

Running with Scissors Study Guide

Running with Scissors by Augusten Burroughs

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Plot Summary

In *Running with Scissors*, Augusten Burroughs tells the story of his adolescence. The memoir begins with the end of his parents' marriage. Due to Augusten's mother, Deidre, suffering from mental illness, the marriage falls apart. Deidre also seeks therapy from one Dr. Finch.

Dr. Finch and his family quickly become integral in Augusten's life. The doctor advises Augusten on very personal matters in growing up, including his sexuality. Soon, Augusten moves in with the Finch family for an extended visit while his mother receives intense treatment from Dr. Finch.

Despite the doctor's extensive treatment, Deidre does not gain the mental stability that she seeks. Eventually, the stress of raising a teenage boy becomes too much for her. Without any warning, Deidre signs over custody to Dr. Finch.

For the remainder of his teen years, Augusten splits his time between the Finch household and his mother's. At thirteen years old, he "comes out," admitting first to the Finch's, then to his mother that he is gay. Through the Finch's, he meets 33 year old Neil Bookman, who quickly becomes his boyfriend. Their relationship, though, suffers from selfishness and anxiety. After two years, Neil takes a train into New York City and never returns.

Life in the Finch household causes much drama. The doctor believes that the children need much freedom to develop themselves. There appear to be few if any rules. The house, though in a nice neighborhood, remains filthy all the time. The children experiment with drugs and alcohol. They come and go as they please and speak rudely to one another and their parents.

However, Augusten feels alone and trapped in his life after a few years. He realizes that the lack of rules also leads to a lack of guidance. He longs for someone to advise him in how to act.

The member of the Finch family that Augusten become closest to is Natalie, the third daughter. Natalie encourages Augusten to apply for a part time job, though on Natalie gains employment. Eventually, Natalie and Augusten move out together and begin college courses.

Shortly after this move, Deidre confesses to Augusten that Dr. Finch sexually abused her during her treatments. Natalie refuses to believe such allegations. Due to the stress that this puts on their friendship, Augusten moves out. While living on his own, having also failed out of college, Augusten realizes that his life, though hard, prepared him for a richer life as a writer in the city. Given all he overcomes, such endeavors fail to scare him any longer.



Throughout the memoir, Augusten dreams of many careers, from hair stylist to professional singer. He resists writing, however, because that is his mother's career. He fears that writing and mental illness go hand in hand. Ironically, that is the very profession in which he succeeds.



Chapter 1: Something Isn't Right

Chapter 1: Something Isn't Right Summary and Analysis

In the opening chapter of the novel, Deidre, Augusten's mother, dresses to go out. As he watches her, Augusten, the narrator, admits to imitating his mother and dressing in her clothes. He does other things to comfort himself during stressful family times, such as collecting shiny things.

Augusten reflects on his family situation, including his father's aloofness. He explains the distance in his parents' relationship. From the start of the novel, the Burroughs family exhibits irregular and irresponsible behavior. Mr. Burroughs fails to exhibit any fatherly feelings or guidance for his son. Deirdre immerses herself in her work, to the neglect of her son. Augusten exhibits obsessive habits concerning his environment. Such habits will evolve as this memoir continues.

The reader may also notice a bit of Oedipus complex in Augusten. He admires his mother's style and talent. It seems he holds her up, at this point, as a desirable woman. Her creativity, at this point and in his immature opinion, signals greatness and not insanity, as it comes to later in his story.



Chapter 2: Little Boy Blue Navy Blazer

Chapter 2: Little Boy Blue Navy Blazer Summary and Analysis

Augusten's obsession with shiny objects continues in this chapter. The family must load their garbage and take it to the dump. Because they fail to do so on a regular basis, Augusten helps his father load the car to overflowing with garbage bags. On a long overdue trip to the dump, he admires a chrome coffee table, which his father refuses to pick up. Such refusal sets a pattern for Augusten's relationship with his father, who gives him little, physically or emotionally, during his teen years.

Deidre's relationship with her husband starts poorly and progresses to awful. They fight and argue loudly in front of their young son. Frequently, it seems, the arguments become physical. Both parents participate in the physical violence, however. Deidre already seems to struggle with mental illness. Her husband, Norman, rejects his wife at her times of mental instability. His subsequent ridicule drives her deeper into her emotional state.

During such times, Augusten retreats to his room. There, he admires his album collection. He also builds his wardrobe. He gains solace from keeping a pristine wardrobe, because he cannot control the turmoil within the household. Augusten's poor attitude towards education begins to surface as well, when he admits that he prefers to skip school rather than to go in unstylish clothes.

Due in part to his mother's dreams of fame and in part to the neglect at home, Augusten dreams of fame. He makes himself sick in order to see the doctor. Such actions demonstrate classic neglect. He also pretends that cameras follow him, as if he were a celebrity. Such escapes reveal a dream for an ideal life, like that of a sitcom.

Dr. Finch appears in this chapter. The psychiatrist reminds Augusten of Santa Claus. All doctors, Augusten thinks, live lavishly. His parents begin to see Dr. Finch for marital counseling, but the sessions do little good. Young Augusten regards the divorce, however, as an opportunity to begin afresh.



Chapter 3: The Masturbatorium

Chapter 3: The Masturbatorium Summary and Analysis

Deidre's visits to Dr. Finch become more numerous. They also grow in length; sometimes she sees the doctor for hours in a stretch.

As a result, Augusten spends increasing amounts of time waiting for his mother outside of Dr. Finch's office. He even meets with the doctor himself. In one such meeting, he seeks to confirm a rumor that the doctor has a room called the masturbatorium. The doctor readily admits that the rumor is true. He explains the health benefits of sexual release at any time. Proudly, he offers to show the room to Augusten.

When they find Dr. Finch's secretary, who is also his daughter, Hope, sleeping on a couch in the masturbatorium, Dr. Finch becomes angry at the invasion of his private place. Hope seems ignorant as to the room's purpose. Augusten, however, feels very dirty in the presence of the doctor, who admits to frequent visits to his special room. After shaking his hand and leaving, Augusten stops to wash his hands several times.

As is often the case in psychology at this time, Dr. Finch seems to place a great deal of emphasis on sexual feelings and tension. He encourages openness and honesty with young Augusten. The doctor strives to demystify the subject and eradicate some of the shame. However, Augusten feels that the doctor violates propriety in his words and especially his actions. At this point in the novel, Augusten and the doctor seems to live in separate moral planes.



