

Meanwhile, T.C.'s adviser, Lori Mahoney, wants to know why an A student like TC is getting Bs. Lori suspects T.C.'s father is a big influence on him not doing better, and T.C.'s father is looking for a date with Lori.

Augie names his diary "Liza" after Liza Minnelli. Augie reveals he has been picked to direct the talent show. Augie feels a lot of anxiety over having been selected. Alejandra agrees to help Augie with the show provided Augie doesn't try to set her up with T.C. Augie's father is revealed to be the owner of a book store. Augie, meanwhile, becomes friends with Andy Wexler, whom he believes has a great smile.



Craig, Augie's father, writes to T.C.'s father, Ted, to ask Ted for advice about Augie being gay, and how to approach it. Ted replies that perhaps Augie doesn't know it himself yet.

Alejandra names her diary "Jacqueline" after John F. Kennedy's wife. She talks about the choice Jackie made -that John was the best of the Kennedys- and that she herself has limited options when it comes to boys. Alejandra doesn't include T.C. on the list because she feels he is too reckless and overconfident. In terms of dancing, Clint tells Alejandra to be honest with her father, and not to lie to him about what she is studying at the Lycee Francaise on Saturdays.

Meanwhile, Alejandra helps Augie begin working on audition advertising for the talent show, and Alejandra begin exchanging e-mails about Augie and Andy liking each other. Clint tells Alejandra that it's alright to make mistakes, to let people in, to ask for help -and she'll be easier to be friends with. Alejandra also speaks to Lee Meyerhoff, taking Clint's advice.

T.C. continues working on his website, "Free Buck Weaver". He is interviewed by SportsAmerica magazine for an article about Buck Weaver. T.C. also notices that his father and Lori seem to be getting closer, as they mention one another frequently. T.C. also e-mails Phyllis, the operator of Augie's father's bookstore, "The Word Shop", to find out what books Alejandra has been purchasing. T.C. has decided to memorize one of John F. Kennedy's speeches in order to impress Alejandra at the talent show.

T.C. also wonders in his diary if his mother isn't helping him out still. T.C.'s father and Lori agree to go out on a date.

Chapter 1 - 8 Analysis

Steve Kluger begins his young adult novel "My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, and Baseball" with three college application essays, one from each of the main characters in the book. Each character will tell his or her own story as the novel progresses, with each story overlapping, supporting, and being supported by the others. The novel then takes the form of diary entries by each of the main characters, from their freshman year in high school.

In typical fashion, Alejandra -the new girl- is beautiful and aloof, and catches T.C.'s eye immediately. For T.C., it is love at first sight, and he tells his best friend (whom he calls his brother) about this. Augie is not surprised that T.C. wants Alejandra. All the other boys seem to want her as well. Augie, however, is gay, though he doesn't know it yet. Alejandra has her own issues to overcome. She seems to be cold and distant based on her upbringing, and so she takes the advice of her best friend -her Secret Service agent- to try to loosen up and open up a little more to those around her. It is sound, and successful advice.

In terms of C.T. and Alejandra, a classic American love story arc can be seen: the streetwise kid with a heart of gold who stands to inherit a small construction company, and the beautiful, charming, and independent daughter of diplomatic royalty. In a larger



sense, the American dynamic demonstrates that characters with such disparate backgrounds can fall in love, and Americans are bound by no restrictions. Indeed, for Alejandra, C.T.'s humble background is never an issue, and Alejandra's lofty familial position is likewise not something that C.T. thinks puts her out of his league. He is in love with her, and that is that. The only thing that would potentially put Alejandra out of C.T.'s league is if Alejandra rejects him.

Between the three characters, Kluger creates three distinct people with three distinct personalities and backgrounds. This leads to their approach of life and love from three different directions -but all those directions are headed toward the same center, though in different ways and for different reasons. Each of the characters -their backgrounds, in particular- are missing something. They are incomplete. Their meeting means that they will become complete in the fullness of time (Alejandra not wanting to be cold and distant, for example, a path away from which would be C.T.).

At the same time, reader learn early on that Augie's parents could care less whether or not he is gay; and readers also learn that C.T.'s father has his eye on Lori, a guidance counselor at school. Readers learn that C.T. and his father, Ted, have a good relationship as father and son, and C.T. will do anything to make sure his father is happy again, including playing Cupid between Ted and Lori.



