

# **Things Not Seen Study Guide**

## **Things Not Seen by Andrew Clements**

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# Plot Summary

Things Not Seen is a novel written by bestselling author Andrew Clements. Things Not Seen is about a 15-year-old boy, Bobby Phillips. One night, Bobby goes to bed snuggling under his electric blanket in his Chicago home. He wakes up the next morning as an invisible person. Bobby tells his parents that he is invisible right away. His mom, a literature professor and his dad, a physicist, both try to figure out how this could have happened to their son, but have no clue where to start searching for the solution to what seems like an impossible problem.

Until they can figure out how it happened and what they can do to reverse it, they instruct Bobby to stay home and not tell anyone about what is going on. Bobby uses his invisible state as an opportunity to explore the world from a different point of view. One day, while exploring one of his favorite places, the library, he literally runs into a girl. The girl turns out to be blind and so she does not realize that Bobby is invisible and simply a bundle of winter clothes, which is the disguise he uses to get around town in the Chicago winter weather. Eventually, Bobby and the girl, Alicia, form a bond and Bobby tells her that he is invisible.

Not only do Alicia and Bobby come together as close friends, but so do their parents. Alicia's father happens to be an astronomer. When he becomes aware of Bobby's situation, he helps Bobby's father figure out what could have caused Bobby to become invisible in the first place. Once he figures out what causes it, he is hopeful they can determine a way to reverse the invisibility.

In the end, it is a heartwarming story that helps teenagers that feel invisible realize that they are not really invisible. There is someone in everyone's life that cares, loves, and misses them when they are gone. Things Not Seen is a coming of age story that changes the life of not only the main character, Bobby Phillips, but everyone that comes into contact with him. It teaches everyone that you should appreciate what you have, but also be flexible enough to adjust to situations as circumstances change.

In addition, the novel reinforces that you should not judge people by what you see on the outside. Just because someone has a disability, such as being blind, it does not mean that they are not regular people on the inside. The novel helps to drive home the point that it is important to get to know people for who they are, not by how they dress or who they hang around with at school. The novel also leaves the reader wondering whether some conditions are pure science, psychological or there is some other force out in the universe that causes phenomena to occur.



# Chapters 1 and 2

## Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Bobby Phillips, a 15-year-old teen wakes up one morning to find that he is invisible. He can't see himself in the mirror and his parents cannot see him either. He can touch things, make things move and even eat his breakfast, but he is invisible to everyone, even himself. His parents and Bobby agree that they have to keep this issue quiet until they can figure out what to do.

When Bobby returns to his room after breakfast, he turns on his desk lamp. Bobby notices that his hand makes a shadow on his desk as he moves it under the light. Bobby's father walks in to Bobby's room and notices the shadow of Bobby's hand under the light as well. This indicates that Bobby is not entirely invisible, but not entirely visible to the normal eye either.

## Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Being invisible symbolizes how Bobby feels inadequate. Since his parents are both geniuses, Bobby may have mentally convinced himself that he is not as smart or not as worthy as they are. Since he feels invisible, his mind has somehow made it possible to make himself invisible. Bobby becoming invisible may also foreshadow a reversal of roles in Bobby's family.

According to how Bobby thinks, his parents always turn Bobby's problems into their problems, when it is really Bobby that has to deal with his own problems. This time, it may require Bobby to figure out on his own as to why he is invisible and how he can reverse it. Finally, Bobby's invisibility foreshadows that Bobby may see things and learn things in a new way than he would be able to do if he were still visible.

Bobby's dad indicates that Bobby is a metaphor of the Stealth Bomber, which is an airplane that is supposed to be invisible. While the Stealth Bomber is invisible to radar systems, when it passes under the sun, it still casts a shadow on the Earth. This is the same as Bobby casting a shadow on his desk when he passes his hand under the desk lamp light. Bobby's dad infers that there is a reason why Bobby is invisible to himself and to his parents, yet still casts a shadow.

Bobby's father is convinced that there is a scientific reason as to why Bobby is invisible to himself and to others. While Bobby believes it may be scientific, he also subconsciously thinks that his invisibility may be psychological. In other words, Bobby has sort of felt that he goes unseen by the students at his school and even to extent by his own parents.