Chapter 4: Imagine My Shock

Chapter 4: Imagine My Shock Summary and Analysis

An exciting day finally arrives when Augusten's mother tells him that they will be visiting Dr. Finch at his home. Just as Augusten dreamed, the doctor holds a very prestigious address in Northampton, Massachusetts. Anxiously, Augusten admired the old, Victorian mansions that line the streets.

When they pull up to Dr. Finch's home, however, Augusten's dreams shatter. The house pales in comparison to others on the street. The outside stands in need of repair and maintenance. Moreover, the inside is filthy. Dr. Finch's wife, Agnes, greets them at the door. Augusten thinks to himself that she reminds him of Edith Bunker.

Dr. Finch's children seem to run wild. At first, Augusten fears playing with them. They force Augusten to join them in playing with their father's old electric shock therapy machine. Furthermore, the doctor's grandson relieves himself on the rug under the piano. All this appalls Augusten and makes him wish to leave.

To his dismay, however, Dr. Finch tells Augusten that he fears for Deirdre's safety from her ex-husband. He instructs Augusten to stay in the Finch house while he takes his mother to a safer place for counseling. Augusten lives in fear in the strange household and does even more poorly in school for the weeks that his mother is away.

The Finch household reveals the result of children left to their own devices. Though many wish for a world without rules, no one seems to be happy with the result. They frequently bicker over chores and responsibility around the house. The children seem unhappy and frequently bored. They also exhibit little empathy for others and behave selfishly and sometimes cruelly. Augusten's obsessive habits and compulsion for neatness cause him much discomfort in the Finch house.

His mother's first trip away with the doctor only begins her strange treatment. Though Augusten never seems to suspect foul play, he does not appreciate the time away from his own home. However, at this time the rights and protection of the mentally ill prove grossly ignored.

The doctor's practices, however, strike the reader as unorthodox. One may wonder how a doctor can afford to give hours at a time to one patient. Furthermore, the reader learns that often the doctor allows patients to move in, or "adopts" them into his family. Some readers may only see the doctor as a very dedicated and caring therapist. When coupled with his strange ideas, which grow stranger as the memoir progresses, one may question the doctor's real motives.

Chapter 5: The Cleaning Lady

Chapter 5: The Cleaning Lady Summary and Analysis

During his time in the Finch's house, Augusten comes to tolerate their weird habits and lack of cleanliness. He deals with their arguments and lack personal boundaries. He begins to describe the odd habits of the members of the Finch household. Agnes cleans obsessively, though she makes little real progress; the house always remains in a straight of disrepair.

Dr. Finch believes in a fluidity of the rules. His children come and go as they please, in a very real sense. They move in with friends who practice dangerous habits, then move back when the situation becomes more than they can handle. Even the doctor's young grandson, who they call Poo, operates without rules when in the house. He runs naked and plays inappropriately with the family dog.

He also meets Joranne, a patient of Dr. Finch's that lives in a room upstairs. Joranne shows an even more extreme obsessive disorder than Augusten. He admits to envying her as she lives in the immaculate room that she refuses to leave. He wonders at the irony that she insists on clean spoons when they come from such a filthy kitchen.

Living with the Finches, Augusten feels abandoned. He fears his mother will never return for him. In fact, the day she does, he does not even realize she waits out front until he spies her car in the drive. Without hesitation, he sprints to the car, leaving the door open. He realizes, in the chaos of the home, he has no need to return to close it.



Chapter 6: Just Add Water

Chapter 6: Just Add Water Summary and Analysis

Homosexuality appears for the first time in this section. The theme foreshadows many of the events that shape Augusten's adolescent years. He worries about how to "come out" at 13 years old. He first confesses to Hope Finch, who proclaims it no big deal. She tells Augusten of Neil Bookman, a former patient of Dr. Finch's whom he adopted as a son. Neil, also, is gay. Hope promises to arrange a meeting for Augusten with Neil.

A week later, Hope keeps her word and arranges the meeting. When Neil finally mentions his sexuality, Augusten feels relieved. Augusten confesses that he has felt gay his whole life. In Neil, Augusten finds a friend and confidant. The meeting leaves him feeling euphoric.

Back at the Finch house, Hope explains Bible-dipping to Augusten. To guide her in a decision, she opens a bible and drops her finger at random. The word her finger rests on instructs her in that decision. In this particular Bible-dip, she decides against going to see a friend. Augusten, at first, sees such actions as sacrilegious, but like many things that occur in the Finch's house, he first grows accustomed to it, then accepting. He realizes that such methods are "like asking a parent."

Life in the Finch household seems to have an impact on Augusten for both better and worse. He learns to be honest about himself, in admitting his sexuality at a time when such admissions were taboo. He also learns to try new things, though the new thing he tries in this chapter is eating dog food, at the encouragement of Agnes. He also learns to smoke, which he finds takes the place of many of his former compulsions. Smoking comes to represent his need for control in his life, as well as an opportunity to escape.



Chapter 7: The Burning Bush

Chapter 7: The Burning Bush Summary and Analysis

IN stark contrast to the Finches, Deirdre becomes friends with the Stewart family, particularly Fern Stewart, a local minister's wife. At dinner in the Stewart house, Augusten observes the normalcy as somewhat unsettling. Though he feels somewhat jealous, he realizes that he feels much more at home with people like the Finches.

While at the Finch house, Augusten acquires a small, closet-like room of his own, symbolizing his growing comfort with the family. He also skips school with increasing frequency, which Dr. Finch fails to rebuke; Dr. Finch believes that rules ought to be more subjective.

One day, while skipping school and stopping back at his mother's house, he catches his mother making love with Fern Stewart. In shame, Fern quickly leaves the house. His mother, however, becomes angry at the intrusion. She makes a speech about feeling oppressed in her life. She confesses that she feels she is only now finding her true self. After his mother's tirade, Augusten simply asks for \$5 and leaves her alone.

Augusten's lack of response to his mother's new relationship demonstrates the adaptability to people, especially children. In living in the free environment of the Finch house, she comes to accept anything as normal. "Normal" in Augusten's life shifts widely during this memoir. One could also argue that, though Augusten recognizes normal in others, such as the Stewarts, he realizes that such standards exist at odds with his life. Ironically, the person who seems most normal to Augusten, Fern Stewart, turns out to be hiding what she considers a shameful secret, in her homosexuality.



Chapter 8: Pure Projection

Chapter 8: Pure Projection Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Augusten participates in the World Father's Day parade, held and sponsored by Dr. Finch. They parade down the local streets in Northampton, distributing literature while dressed in ridiculous outfits, including breast like balloons. A few times, the police stop the procession but, after seeing Dr. Finch's credentials, they allow the group to proceed.