Chapter 9 - 16

Chapter 9 - 16 Summary

Augie is coming around to the fact that he's gay, and cannot stop thinking about Andy. Augie asks T.C. what he thinks, and T.C. says he already knew Augie was gay. He begins choosing a different diva every week to call his diary. It is also revealed that Lee is spying for both T.C. and Augie. Lee directs Augie to seek out Alejandra while she is at dance at the Lycee. Augie wants her to perform the closing act of the talent show. Alejandra won't, because she doesn't want her parents to discover her secret life as a dancer.

Craig and Ted e-mail each other about Augie's first date, and Ted's first date with Lori.

Alejandra puts together the schedule for the show. She will indeed be performing a vocal and dance routine to "The Music and the Mirror" because Augie had the programs printed up without her knowing. The reaction is positive and overwhelming, and Alejandra becomes more and more popular because of her name appearing on the program. When Alejandra thinks of T.C. watching her perform, it makes her nervous. Clint, as well as Augie's mom, Lisa Wei, tell her she should do it.

That night, Alejandra nervously waits for her turn, and watches T.C. deliver Kennedy's inaugural address. She realizes he is doing it for her. Alejandra then goes on to perform, and afterwards, cries from the sheer emotional release. She takes first prize in the show, and goes out for dinner with Augie, Augie's parents, T.C. and his father, Andy, and Lee. Alejandra and T.C. dance. Alejandra and Lee go to watch T.C. play baseball the following day, and Lee insists T.C. is very attractive. The school, meanwhile, begins organizing for a production of "Kiss Me, Kate", and they want Alejandra to play the lead of Lilli Vanessi.

T.C. and Augie counsel one another on the progression of their love lives. T.C., meanwhile, befriends a six-year old deaf kid at the baseball field named Hucky Harper, who lives in an institute because his mother cannot take care of him. Hucky seems to have an innate, almost intuitive knowledge of baseball, and T.C. wants to be able to communicate with him. T.C. goes to Lori to ask her about learning sign language. T.C. sees himself in Huck, and wants to reach out to him. T.C. goes to visit Hucky at the Boston Institute for the Deaf. Ted invites Lori over for Thanksgiving dinner.

Augie reveals that T.C. is forcing him to take sign language. Augie and Andy, meanwhile, continue getting closer. Thanksgiving at Augie's house rolls around. Lori swings by, and talks to T.C.'s father. They agree to go to a Celtics game together. Andy also attends the dinner, and the entire family has figured Augie out by then. Hucky also attends the dinner, and T.C. and Augie attempt to bring Hucky out of his shell.



Alejandra writes to California about plans to make a Japanese World War II internment camp an historical site. Alejandra dreams about T.C. not being able to find his mother. By December, the things that once annoyed Alejandra about T.C., such as his fierce Boston accent, she has come to like. Lee recognizes that Alejandra is falling for T.C. She finds T.C. at the Word Shop, teaching Hucky how to spell. Alejandra sits down with them. She goes with them to the park to watch them play baseball. Alejandra asks T.C. if he wouldn't mind attending the auditions to watch her.

At breakfast, Alejandra's parents ask her if she's figured out how she wants to spend the coming summer, that maybe she should intern at the French Embassy. Carlos tells them they should ask her how she wants to spend it. Carlos also tells Alejandra he's been covering for her at the dance school, so their parents don't see the classes she's taking. Alejandra then goes to the "Kiss Me, Kate" auditions. She gets the part of Lilli.

SportsAmerica publishes its article about Buck Weaver, and its interview with T.C. There are even photos of T.C. and his dad. T.C., meanwhile, continues to reach out to Huck, and they watch *Mary Poppins*. T.C. commits to helping Alejandra get a baseball diamond built at Manzanar in California by creating a website. Hucky, meanwhile, has been given permission to go away to Vermont with T.C. and his friends and family on their Christmas ski trip. Hucky is becoming like a little brother to T.C. Hucky spends the night with T.C. and his father, but in the middle of the night, Hucky wakes up crying, and T.C. finally comforts him and gets him to go back to sleep. Augie theorizes that perhaps Hucky is waiting for his mother to rescue him. Ted invites Lori to come with them to Vermont, from December 26 to the 30.