# Chapters 3 and 4

## Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Bobby bundles up in winter clothes and wears his dad's sunglasses, so that he looks like a normal person so he can leave the house. He takes the bus to the library. When he gets to the library, he goes into the bathroom, completely undresses, and hides his bundle of clothes in the ceiling by moving one of the ceiling tiles. Bobby starts to explore the library in his invisible nature. After redressing, Bobby runs out of the library, in a hurry to make it home before his father does, as Bobby has been instructed not to leave the house, but did anyway. In his haste, he runs right into a girl and some items fall out of her backpack. As Bobby stoops to help her gather her things, his scarf falls off, which means that the girl can see that he doesn't have a face. Then Bobby realizes that even though the girl is looking straight at him, she does not seem afraid that he is faceless because she is blind.

When Bobby gets home, his father is already home. His father yells at Bobby about being gone in his condition. Bobby's father goes to pick up his mom at the University of Chicago. While his dad is gone, Bobby falls asleep on the couch. While his parents should have returned to the house in about 20 minutes, Bobby realizes he has been asleep for two hours. He awakes to a news story talking about a three-car accident and one of the cars is his dad's car. The news reporter says that the two occupants of his dad's car were taken to the hospital in serious condition.

## Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Bobby's change in natural state is also a symbol of his change in thought. The fact that he can move through crowds and around people without them seeing him also allows Bobby to view the world and people in a new and different way. The fact that Bobby is invisible allows him to almost get into the minds of the people he is observing because they are acting as if no one is watching them, so they move through their action uninhibited.

When Bobby was visible, he felt alone. Bobby's invisibility is a symbol of his loneliness. Even though Bobby is surrounded by people, whether he is visible or not, he feels alone. The fact that Bobby meets a blind girl foreshadows a relationship forming between him and the girl. Because the girl cannot see Bobby, the friendship or relationship they form with one another is based on personality and compatibility rather than looks. It's like the old adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

As Bobby's father scolds him for leaving the house, ironically, Bobby scolds his father back. Bobby tells his father that everything is more important to his parents than Bobby himself. This is how Bobby felt before he became invisible so the metamorphosis into an invisible boy is a representation or symbol about how Bobby felt anyway.



# Chapters 5 and 6

## Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

The police come to the door, presumably to tell him about his parents' car accident. He can't and doesn't answer the door. The phone rings and it is the doctor from the hospital. She tells Bobby that both of his parents are fine, but that he needs to make arrangements to stay with an adult or have an adult come stay with him until his parents are released from the hospital.

Bobby dresses again as a big bundle of winter clothes and takes a taxi cab to the hospital and asks to see Emily Phillips. When the nurse says he has to be a relative and get the doctor's permission to see her, Bobby sneaks into an empty patient room and becomes invisible by taking off all his clothes. He finds his mom's room number while he's invisible and heads to her room. While Bobby is visiting with his mom, three doctors come in to check on her. Bobby's mom tells the doctor that Bobby called her on her cell phone and that his Aunt Ethel is coming to stay with him.

## Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Bobby's mom sends him a coded message through the doctor by suggesting that he contact his Aunt Ethel to take care of him. The irony of the story is that Aunt Ethel lives in Miami, which indicates that Bobby's mom knows that Bobby is going to have to take care of himself considering his invisible condition.

Bobby sees a symbol of a "normal" family sitting around the dinner table on a commercial and decides that to be normal, he has to do normal things, which is to go visit his parents in the hospital. This is what convinced Bobby to bundle up in his winter clothing disguise and head to the hospital in the first place.

Both Bobby and his mom realize that they have taken each other for granted once Emily and David have been in the car accident. Bobby's mom realizes that even when she was in the home, she really wasn't there for Bobby. Now her injuries are prohibiting her from being there for Bobby again.

The same is true of Bobby's dad, since he is in worse condition than Bobby's mom and will probably be in the hospital even longer than she will be. It is also as if Bobby has fulfilled a self-fulfilling prophecy. He wanted to be alone and now he is.



# Chapters 7 and 8

## Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Bobby leaves the hospital, taking a taxi home and turns on the alarm system after he gets all the doors locked and shades down in the house. While Bobby has been home alone before, it has never been like this, never overnight and without anyone else in the house.