Later, during an intense argument between two of Dr. Finch's daughters, Natalie and Hope, Augusten explains more of the doctor's philosophies. Dr. Finch believes in freedom of expression. He feels that one achieves mental health by letting all of one's aggression out, in the form of heated shouting matches. Augusten rates this particular argument as only a 4.5.

One matter that frequently causes this type of argument is Dr. Finch's mistresses. Agnes rejects the doctor's infidelity, but he admonished her to be more open-minded. When she does become angry about it, Dr. Finch only encourages her tirades as good for her mental health.

Due to the irregular habits of the Finch family, Dr. Finch's one biological son, Jeff, does not visit his family much. In almost a religious way, Jeff represents a skeptic or even an atheist in regards to Dr. Finch's beliefs. One may say, though, that Jeff leads a life of enviable normalcy, away from the chaos of the Finch house.



Chapter 9: He Was Raised without Proper Diagnosis

Chapter 9: He Was Raised without Proper Diagnosis Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, the reader learns that Augusten has a brother seven years older than himself, Troy. Except for practical jokes against his family, Troy appears to have no emotions.

Augusten does look up to Troy, however, because he works for KISS, the rock band. For one concert, Troy flies Augusten into town. He spies on the band and sees Gene Simon dress. Such occurrences point out Augusten's lack of training for general society. He does not seem to know how to conduct himself. However, at one time, he rejected Dr. Finch's masturbatorium, now he becomes lax in rules of privacy himself.

During their visit, Troy attempts to explain the complex audio systems that he runs. When Augusten fails to understand, Troy proclaims him retarded. Such a comment, Augusten realizes, should not insult him. Troy truly feels someone who cannot understand his work suffers mental challenges.

Like Augusten, Troy does not understand the life of his family either. He refuses to see Dr. Finch for therapy. Furthermore, he has none of Augusten's sense of personal style. Augusten, at the tender age of 13, sees the lack of style as something worse than mental illness. Even in light of this, however, Augusten envies Troy's lack of feelings towards his family. Augusten feels overwhelmed by the emotions that occurs to him on a daily basis.

Augusten as the narrator reveals that Troy later discovers he has Aspersers syndrome, a high functioning type of autism. The lack of a diagnosis, though, protected Troy, according to Augusten. Ironically, the Aspersers caused Troy to emotionally close off his family, so that their irregularities failed to affect him growing up. A mentally healthy child, like Augusten, becomes overwhelmed growing up with a mentally ill mother and the other unusual people surrounding her.

Chapter 10: The Joy of Sex (Preteen Edition)

Chapter 10: The Joy of Sex (Preteen Edition) Summary and Analysis

Neil Bookman returns in this chapter. Augusten goes to see Neil, under the guise of looking at Neil's photography. Quickly, the visit develops into more and results in Neil more or less forcing Augusten into oral sex. Augusten feels very out-of-body during the experience. After, Neil explains that this experience was gay sex, and Augusten needed it to make sure he really is gay.

This scene may disturb many readers in its graphic and almost violent nature. To see such a young boy, thirteen year old Augusten, treated so harshly by an older man, thirty-three year old Neil, serves to make the reader uncomfortable. The author does well in capturing the violation felt by Augusten. He admits to himself that he both hates Neil and feels euphoric. Many times, sexually abused children feel this way, because they cannot separate the pleasure from the violation of personal space.

After returning to the Finch house, Augusten talks to Hope about moving to New York City. To Augusten, the City represents freedom and acceptance, especially in light of his sexuality. Hope proclaims a bible-dip will help. She expounds for some time on her finding: strength. Such a result, she claims, should encourage Augusten to pursue his dream of life in New York City.



Chapter 11: School Daze

Chapter 11: School Daze Summary and Analysis

In school, a fellow classmate, a daughter of Bill Cosby, the comedian, discourages Augusten. Augusten hates her for her popular perfection. He begins to desire to drop out of school. While he chain smokes, a habit he picked up at the Finch house, he contemplates suicide. Deidre proves to be little help, as she selfishly and compulsively works on her current poem.

With only one other place to turn, Augusten calls Dr. Finch and explains his angst with his school situation. Dr. Finch, with his belief in the fluidity of rules, supports Augusten's desires, though he points out that the laws prohibit Augusten from dropping out of school at his age. By way of appeasing everyone involved, Dr. Finch comes up with an alternate plan. He explains to Augusten that, if Augusten were to suffer a failed suicide attempt, the doctor could sign him out of school for a few weeks.

Augusten agrees to the plan, and the doctor delivers instructions and some drugs for Augusten to take, with some alcohol. The doctor then instructs Deirdre to drive Augusten to the hospital, though he warns both of them against telling anyone the truth, as the doctor would have his license revoked for such an action.

After taking the drugs, Augusten passes out. He awakens in the hospital after having his stomach pumped of the drugs and alcohol. In the mental ward of the hospital, Augusten meets his roommate, a real suicidal young man who often sits around naked.

Though Augusten feels disturbed by the crazy people surrounding him, he admits it is better than homeroom. He regrets the fact that, in the seventh grade, he cannot freely discuss his 33 year old boyfriend with his peers. However, in therapy at the hospital, he cannot freely admit the truth either. He pretends to be suicidal, like the others in the group sessions. In the mental hospital, Augusten misses Neil Bookman.

After he gains his release, both from the hospital and from school, Augusten tells his mother about his relationship with Neil. In the mental hospital, Augusten misses Neil Bookman.

After he gains his release, both from the hospital and from school, Augusten tells his mother about his relationship with Neil, which she supports. Many call such attitude child neglect, because Augusten's mother fails to protect him from an inappropriate relationship with a much older man.

The doctor warns Augusten against his relationship, though not for age reasons. Dr. Finch labels Neil as unstable, in light of his past therapy with the doctor. The doctor, after this conversation in his office, gives Augusten a bottle of anti-anxiety pills to try out. This chapter shows the beginning of drug use and experimentation in Augusten's life.

Another turning point occurs at the end of this chapter. To aid in coping with her mental illness, Deirdre signs custody of Augusten over to Dr. Finch. Though Augusten says of this move that Dr. Finch becomes his father, he never comes to view him in the way.



Chapter 12: The 7 & ? Inch Disaster

Chapter 12: The 7 & ? Inch Disaster Summary and Analysis

At thirteen years old, Dr. Finch's third daughter, Natalie, moved in with a 41 year old male tennis player that is a patient of Dr. Finch's. Three years later, she moves back home, after suffering mental and physical abuse. Even in light of the abuse, she misses her former lover, Terrance. One night, as Natalie sits with Augusten and both of them feel sorry for themselves and their respective loneliness, Augusten observes that the kitchen ceiling hangs too low. Sometime after midnight, the two begin knocking out the plaster ceiling with whatever tools they find laying around. Such projects around the house occur frequently.