Augie, Alejandra, and T.C. compose a letter to Julie Andrews about writing a letter to Hucky. Augie knows he will miss Andy when Augie goes to Vermont, and Andy goes to Ohio. Augie and his family get ready for the Vermont trip to Briar Hearth Inn. Augie is also aware that T.C. is going to tell Alejandra that they should just be friends, which should make her fall in love with him. Augie and T.C. take turns caring for Hucky at night during Hucky's outbursts. Lori later meets everyone at the lodge.

For Christmas, T.C. buys Alejandra a rare copy of a book about John F. Kennedy called "The Burden and the Glory". She and T.C. continue on with their plans to restore the Manzanar baseball field. Back at school, "Kiss Me, Kate" rehearsals begin. Hucky even knows that Alejandra likes T.C., and Alejandra doesn't know how to respond. Carlos comes to a rehearsal unannounced, and he is very impressed with his sister's talents. Meanwhile, Andy and Augie appear to have broken up, and neither Alejandra nor T.C. can find out why. T.C. tries the "let's be friends" routine on Alejandra, but it fails: she already knows about it.

Augie later confesses that his breakup had to do with gender issues between him and Andy. T.C. also fills in Alejandra about his life, about growing up, and his mother teaching him how to ride a bike just before she died.



Chapter 9 - 16 Analysis

Slowly, Augie begins to realize that he is gay (as if his obsession with women's fashion and divas were not enough of a giveaway already), and it is something that T.C., like Augie's parents, freely accepts. There is no hint of judgment against Augie from T.C. Whereas T.C. and Augie have a brotherly relationship, Ted and Augie's father, Craig, also seem to have something of a brotherly relationship. Craig seeks advice about guiding his son from Ted, and Ted seeks advice from Craig about dating -and both men exchange casual stories as well.

Augie himself has decided to play matchmaker, vowing to help T.C. in his pursuit of Alejandra. Augie, who is managing the talent show, seeks to involve Alejandra in the process. Alejandra, who hides her love of dance and performance from her parents, is hesitant to help at first, but then ultimately has no choice when Augie includes her in the talent show program. Hoping to impress Alejandra, T.C. decides to recite a Kennedy speech in the talent show. Interesting enough, the talent show -meant for students to show off their talents- gives Augie, T.C., and Alejandra to show the world who they truly are. T.C. has a knack for politics, and is definitely a people-person; Augie has a knack for production and direction; and Alejandra has a knack for dance and performance. Indeed, Alejandra's performance is so emotionally-invested that she ends up crying afterward.

The talent show, also serves to bring T.C., Alejandra, and Augie even closer together. It also brings into the fold a close female friend for Alejandra, Lee, who is also secretly working to bring together Alejandra and T.C. Step by step. Alejandra is falling for T.C. But just as T.C. and Alejandra are getting closer, Augie and Andy appear to have had differences over Augie's gender ideas, and they break up.

The talent show proves to be a catalyst for each of the characters, as not only do they grow closer, but each learns more about the other two. Alejandra discovers that T.C. is not just some typical girl-chasing teenager, but someone who is sincere and heartfelt, and learning about how much T.C. misses and idolizes his mother, brings Alejandra closer to him.

T.C. also meets Hucky, a deaf six-year old with a penchant for baseball. Hucky reminds T.C. of himself when he was six, and determines that he will become a force for good in Hucky's life. Alejandra and Augie also come along for the ride, discovering that they have the ability to change Hucky's life.



Chapter 17 - 22

Chapter 17 - 22 Summary

Julie Andrews writes back to Alejandra, T.C., and Augie for Hucky. They decide to keep the letter for when Hucky is older, because they are trying to find a way to tell him what happens in the movie "Mary Poppins" isn't real, and Julie Andrews's letter is beautiful but fantastical. Augie also lets T.C. know that Andy was apparently ashamed of Augie's flamboyancy, and T.C. says he'll beat up Andy. T.C. decides he wants to name a star after Hucky when they go to Plum Island. T.C. is learning more and more about Hucky, who, for example, hates the Backstreet Boys but likes 'N Sync.

The trip to Plum Island begins, and Lori comes along. So do Alejandra and Augie, who sing all the songs from "Kiss Me, Kate" on the drive to the water. That night, when T.C. names a star for Hucky, he begins crying quietly, and Alejandra holds his hand. T.C. thanks his mom, believing it was a gift from his mom.