The next morning, when the kitchen lies under a pile of rubble, Dr. Finch reacts calmly. Such levelheadedness disappoints Natalie, who hoped for a reaction for her father. To attempt to provoke him further, she asks for money to fix the ceiling. This produces the desired argument. Natalie and Augusten spend the day cleaning the kitchen, including shoveling debris and doing the dishes.

In the process, they decide the kitchen needs a skylight. Short on funds, they remove a window from the pantry and saw a rough hole in the ceiling. After much effort, they place the window in the hole, only to discover that the hole is 7 ? inches too large. In keeping with the disorder of the home, they leave the skylight in the state of disrepair and simply adapt to it by laying pots to catch the leaks and wearing winter hats in the kitchen during cold weather.



Chapter 13: Queen Helene Cholesterol

Chapter 13: Queen Helene Cholesterol Summary and Analysis

The reader meets Kate Finch in this chapter. Augusten proclaims her to be more sophisticated than all the other Finches. He desires to be a cosmetologist like Kate. Augusten still dreams of a life of fame, now hoping for a large beauty empire.

Frequently, Augusten practices his beauty treatments on members of the Finch family. He obsesses about mastering the techniques described in an old beauty school manual that Kate gives him. Some nights, he lies awake, worrying that he will not pass his beauty school test. He journals feverishly about this very topic.

Above all, he does not want to be a writer like his mom; he equates writing with mental illness. Furthermore, Deidre does not enjoy enough fame. Such a proclamation proves ironic, as he obviously does become a writer.

Augusten's relationship with Neil continues to cause uncomfortable situations for the reader. The relationship progresses to Neil's lessons on anal sex. Neil explains that, for Augusten's comfort, he will use Augusten's Queen Helene Cholesterol hair gel.

Such an action symbolizes the violation Augusten feels. He lacks the emotional maturity, due to his age, to process the reason for this physical relationship. Moreover, Neil also seems to lack stable emotions concerning their relationship. Though he constantly vows his love for Augusten, it appears as a selfish love.

Augusten continues to feel violated by the physical nature of their relationship. He becomes verbally abusive to Neil, even threatening statutory rape charges if Neil does not comply with his desires. Ironically, it seems to be Neil that holds much of the control in the relationship, yet Augusten gives the illusion of it and Neil goes along with this.



Chapter 14: Toilet Bowl Readings

Chapter 14: Toilet Bowl Readings Summary and Analysis

As Dr. Finch's theories become more outlandish, Augusten seems to begin to question the health of his current living situation. When Dr. Finch begins to see divine messages in his bowel movements, Augusten realizes that the doctor himself seems somewhat crazy. In fact, only Hope supports the doctor's latest theory and dutifully preserves the messages from the toilet.

Natalie Finch becomes worried that, if news of this turn in her father's studies gets out, she will not get into Smith College, as she hoped. Ironically, she does not worry that her own lack of study habits would be the actual deterrent. Agnes sweeps compulsively to deal with the stress of her odd household, though she does little in improving the filthy house.

After this episode passes, Natalie encourages Augusten to write down the crazy antics of the household. She insists that he will never be happy styling hair. Augusten becomes offended that Natalie, now his closest friend, fails to understand his dreams of fame in the fashion world. Again, he rejects a career in writing and describes his dreams of an empire of hair products.

Once again, this chapter becomes a turning point for Augusten, when he rejects the unstable authority figures in his life and becomes more independent. The reader must also realize that Augusten is an adolescent and, as such, does much nature maturing during these years.



Chapter 15: Phlegmed Before a Live Audience

Chapter 15: Phlegmed Before a Live Audience Summary and Analysis

Natalie and Augusten come to think of themselves as talented singers. They dream about stardom and frequently convince Dr. Finch's musically talented patients to accompany them on the piano. After many hours of practice, they decide that they need a live audience.

With the endorsement of Dr. Finch, they lie their way into a gig singing for the patients at Northampton State Hospital, a mental hospital where, while Dr. Finch worked there, the whole family used to live. During their one performance at the hospital, an old man spits on them and Natalie spits back. Such a reaction quickly ends their musical careers.

Augusten's continued dreams of fame show his desire to escape his current life. Such desires appear frequently in young adults. Often, they offer much aid through their strong attitudes and emotions.

Yet, at every turn, he finds himself surrounded by the mentally ill. While Dr. Finch supports the children in all their desires, he fails to lay boundaries for acceptable behavior that would protect the children from heartache and embarrassment, such as happened at the mental hospital.

Chapter 16: Here Kitty Kitty

Chapter 16: Here Kitty Kitty Summary and Analysis

For the first time, Hope Finch shows signs of mental distress when she thinks Freud, the family cat, talks to her in her dreams. In a state of severe agitation, she traps the cat in a laundry hamper and watches it for three days.

Dr. Finch listens to Hope's concerns in a very professional manner, showing his schooling and intellect. He then veers from the norm when he performs a bible-dip to decide how to handle Hope's case. He determines to allow her to watch the cat.

After one week of confinement in the hamper without food or water, the cat dies. Even after the cat's death, Hope hears its cries. Augusten, fearing for Hope, calls Dr. Finch at work. The doctor manages to call his daughter, but Hope continues to suffer bouts of mental instability after this.

The lack of explanation for Hope's illness suggests that, perhaps the presence of so many mentally ill people causes Hope to exhibit symptoms. In fact, as the doctor's secretary, she meets more than anyone else in the family does.

Another theory may be that she craves her father's attention. Only his mentally ill patients receive his full attention and, furthermore, his advice. Treatment may really only symbolize the fatherly advice that the children desire but never receive.



Chapter 17: I Would Dye For You

Chapter 17: I Would Dye For You Summary and Analysis

Hope, now seeming better, begins this chapter in an argument with Neil. After Neil criticizes Hope's lack of a love life, she points out that Neil's boyfriend is a 14 year old boy. Augusten takes Hope's side in the argument, calling Hope normal, a word not frequently heard in the Finch household. In doing so, Augusten shows more fidelity to Hope than his boyfriend, Neil, does.

The very adult relationship between Augusten and Neil quickly becomes overwhelming. Augusten proclaims it feels like overeating. He has premonitions about future hurt from Neil, because the love is too intense. Though Augusten enjoys Neil avid attention, he hates the emotional confessions that follow. To demonstrate his love, Neil allows Augusten to dye his hair. When it turns out green, Neil questions Augusten's calling to beauty school.

In a popular style for a coming of age story, Augusten, as a youth, becomes the adult figure. Likewise, many of the adults in his life become childlike and immature. Such a role reversal gives Augusten power and freedom in growing up.



Chapter 18: A Family Affair

Chapter 18: A Family Affair Summary and Analysis

When Fern refuses to leave her minister husband, Deidre feels the need to find a new girlfriend. She quickly finds Dorothy, a much younger woman with a significant income from her trust fund. Dorothy appears to be supportive and accepting of Deidre in her madness.

One particularly severe case of insanity lands Deidre in the mental hospital, where she meets Cesar. She brings him home to live with her and Deidre. They learn that Cesar also suffers from insanity and, furthermore, runs from the police. While Cesar stays at his mother's, Augusten never feels at home there. When Cesar tries to molest Augusten, Deidre kicks him out in a rare show of motherly protection.

Cesar, now a patient of Dr. Finch, becomes attracted to Natalie, who sleeps with him for money while he stays at the Finch house. After this incident, Dr. Finch also kicks him out. All three women that slept with Cesar, Deidre, Dorothy and Natalie, develop yeast infections. The infection shows a rare instance of payment for indiscretion; usually unwise actions go unpunished in Augusten's world.



Chapter 19: Inquire Within

Chapter 19: Inquire Within Summary and Analysis

The mood at the Finch house becomes depressing. Hope suffers from a flare up of her psoriasis and Natalie pesters her mercilessly. Augusten continues to experiment on his hair as well.

Finally, Natalie professes that she must escape the crazy house. She convinces Augusten to come along with her to apply for a part time job. He wisely points out that they have no education and no marketable skills. After smoking some marijuana together, though, they feel more confident and set out to find jobs.

In their drugged state, they walk around the area of Smith College and apply at stores and fast food restaurants. After, they walk on the ledge behind a waterfall and become soaked in the spray. Proudly, they walk, dripping, through town and into some of the same places they recently applied.

Back at home, Hope cooks a questionable looking soup. At first, she claims that she dug up Freud the cat for the soup. Upon seeing their disgust, she claims it was a joke, but it is not clear which claim is true; Augusten refuses soup.

Hope and Natalie represent two different types of characters in this novel. Hope, older than Natalie, still lives at home and depends mostly dependent on her parents. Natalie, though, desires independent and normalcy, as she exhibits her desire for gainful employment. Natalie, too, seems to be the healthy of the two sisters. The extended exposure to the unstable house seems to affect Hope in an unhealthy way.



Chapter 20: Life in the Great Outdoors

Chapter 20: Life in the Great Outdoors Summary and Analysis

To gain some extra money, the Finches and Augusten move a number of household items into the front yard for a tag sale. Quickly, they feel comfortable in the new surroundings and take to living on a furniture arrangement on the lawn. On one particular day, Natalie makes homemade ice cream in their newly found space and Hope reads past bible-dips.

It is now summer and Augusten travels back and forth between Northampton and his other's house in Amherst at will, courtesy of public transportation. Upon arriving at his mother's late one evening, he finds that Deidre and Dorothy have busted most of the dishes in the backyard. They both appear to be suffering from a crazy episode.

Augusten, out of concern, calls Dr. Finch and Hope arrives to help. Deidre tries to scare Hop away by showing her a basket of locust shells that she keeps around for inspirations. When Deidre becomes excessively violent, Hope calls the police.

At this point in the story, Deidre's psychotic episodes occur more and more frequently. The reader may begin to question the validity of Dr. Finch's treatment, as no improvement occurs. Augusten himself begins to question the doctor's methods.

This story seems to point to one's surroundings as an explanation for mental illness. Deirdre and Hope both suffer because of their unusual life situations. Augusten, though, fears that mental illness may be hereditary. However, he proves such theories wrong by turning out to be comparatively normal.



Chapter 21: You are Nothing but a Sex Object

Chapter 21: You are Nothing but a Sex Object Summary and Analysis

Augusten is not 15 years old. Dr. Finch, Hope, Augusten and Neil accompany Deidre to a Rhode Island hotel, where she undergoes nearly constant treatment from Dr. Finch and around the clock observation, for her own safety. An attempt to call his father to inform him about Deidre's health goes unanswered. Augusten notices that his mother seems to suffer an episode every fall.

While in Rhode Island, Dr. Finch confesses to Augusten that Deidre harbors suppressed love for the doctor that inhibits her recovery. In this instance, the doctor shows little regard for patient confidentiality.

To further the theme of unreciprocated love, Neil professes his deep love for Augusten. He passes Augusten a love letter that read, "you are nothing but a sex object." It appears that Neil is literally crazy about Augusten, who does not like to talk about it. Augusten ignores the note and does his best to ignore Neil. Once again, they both show their selfish nature in regard to their relationship.

After some days at the hotel, Deidre, Dr. Finch and Augusten walk, at Deidre's insistence, to a local diner for a sandwich. There they meet Winnie Pye, who quickly suspects foul play on the part of Dr. Finch.

Later that day, Winnie appears at Deidre's room. Three days later, she exits, producing a Deidre that Augusten describes as made over like a showgirl. Thus finalizes Deidre's treatment. Winnie takes a leave of absence from work and move back home with Deidre to help her further recover.

Winnie Pye represents the normal world that Augusten has longed for. With her down to earth advice, Deidre makes more progress than she has in years of therapy from Dr. Finch. After Deidre's time in Rhode Island, Dr. Finch's power over the Burroughs family dwindles significantly.



Chapter 22: Thin Air

Chapter 22: Thin Air Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Neil becomes more distant. Everyone around the Finch house notices, especially Augusten. Late one night, Neil wakens Augusten, saying he is going out to buy film. Augusten immediately begins to worry. After some hours without Neil reappearing, Augusten calls the train station, only to learn one person purchased a ticket bound for New York City.

Augusten calls Hope, who in turn calls Dr. Finch. Together, Hope and Augusten travel to New York and search through known gay bars, without results. Augusten, as narrator, remembers he spent one whole year hoping Neil would return, and feeling restless and lonely.

Even though Augusten frequently felt strong feelings against Neil Bookman, when Neil leaves, Augusten feels the loss of someone who understands his feelings about his sexuality.

Such feelings parallel Natalie's feelings after she returns home from living with the abusive tennis player. The author illustrates the hold that even a poor relationship can hold over someone, especially someone with very little good in their life. Augusten compares it to Stockholm syndrome, in which captives believe themselves in love with their kidnappers.