Andy emails Augie apologizing, and telling Augie he loves him. Phyllis advises Augie to let Andy sweat for a little while after what happened. They have a long talk about what happened, and they agree to try again. Andy teaches Augie about football so Augie can connect with his father on a better level. Augie and T.C. continue to get closer to Hucky, who becomes more and more friendly, and has fewer and fewer night terrors. Augie even writes a history of the tooth fairy for Hucky.

Augie and Alejandra plot what to do for T.C.'s birthday. Augie wants to do a surprise party and get him tickets to a baseball game; and Alejandra has officially named a star after him. While shopping for Valentine's Day, Augie and Andy kiss.

Alejandra realizes her idolization of Jackie Kennedy has been more damaging than beneficial. Alejandra then decides to begin writing to Mary Poppins. Alejandra reveals that she and T.C. have been out on three dates, but T.C. doesn't know that they were dates. The fliers for "Kiss Me, Kate" have been printed up, and have been distributed all over the city. Alejandra at last tells her parents she wants to go to performing arts college, but her father will have none of it. He expects her to become a member of the embassy. Clint also arranges for tickets for Alejandra and T.C., as a gift from Augie.

Meanwhile, C.T. and Alejandra enlist more help for their campaign for a baseball field at Manzanar. C.T. and Alejandra decide to go and see the film "Love Actually". They kiss twice.

T.C. takes Hucky on a trip to New York's Shubert Theater to meet Julie Andrews with Augie's guidance. T.C. pretends Julie Andrews is his aunt, and the guard waves him in. After the show, Julie Andrews speaks with Hucky and T.C., having remembered them from the letter she wrote. While Julie Andrews is talking to Hucky, Augie calls to ask how everything is going, and T.C. puts Liza Minnelli on the phone to talk to Augie. Julie



Andrews tells T.C. that she has explained to Hucky that Mary Poppins only comes to live with children who have been left alone, but Hucky isn't alone because he has T.C.

Back in his essay for college, Augie recounts how much more popular Alejandra became after "Kiss Me, Kate", and how her professional theater career began. Augie has decided to become a director and a choreographer. He stayed with Andy.

The male lead in "Kiss Me, Kate" has a mother who is a talent agent, and who offers to represent Alejandra. Alejandra's parents come around to accepting her decision to go into theater, and she becomes a cultural talking point among dignitaries and diplomats. She has decided to attend Emerson College because she wants to be near T.C. T.C. is going into politics, Alejandra reveals.

T.C.'s father formally adopts Hucky, and he and T.C. make Hucky a bedroom. Hucky and Julie Andrews continue corresponding. T.C.'s father and Lori have officially been an item for two years. T.C. and Alejandra are continuing to date.

Chapter 17 - 22 Analysis

Just as T.C., Augie, and Alejandra are all growing up, they realize they must find a way to help Hucky grow up as well without destroying his childhood. So they seek to enlist Julie Andrews in a campaign to get Hucky to understand that the events of "Mary Poppins" are fictitious. Julie Andrews, in good form, not only replies to a letter, but meets with them in person in New York.

Growing up also means that Alejandra reflects on certain aspects of herself, such as her idolization of Jacqueline Kennedy. She also reveals to her parents that she wants to attend school for dance and the performing arts, and in so doing, stands up for herself for the first time. T.C.'s father, Ted, also ends up adopting Hucky as well as dating Lori officially.

Reflecting on freshman year, each one of the characters can reflect on their friendship, and their involvement in the talent show, as the linchpin that began their ascent as human beings. Because of the talent show, each of the characters began a trajectory that ultimately helped to define them (for Augie, directing and choreography; for Alejandra, dance and the performing arts; for C.T., politics). Indeed, the entire year proved to be monumental in the lives of each of the characters, and each character proved to be monumental in the lives of the others.



Characters

Anthony T.C Keller

T.C. Keller is one of three main characters, and one of three main principle protagonists in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year." Fifteen-years-old, T.C. is pretty typical American kid. He is intelligent, confident, and kind. He also lives with his father, Ted. T.C.'s mother, Nikki, passed away from cancer when T.C. was only six.

T.C. attends high school in Boston, and has a pronounced accent. which Alejandra at first finds grating, but then cute. T.C. is a B student in school, but should be getting As. According to T.C., who plans to go work for his father's construction company initially, there is no need for XYs in building. When T.C. sees Alejandra for the first time, he is determined to go after her, and enlists the help of his best friend, Augie, to do so.

T.C. is also very patient and open-minded, as he doesn't care that Augie is gay, and takes great pains to make a connection to Hucky, the deaf six year-old kid whom reminds T.C. of himself. T.C. is also full of gimmicks and schemes, and spares no expense to get in good with Alejandra, and to help Lori decide to date his father.

By the end of the novel, T.C. and Alejandra are dating, and T.C. has decided to study political science in college.

Augie Hwong

Augie Hwong is one of three main characters, and one of three main principle protagonists in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year." An American-born Chinese, Augie's mother is a cultural critic for the papers, and his father is the owner of The Word Store, a bookshop. Augie is very intelligent, and has a strong interest in women's fashion, divas, film, and theater. Throughout the course of the book, Augie comes to realize he is gay. His sexuality is immediately accepted by both his parents, and his friends.

Augie is best friends with T.C., whom he helps win the heart of Alejandra. Augie, meanwhile, falls in love with a kid named Andy Wexler, and the two connect immediately. Augie is also tapped to direct the school freshman talent show, which he does with gusto. He arranges to have Alejandra close the show with a dance-and-song number, which exposes her to the student body as someone with serious talent.

By the end of the novel, Augie has almost broken up with Andy for good, because Andy is concerned with Augie's flamboyancy. It is nevertheless something that they overcome. Augie also becomes a big brother figure to Hucky, the deaf six year-old kid that becomes attached to T.C. Ultimately, Augie decides he wants to be a director and a choreographer in life.



Alejandra Perez

Alejandra Perez is one of three main characters, and one of three main principle protagonists in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year". Described as stunningly beautiful, Alejandra is a young social activist and member of the Young Democrats at school. She is the daughter of the former ambassador to Mexico and is pegged by her parents with a future in diplomacy. But Alejandra secretly dreams of being a dancer and going into the performing arts. Her best friend is her Secret Service agent, Clint, who serves as a sort of father figure for Alejandra, and dispenses good advice.

Alejandra meets Augie at school, and is sequestered by Augie to participate in the talent show, a performance which leaves her so emotionally charged, she cries afterward. Throughout the book, she warms up to others and makes many friends. She initially resists the advances and requests for dates made by T.C., but slowly comes around to him in the end.

By the conclusion of the novel, Alejandra has made major steps in her life. She has stood up to her parents, telling them that she wants to be a dancer and to go into the performing arts, something which they ultimately accept and decide is a positive thing. Indeed. Alejandra continues to attend state events with them, and brings along T.C. who has become her boyfriend.

Ted Keller

Ted Keller is the father of T.C. Keller, and the widower of Nikki Keller. Ted is kind and patient, and a very good father. He enjoys a good father-son relationship with T.C., and it is more like the two of them are friends than simply family relations. Despite their good relationship, Ted does not hesitate to lay down the law where appropriate. He nevertheless takes an active interest in his son's well-being, offering advice and consolation where needed.

Ted owns a construction company, and is good friends with Augie's father, Craig. The two frequently exchange advice and stories about their sons. Ted has been on a series of dates, but finally falls for Lori, the school guidance counselor, whom T.C. helps goad into dating Ted. By the end of the book, Ted and Lori are in a committed relationship, and Ted has adopted Hucky.

Hucky Harper

Hucky Harper is a quiet and deaf six-year old child who meets T.C. at the park while T.C. is playing baseball. Without his parents. Hucky lives at the Boston Institute for the Deaf. T.C. befriends Hucky and becomes an older brother for him, doing everything from naming a star after him to watching Mary Poppins with him, and getting Julie Andrews to write a letter to, and speak to Hucky. By the end of the novel. Hucky is



happy and has come to view T.C., Augie, and Alejandra as older siblings after he is adopted by Ted.

Craig Hwong

Craig Hwong is the father of Augie Hwong, and husband to Lisa Wei Hwong. He is kind and patient, and very accepting of his son. He is often unsure how to handle certain situations, and so seeks advice from T.C.'s father, Ted. Ted, in turn, seeks advice from Craig.

Lori Mahoney

Lori Mahoney is a school guidance counselor who insists that T.C. can do better than Bs in all of his classes. She is the love interest of Ted Keller, and T.C. does everything in his power to make sure that the two end up dating.