Chapter 23: All Star Running Back

Chapter 23: All Star Running Back Summary and Analysis

Kate's daughter, Brenda, once again visits the Finch household. She tells Augusten that she dreams of being a dancer. Augusten the narrator reveals that, in their adult life, Brenda becomes an unlicensed massage therapist that performs sexual favors for her clients. Such reflections reveal the bitterness the author feels for childhood dreams, which seem often futile.

In spite of the apparent freedom of the Finch household, Augusten feels trapped. One may realize that such feelings commonly occur among adolescents. Yet, Augusten, in his youth, cannot recognize such truths. He seeks another boyfriend to fill the void left one year ago by Neil. Because of an apparent low self-esteem, Augusten sets low standards, ruling out no one that would be willing to have a long term relationship that includes more than sex.

On the way to his mother's one night, he quickly falls for a male convenience store clerk. He pretends to study items in the store, to give the clerk ample time to check him over. After these long minutes, Augusten decides that the clerk must also be a homosexual.

After a very brief conversation with the young man, Augusten runs home, writes a letter expressing his feelings and delivers it back to the store, which now holds a number of the clerk's friends. As Augusten watches from afar, the clerk reads the letter aloud and the group laughs. Feeling a sense of shame and loss, Augusten returns to his mother. He realizes that, without someone to tell one what to do, one also lacks a person to tell one what not to do.

In his sexuality, Augusten always acts alone. In matters of personal taste and employment, he at least has the company of Natalie. For seeking a boyfriend, however, he feels no one understands. Despite her own sexuality, he does not even confide in his mother. Nevertheless, despite the peculiarities of his life, Augusten's rejection by the clerk symbolizes a foolish love interest that many young people find themselves in. Such feelings doubtless resound with many readers.



Chapter 24: Pennies From Heaven

Chapter 24: Pennies From Heaven Summary and Analysis

To give the reader a time frame for the novel, the author refers to Princess Diana's wedding. While the Finches watch it on TV, Agnes remarks that Natalie resembles Princess Di. An intense argument ensues, in which Agnes and Natalie take multiple turns insulting one another. Natalie takes the money from her mother's purse and convinces Augusten to join her at McDonalds.

Once they have spent all their money at McDonald's, they seek out Dr. Finch's friends, Father Kimmel for more funds. They gain another \$25 from the priest out of the church offerings. As they attempt to hitchhike to a local cinema, they discuss the dishonesty of Father Kimmel.

Augusten seems to reveal corruption everywhere he turns. Dr. Finch turns out to be very unlike any doctor Augusten ever imagined. Likewise, Father Kimmel proves to be dishonest in taking money from the church offering. However, Natalie and Augusten readily accept the money, showing themselves to be much like the people they criticize.



Chapter 25: Oh Christmas Tree

Chapter 25: Oh Christmas Tree Summary and Analysis

Unexpectedly, the reader learns that this chapter takes place in May. The family still seeks candy from the Christmas tree that everyone refuses to take down. They continue to place the responsibility on everyone else.

Augusten flashes back to Christmas when he was 10 years old. His parents were still married, though unhappily so. Deidre, in a fit of mental instability and creativity, erects a huge, real fir in the living room. When Norman Burroughs complains about the presence of pin needles, Deidre drags the huge tree to the balcony and heaves it over the edge. Christmas trees do not hold happy significance for Augusten. The tree at the Finch household makes him feel sad.

Hope Finch claims that the tree should be Natalie's responsibility. In rage and retribution, Natalie moves the tree to Hope's room, thereby making it Hope's job to get rid of it. The matter of the tree never resolves. Augusten points out that trees and turkey bones move around the house but never out with the Finches.



Chapter 26: Running with Scissors

Chapter 26: Running with Scissors Summary and Analysis

This chapter takes place a few years later. Augusten, now 17, travels to the Atlantic shore with Natalie, who works at McDonalds. Augusten feels jealous about this, because he never received a call back from any of their applications.

Even outside of the Finch household, little changes. Natalie refuses to do laundry. Instead, on a long weekend vacation to the shore, she wears her McDonald's uniform. She tells Augusten how money equals power. Though they are underage, she proves this theory by buying them beers on a whale watch boat.

Back on shore, they dine on local seafood. Augusten begins to worry about the future. Aloud, he vows to become a writer. Natalie immediately supports him. She announced that she would still like to attend Smith to study psychology and music.

Back at their hotel, Natalie discovers that her earrings are missing. She immediately blames the maid. However, multiple calls to the front office produce no earrings. In retribution, she dumps the contents of their room into the hotel's pool. Quickly, the two friends leave town, heading for home.

More than ever, Augusten and Natalie show maturity in the independent travels and plans for the future. However, immaturity still surfaces, as does a lack of control, when they trash their hotel room.

In this chapter, the title of the book comes out. When Augusten remarks to Natalie that they run their own lives now, she comments that they are "running with scissors." Such a comment symbolizes the haphazard way in which the children raise themselves, without the usual adult input and feedback.



Chapter 27: You're Gonna Make it After All

Chapter 27: You're Gonna Make it After All Summary and Analysis

Following their dreams, Natalie and Augusten get an apartment together and enroll in community college. Augusten acquires his GED then enrolls premed. Surprisingly, Natalie proves to be a diligent student. She studies hard and makes great grades. Augusten, however, fails every class. He realizes that the study habits taught in high school would be useful now, in college.

In a meeting with his anatomy professor, advises Augusten to change his major. Shortly after this, his mother appears with disturbing confessions. She tells Augusten that Dr. Finch sexually abused her and overmedicated her during her treatment.

These confessions drive a wedge between Augusten and Natalie. Natalie side with her father, but Augusten feels compelled to believe his mother. After all, he knows first hand how the doctor treats drugs.

In the middle of the night, Augusten moves out. While living alone, he pictures life in New York City. He realizes, after all he has lived through, life in the big city would not be so hard. Deidre also moves into her own apartment and Dorothy moves in with the Finches.

School never represents a place of hope for Augusten. He always fails in an organized education setting. Finally, in this chapter, he realizes that life educates him as much as he requires. He determines to stop waiting and become a success now.

Largely unspoken suspicions about Dr. Finch seem confirmed. Though Deidre remains an unreliable source, Augusten believes her confessions. With the lack of details against it and in light of the doctor's unorthodox methods, the truth seems all to clear that the doctor abused his power, at least where Deidre was concerned.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

In short, order, the narrator explains what becomes of the characters in this novel. Dr. Finch loses his license and then passes away. Agnes lives in a home. Natalie achieves her dream with a double major from Smith in psychology and music. Deidre continues to write though she eventually becomes estranged from Augusten. Neil Bookman is never heard from again.