Andy Wexler

Andy Wexler is the love interest of Augie Hwong. The two have a slow but steady relationship, one which is interrupted by temporary breakups. Andy is uncomfortable with certain aspects of Augie's sexuality, such as his flamboyancy and love of female clothing, but ultimately comes around to accept Augie for who he is.

Phyllis

Phyllis is a partner at the Word Store, and runs the bookshop. She serves as a source of advice for both Augie and T.C. When T.C. wants to find out what interests Alejandra, T.C. goes to Phyllis to find out what sorts of books Alejandra is reading.

Clint

Clint is a Secret Service agent, and the best friend of Alejandra. He is her main source of advice, and he assumes a somewhat fatherly/brotherly role with her as well.



Objects/Places

Massachusetts

Massachusetts is the main setting for Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, and Fenway Park." It is the location of Brookline and Boston, and where most of the events of the novel take place.

Boston

Boston, located in Massachusetts, is where T.C., Augie, and Alejandra all attend school and live. It is where they work on and perform in school theater productions, and where each of them fall in love. It is also the home of the Boston Institute for the Deaf, where Hucky lives until he is adopted by Ted Keller.

Brookline

Brookline is a suburb of Boston, where Augie and Alejandra live, and where The Word Shop is located.

The Word Store

The Word Store, located in Brookline, Massachusetts, is a bookshop owned by Craig Hwong, and operated and run by Phyllis. It is where each of the main characters often visit, and it is where Alejandra gets to see Hucky and T.C. interact for the first time.

Laurents School

Laurents School is the high school in Brookline where T.C., Alejandra, and Augie all attend class. The school is also host to the talent show, and the production of "Kiss Me, Kate". It is also where Lori Mahoney works and counsels T.C. and other students.

Shubert Theater

The Shubert Theater in New York is the place where T.C. and Hucky go for a day trip. They head there in order to meet Julie Andrews, who is performing and speaking there.



Plum Island

Plum Island is an island off the coast of Massachusetts. It is where Ted rents a boat to bring T.C., Alejandra, Augie, Lori, and Hucky. Plum Island is also where T.C. names a star for Hucky.

Letter to Julie Andrews

Composed by T.C., Alejandra, and Augie, a letter to Julie Andrews is sent on behalf of Hucky, with the three friends hoping to find a way to let down Hucky easily that the events of "Mary Poppin" are not real.

Star Registration

A gift to T.C. from Alejandra, a star registration is named for T.C. It is an especially heartfelt gift considering T.C.'s history with his mother, and his kindness toward T.C.

Books

Books are ravenously read by Alejandra, most of them being political in nature. In order to learn more about Alejandra, T.C. seeks out the sorts of books she is reading, and gives her a rare book of speeches by John F. Kennedy as a gift.

Chalk

Chalk is what the characters in "Mary Poppins" use to draw on the sidewalk, and how they enter each of the illustrated worlds. Chalk is also used by T.C. and Hucky to draw on the sidewalk.



Themes

Family

Family is one of the three major themes in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year." Family appears in every part of the book, and appears in traditional and nontraditional ways, each being incredibly important to those characters involved.

Traditionally, family appears in blood relations. Alejandra's parents, enmeshed in diplomatic affairs, serve as stern role models, but are nevertheless eventually receptive to their daughter's dreams and desires. Indeed, they end up rigorously supporting her pursuit of those dreams and desires. Augie Hwong's parents, Craig and Lisa, serve as rocks on which he stands. They are very supportive of their son's desires to be a director and a choreographer. Even more, they are receptive and open to his homosexuality, and they support Augie's relationship with Andy, welcoming Andy into the family. T.C.'s mother, having died when he was six, nevertheless retains strong ties to his mother by naming his diary after her, and believing she is working in his life from Heaven. T.C. also has an exceptionally strong relationship with his father, who supports T.C. and looks out for him.

Nontraditionally, the idea of family extends to ties that go beyond blood. The relationship between T.C. and Augie can best be described as brotherly. They are best friends as well. They help one another out in the others' love lives and they scheme and plot together as normal brothers do. Indeed, Augie helped to fill a void left by the passing of T.C.'s mother. The friendship/brotherhood of T.C. and Augie has also brought together their families, creating a sort of extended family. T.C. himself later becomes a brother figure to Hucky, and then ultimately becomes a legal step-brother to him when Ted adopts Hucky.