It may leave the reader curious and disappointed to only learn this little bit about the lives of the characters of this memoir. For instance, the reader receives no explanation about the estrangement of Augusten and his mother.

Furthermore, some readers may be dissatisfied with the cursory ending in which people such as Natalie and Augusten, who were essentially high school dropouts, gained such success. While such an ending encourages many reader who lived less than ideal childhoods, readers that struggled for success and gained it through the proper channels may feel that such a testimony could discourage young people from trying hard in school.

That said, most reader will realizes that this, in many ways, would not be an appropriate book for young readers, therefore, such a concern would be largely unnecessary.



Characters

Augusten Burroughs

Deidre Burroughs

Norman Burroughs

Dr. Finch

Hope Finch

Natalie Finch

Agnes Finch

Joranne

Neil Bookman

Fern Stewart

Troy

Dorothy

Cesar Mendoza

Winnie Pye



Objects/Places

Northampton

Dr. Finch lives in Northampton, where many post residences are. Northampton is a place that Augusten admires. He dreams of a pristine home with fancy cars and luxurious furnishings. During his first drive in the neighborhood, it seems that many of the houses in fact look just as he imagines.

The Finch house, though, suffers from years of abuse and neglect, much like Augusten himself. The house receives little cleaning because no one takes responsibility for the messes therein.

Dr. Finch's Office

Early in Deidre's therapy, Augusten spends much time waiting in Dr. Finch's office. He becomes friends with Hope there, and a friendship with such an older, mature person makes Augusten himself feel mature.

During one session with the doctor, though, Augusten becomes disturbed. The doctor confirms rumors that he keeps a room in the office for masturbating. The doctor claims that such actions are not only normal, but also healthy. Even in light of such progressive thinking, Augusten admits to being disturbed and washes his hands compulsively after this meeting.

Amherst

Deidre keeps her home in Amherst. It remains a place of relative calm for Augusten much of the time. When the crazy life in the Finch house becomes too much, he catches a bus to Amherst.

Sometimes, however, he walks in on an upheaval in his mother's life, such as the psychotic episode that lands her at the hotel in Rhode Island.

Mental Hospital

Many of the characters spend time in different mental hospitals. First, Augusten spends time in the local mental ward when he fakes a suicide to get out of school. The disturbing ironic aspect of this episode is the help of Dr. Finch in staging the suicide. The place makes Augusten feel uncomfortable, because he must lie to keep up his story. However he admits that he would rather be there than in school.



Deidre also spends time in a mental hospital, where she meets Dorothy and Cesar. Both relationships, as one may expect prove to be less than healthy for her.

The reader also learns that, at one time, the Finch family lived in the state mental hospital while Dr. Finch worked there. Such an arrangement may signal to some of the odd behaviors of the family, or at least their acceptance of strange behaviors from others.

Freud

The Finch family cat, Feud, suffers a horrible death when Hope begins to believe that the cat communicates through her dreams. Convinced that she must catch him in order to gain his message and help his pain; she traps him in a laundry hamper. After a week of starvation the cat dies. Dr. Finch supports Hope's attempts to communicate with the cat. It seems that this episode continues to haunt Hope. She jokes about using the cat for soup, though Augusten does not seem sure that the soup really is a joke.

Skylight

Natalie and Augusten's project of installing a skylight in the kitchen symbolizes many of the oddities of the Finch house. First, they decide in the middle of the night to remove all the plaster from the existing ceiling. Such actions do not even gain attention within the household.

Then, they remove a window and place it in the ceiling, which also gains no attention. Finally, the window fails to fit and leaving a 7 ? inch hole. No one takes the time to fix this. They simply deal with the problem in other ways, such as placing pans to catch the leaks.

Bowel Movements

In perhaps one of the more disturbing chapters of the book, Dr. Finch begins to "read" his bowel movements. Quite suddenly, he declares that God speaks to him through his bowel movements. Only Hope seems supportive in this endeavor. Natalie worries what such "research" will do to her reputation.

Though Dr. Finch's obsession with reading his bowel movement proves to be short lived, it signals a downward spiral for him. He loses paying patients. He also becomes sexually violent towards Deidre, she later claims.

All Star Market

The All Star Market is the only all night convenience store near Deidre's home. On his way to his mother's one night about a year after Neil left town, Augusten enters the store.



He quickly falls in love with the clerk. After writing a letter to this effect, though, Augusten realizes that clerk does not share his feelings.

Augusten fears what should happen if he must return to the store. He feels he cannot face the clerk again. The market comes to stand for the lack of guidance in Augusten's life. He realizes that a wise adult would advise more discretion.



Themes

Family

Augusten operates through much of the novel without a standard family unit. Even when his parents are married, they fight often and violently. The divorce comes as a relief to Augusten; he sees it as a time to start over.

The Finch family, Augusten realizes, is not a normal family. They communicate in rude and selfish ways, frequently yelling and name calling. They fail to take responsibility around the house, for the comfort of their fellow family members.

Yet Augusten becomes apart of this family. The very girls that scare him at first quickly become his closest friends. Though the Finch's are not normal, Augusten feels that they understand what he goes through more than many of his peers. Augusten feels that someone in a normal, nuclear family could not understand homosexuality or the stress of a mentally ill mother.

The Stewart family appears in the story in sharp contrast to the Burroughs or the Finches. On the surface, the Stewarts appear to be perfect. Fern Stewart holds the family together and operates in public like the stereotypical minister's wife. IN private, however she harbors the dark secret of her sexuality. Though she participates in a passionate relationship with Deidre, she refuses to give up her family. By this example, the reader can assume that there may not be anything that one may call a normal family.

Personal Identity

As do many adolescents, Augusten struggles with his personal identity. First, he struggles to become someone of significance. He dreams of fame and fortune as a way to escape his painful life. He wants attention that he does not receive from his parents. He envisions cameras catching his every move.

Also affecting his identity is his sexuality. Augusten struggles with his homosexuality at a time when such admissions were more taboo. He receives much support, though. The Finch's support such feelings, even when they do not support his choice of mates, in Neil. His mother, also, accepts his sexuality, as she discovers the same truth about herself. Such admission appears to represent freedom, in being one's true self. Deidre admits as much after Augusten catches her with Fern.