Love

Love is one of the three major, dominant themes in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year". Love is predominant between the three main characters, and occurs in a familial and a romantic way.

In a familial sense, love occurs primarily between T.C. and Augie. Having been best friends since the first grade, T.C. and Augie consider themselves to be brothers, all genetics aside. They do everything they can together, and act as brothers should. They trade advice and share adventures. When T.C. falls for Alejandra, Augie helps him win her heart; when Augie's heart is broken by Andy, T.C. is prepared to beat up Andy.

In a romantic sense, love occurs between three sets of characters, serving as a catalyst for much of the plot. The most major example of romantic love occurs between T.C. and Alejandra. In romantic American fashion, T.C., the working class kid from Boston seeks to win the heart of Alejandra, beautiful, wealthy, and well-refined. By the



end of the novel, they are in a committed relationship, and are never without one another. Their love for one another can be seen not just in the gifts that they give each other, for example, but the thought that goes into those gifts. For example, Alejandra purchases a star registration for T.C. after learning about his mother naming a star for him, and T.C. naming a star for Hucky. The secondary romantic plot occurs between Augie and Andy, both of whom are struggling with their acceptance of their homosexuality. In the end, they agree to disagree on things they cannot agree on, and decide to be with one another for the sake of love. The tertiary romantic plot occurs between Ted, T.C.'s father, and Lori, T.C.'s school guidance counselor. By the end of the novel, the two have entered into a strong relationship.

Coming of Age

Of the three major themes in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year", the most dominant and overarching is that of coming-of-age. Entailing a spiritual and emotional journey of self-discovery that leads to the bettering of a character morally, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. In "My Most Excellent Year", each of the main characters come of age in some way or fashion.

T.C. begins the book as a working class kid who gets by with Bs and uses tricks and gimmicks to get what he wants, including girls. But the cheap tricks and gimmicks do not work on Alejandra, forcing T.C. to reveal more of his true nature as a genuine, sincere, and caring person to her. Lori, T.C.'s guidance counselor, will not settle for his B-average grades, and so compels him to do better academically. By the end of the novel, T.C. has settled on studying political science, has brought his grades up, and is a more capable and confident young man, having revealed his true nature to Alejandra.

Alejandra begins the book as an aloof, cold, and unattainable girl. The scion of a wealthy family in the diplomatic services, she idolizes Jacqueline Kennedy and is a Young Democrat. Taking the advice of Clint, and warming up to T.C., Alejandra ultimately rejects Jackie Kennedy as a role model, and makes many friends at school. Secretly, Alejandra wants to be a dancer and to study the performing arts, despite being groomed by her parents for a future in ambassador offices. Despite her confidence in public, Alejandra is not confident in private. In the end, she stands up to her parents to take charge of her own future, and becomes a stronger person by letting T.C. into her heart.

Augie begins the novel as a shy, hopeless dreamer who is unaware he is gay. Through directing the school talent show and falling in love with Andy, Augie comes down to earth and recognizes that he has talents and desires that do not include women's clothing. Augie finishes the novel as a strong and confident person who is confident in his homosexuality and in his desire to be a director and choreographer.



Style

Point of View

Steve Kluger tells his novel "My Most Excellent Year" in the first-person narrative mode, from the perspective of each of his three main characters writing in their journals and college application essays. This is done because of the diverse nature and backgrounds of the three main characters. Ordinarily, the first-person perspective is confined to the main character who narrates the entire story to avoid confusion between switching back and forth between different characters, but here, Kluger has opted for three story-tellers. This is a task well-accomplished because there are only three main characters, and the chapters are entitled with the name of the character who is telling the chapter, avoiding confusion for the reader. Further, each character tells an entire chapter, so to as avoid internal chapter narration confusion.

Setting

The setting of Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year" is that of Massachusetts, in particular, Boston and Brookline. The area is a perfect setting for the novels because of the characters involved in the plot. Alejandra, member of the wealthy Perez family, lives in upperclass Suburban Brookline, while working class T.C. and middle-class Augie live in less-wealthy neighborhoods. The diverse setting of Boston further means added emotional and diversity depth to the characters. It also gives the characters a diverse and culturally-rich atmosphere to come of age in, and for a character like Alejandra, this is especially important in terms of dance and performance. For Augie, a cultural city center is important for an aspiring director and choreographer; and for an aspiring politician like T.C., Boston, which is part of the American Revolution, and a hotbed for politics, is a perfect place to reside.