Throughout the novel, though Augusten resists one aspect of his true character. He refuses to admit that he will become a writer. Such a role he equates with insanity, which he hopes to avoid at all costs. In the end, though, he cannot ignore the fact that his life has prepared him to be a great writer.



Mental Illness

Nearly all of the characters suffer from some form of mental illness, whether they admit it or not. The most obvious character is Deidre, whose mental illness brings about many of the occurrences in the story. Her mental illness introduces Dr. Finch. Likewise, her psychotic episode brings about the trip to Rhode Island that changes everyone's life, because he causes her to admit the truth about her relationship with Dr. Finch to Augusten.

Mental illness becomes something of which Augusten becomes afraid. Though he writes in his journal compulsively, he avoids becoming a writer. His mother, a self-proclaimed poet, shows him that writers can be off-balanced people. Therefore, he believes that all writers must be this way. However, in the end he learns that writers may be just as mentally stable as general society.

The doctor's family is not exempt from possible mental illness either. Hope and Agnes both suffer from psychotic episodes, most notably within Hope believes that the family cat communicates to her through her dreams. Most of all, Dr. Finch himself seems to be mentally unbalanced, especially when he goes so far as to read his own bowel movements for guidance in his future.

Style

Perspective

This book lies in the section of biography, more specifically memoir. The author speaks with the utmost amount of authority, because the events of this story happened to him. Though memoir allows some poetic license, especially to protect the identities of those in the story, the events are assumed true, as in they really happened to someone.

Such writing can be cathartic. When such traumatic events happen, especially at such a tender time as adolescence, writing them and sharing them makes them tangible and puts them in a safe place. Furthermore, if the sharing of such events can help someone, the encouragement gives the events reason.

The intended audience could be any reader that enjoys a funny but thought provoking book. Due to the comments of some of the people in the book, the intended audience may specifically be people who have not experienced life close to someone suffering from mental illness. The characters comment on how unbelievable this story may seem to outsiders.

The author's intentions include shocking the reader. The author makes the reader feel uncomfortable in reading the truth about this young man's growing up years. Though in fact the stories are hard to believe and the reader may even be disgusted by certain parts, he will want to keep reading to find out how these crazy people end up.

Tone

This memoir is written with an informal tone. Often, the author writes like a teenage boy, with immature language and limited vocabulary. Other times, the author sounds more like an adult, but continues to keep the tone light. Colorful language shows the lack of sophistication on the part of many of the characters.

The author remains mostly subjective in the telling of his story. He can only tell it from his point of view. Mostly, the feelings of others receive little discussion, only how the actions of others make the author feel.

The informal, subjective tone draws the reader into the story. It seems conversational. The journal-like quality of the memoir and the personal nature of the topics make the reader feel voyeuristic, which in itself draws one to complete the story.

Structure

This memoir is told in 25 short chapters, each named in a crave way for some event in the chapter. The author also includes a short epilogue, giving a report on the characters lives after the story ends.

This format works well to make the book easy to read. The author uses short chapters to make the book almost seem like a collection of short stories.

Time passes in between chapters, sometimes in small bits and sometimes in large chunks. The format and style do make it difficult to discern the passage of time, unless one is familiar enough with the references to pop culture, such as the marriage of Princess Diana and the appearance of eight track tapes.



Quotes

"I preferred *albums* to the more modern *eight tracks*. Albums came with sleeves which reminded me of clean underwear." p. 10

"I could *control* the sharpness of the crease in my double-knit slacks, even if I couldn't stop my mother from hurling the Christmas tree off the porch like she did one winter." P. 19

"A thin layer of trust had formed in my mind, like a scab." P. 64

"I was worried my being gay would push the Finches' acceptance of me past the breaking point." P. 69

"[Bible-dipping] was like being able to turn to the back of the book and look at the answers." P. 79

"I wasn't sure whether I wanted to be one of them or simply live among them taking notes and photographs." P. 82

"In addition to calling each other standard names like *bitch* and *whore*, the Finches incorporated Freud's stages of psychosexual development into their arsenal of invectives." P. 96

"So we screamed at each other constantly. It was like a competition and the prize was mental health." P. 98

"I envied his lack of emotional ties. I felt pulled by everyone in every direction, while my brother seemed free of annoying human encumbrances." P. 107

"I feel like I've walked through some door, into some room, and I'll never be able to leave." P. 113

"I was upstairs in my rarely occupied room, staring out the window at the street thinking about that little Cosby bitch. She certainly didn't have to choose between a mental hospital or the seventh grade." P. 124

"My mother looked alarmed, like she'd just been diagnosed with a disease that would prevent her from ever being able to talk about herself again." p. 126

"A couple of signatures later and Dr. Finch was no longer just my mother's psychiatrist. He was my father." p. 138

"Next to obsessing over hairdressing school, hurting Neil Bookman was my favorite things to do." P. 162



"After Kate slammed her car door and drove away, Natalie leaned forward. " You really should write all this stuff down." I said, "Even if I did, nobody would believe it." "That's true," she said. "Maybe it's better to just forget it." P. 173

"A *mothermind* was a Dr. Finch-ism. It was one part busybody and on part manipulator." P. 188

"And when my mother did go psychotic, Dorothy went along for the ride." P. 206

"And it scared me that I had her eyes because I worried that it meant I had whatever else she had back there that made her believe she could not only speak to the dead, but smoke cigarettes in the bathroom with them." P. 240

"It made me sad to visit her in the hospital. Not because she didn't fit in there with the crazy people, but because she did." P. 241

"Freedom was what we had... So why did we feel so trapped?" p. 258

"My standards were high: anyone who looked back at me. Nobody did." P. 259

"The problem with not having anybody to tell you what to do, I understood, is that there was nobody to tell you what *not* to do." P. 264

"Our lives are one endless stretch of misery punctuated by processed fast foods and the occasional crisis or amusing curiosity." P. 274

"Without knowing why, I answered, "I'm going to run away to New York City and become a writer." P. 289

"Ironically, I had been excited to go to college, but in order to be able to do it, I really needed study habits and knowledge I would have learned in high school. *Oops.*" P. 296

"Unwittingly, I had earned a Ph.D. in *survival.*" P. 301



Topics for Discussion

In light of this novel, how would you define *crazy*?

Does Augusten have a family? If so, who does it include?

Does Dr. Finch help Deidre or Augusten? Explain.

How does the theme of homosexuality affect this memoir?

How would Augusten's life be different in your city?

How would you feel if you had to live with the Finches?

Why did the author include such graphic descriptions of Augusten's sexual relations with Bookman? How does that affect the reader?

How might you feel if you were included in someone's memoir such as *Running with Scissors*?