Language and Meaning

Because the main characters of Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year" are fifteen for most of the book, the novel is written in language that is simple and straightforward, yet engaging. Writing the novel in this brisk fashion, Kluger makes the characterization of his protagonists all the more believable because he doesn't use esoteric words or high vocabulary. Neither does Kluger use overly-poetic prose or strange sentence construction. His characters are down to earth, and so is his writing.

Structure

Steve Kluger divides his book "My Most Excellent Year" into twenty-two consecutive chapters, with each chapter being told by one of the three main characters -either T.C., Augie, or Alejandra. Furthermore, besides simple narration, each chapter of the book is

full of snippets of e-mails, instant messaging conversations, and in-person conversation transcripts. This makes the book all the more engaging, and helps the reader to get a better grasp of the three main characters. Kluger also arranges the interior of each chapter in a simple, flowing fashion, so as not to distract from the plot, which is ultimately the main point of the novel. It also helps the reader to make transitions between the narrations of each of the characters in each chapter more easily, compelling the reader to read more than just prose.



Quotes

"Pop says he knew you were already falling in love with him after the first two hours because you held onto his arm when Bucky F. Dent hit the home run" (Chapter 4, p. 23).

"Adolescence isn't just about growing hair, it's about growing up. I hope I'm ready for it" (Chapter 5, p. 48).

"At least once a week, try to make a mistake. And on the off-chance you discover that the world hasn't exploded, make another one" (Chapter 7, p. 72).

"And when he reached the finish, the ovation began while he was still delivering "knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own." That's when he turned toward the downstage wing, stared directly into my eyes, and ended on a shrug and a sheepish grin that was pure Anthony" (Chapter 10, p. 133-134).

"Ale's thrown me a breaking curve that I don't know how to handle. The more time I spend with her, the more I want to be with her and the less I think about kissing her" (Chapter 11, p. 156).

"Does she think I was born yesterday? I know exactly what she's trying to do. She's trying to make me crazy on purpose. The only problem is that it's working" (Chapter 14, p. 216).

"Besides, my brother's been on the phone with Ale a lot longer than we've been online. He's been waiting for the magic moment to tell her they should just be friends -which is supposed to make her fall in love with him" (Chapter 15, p. 254).

"Jacqueline, whether or not I ever give the American people majesty, I'm going to fall in love with Anthony Keller anyway. As soon as he learns that all I want him to be is Anthony. Without the ploys and gimmicks" (Chapter 16, p. 284).

"That's what I was afraid of. I'm going to have to pull this off as an honest man. Without any subterfuge" (Chapter 17, p. 320).

"And after Tick brought Hucky into our lives and I watched what happened, I figured out that it's not just the people we love, but the people we let love us back who show us how high we can really soar" (Chapter 20, p. 391).

"A first kiss after five months means more than a first kiss after five minutes" (Chapter 22, p. 403).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the importance of naming stars and the star registration in Steve Kluger's novel, "My Most Excellent Year." What is the significance of naming stars? To whom is this significant? Why? Why is the gift of a star registration from Alejandra to T.C. such an important thing?

Discuss the theme of family in the novel "My Most Excellent Year" by Steve Kluger. In what ways does family appear in the novel in both traditional and non-traditional ways? What effect do each of these manifestations of family have, and why? What is the outcome for each of the characters?

Why is the setting of Brookline/Boston, Massachusetts, in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year" so important to each of the main characters and their development? Explain and provide examples.

Discuss the theme of love in the novel "My Most Excellent Year" by Steve Kluger. How does love appear in the novel? Between whom does love occur, and how? Why is love so important to the plot of the novel? Provide evidence to support your claim.

Discuss the theme of coming of age in Steve Kluger's novel "My Most Excellent Year". In what ways do each of the three main characters come of age? How do each of these characters help the others? Make a list of the characters, the ways they change, and how the other characters help them in the process of coming of age.

During the novel, T.C. takes Hutchy under his wing and befriends Hutchy. Why does T.C. do this? Does T.C. have ulterior motives with Hutch with respect to Alejandra, or is T.C.'s care for Hutchy sincere? Why or why not?