Bobby finds that his time alone in the house is very monotonous. He does the same things over and over again. His mother calls to check in and bark orders, just as she would if she were home, so that part of his life has not changed. Bobby is also able to talk to his dad on the phone for the first time. Mrs. Trent, the nosy neighbor brings cookies over for Bobby, but he tells her that he has the flu and Aunt Ethel is upstairs taking a bath. Mrs. Trent leaves the cookies on the porch and then Bobby dresses up like Aunt Ethel a little later to retrieve the cookies, so Mrs. Trent believes that Aunt Ethel is staying with him.

## Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

While Bobby may have felt alone before in his life, now that his parents are in the hospital, he is truly alone in this world and in his house until his parents come back. In a twist of irony, while Bobby has always wanted his parents to leave him alone and not bother him, now that they are not there and not bothering him, Bobby feels scared and alone. Bobby realizes that he cannot allow fear to control him; that he has to control the fear. Once he comes to this realization, he doesn't feel afraid anymore and continues on with a normal evening and goes to bed, but still locks his bedroom door behind him.

Bobby is starting to go through a metamorphosis, where he is beginning to realize that there is a difference between wanting to be left alone and actually being alone. Bobby misses running into mom at least twice a day, where she tells him what to do and then she goes on with her life in between. Before the accident, Bobby felt as if everything in his parents' lives were more important than him. Ironically, now that his mother is in the hospital, her life revolves around Bobby—what he is doing, what he is eating, whether he turned on the alarm system, whether or not he is watering her plants and why he hasn't gotten his homework assignments from one of the kids at school.

Bobby had some concern that the car accident may have affected his dad's way of thinking. Once Bobby talks to his dad, however, he realizes that his dad's mind is still intact and that his dad is still thinking about how to rectify Bobby's invisibility problem. As Bobby's parents are feeling better, they are calling him more and more, which is another change in the family dynamic from before the car accident and before Bobby became invisible.



Bobby begins to worry that his invisibility may become a permanent problem by the time the fourth day rolls around. This scares Bobby because he realizes that he will never be able to live a normal life in this condition. He can't go to school, go off to college, get married and have kids or any of the normal things that people do in life in his condition. It is a lesson for Bobby that wishing that you were alone or "invisible" to others and actually being alone and invisible are not the same thing at all. This is when Bobby decides to take control of his own life and make do with the life that he has by taking off all of his clothes, so he is invisible to the word and goes for a walk outside in the unseasonably warm weather.





# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

As Bobby walks around town naked, he is able to observe people doing things without them knowing that he is looking at them. For example, he notices a boy about 18 that puts on a cool act when his friends approach him. After his friends pass, his demeanor changes and he goes back to being who he really is. Bobby decides to go to his school and watch the kids file out for dismissal. When Bobby leaves his school, he heads to the library. Bobby wants to use one of the soundproof rooms to listen to a CD, but he finds all of the rooms occupied. In the final soundproof booth is the blind girl that he ran into a few days earlier, so he steps inside of her booth.

When Bobby steps into the soundproof booth with the blind girl, he realizes she is listening to an audiobook. Bobby says hi to the girl and she recognizes his voice as the guy that ran into her at the entrance of the library on Tuesday. She says she reserves the booth four times a week to do her school work because it's better than being at home. Bobby finds out that she does not attend school, but rather takes correspondence courses. Bobby asks the girl how she became blind, but then feels embarrassed and starts to leave, but the blind girl calls him back in to the cubicle. When it's time for her to leave, she invites Bobby to walk with her outside for a little while and they leave together.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Bobby thinks of himself as a symbol of a Greek warrior because the Greeks used to go to battle naked. Bobby believes walking around Chicago naked actually makes him more alert and aware of his surroundings, but at the same time he feels less protected from his nakedness.

Bobby goes to his school to watch as the kids file out for dismissal to see the event unfold from a different vantage point. While Bobby is usually part of the herd of kids heading to their bikes, buses or parents' cars to go home, Bobby is now outside of the herd. While he has never really felt like he belongs in the herd in the first place, now that he isn't part of the herd, he feels more left out than ever, more isolated than ever.

Bobby is seeking human contact, which he has been lacking for the past three days, when he steps into the soundproof booth with the blind girl. While he has been in voice contact with various people, he has been lacking a basic human social need, which is human contact.

Bobby realizes that he and the blind girl have a lot in common. One of each of their parents teaches at the university. Their dad's are both nerds and scientists and the blind girl can't see the world and the world can't Bobby. All of these factors may be what

initially forms the bond between Bobby and Alicia. Alicia being blind is what propels Bobby to tell Alicia that he is invisible in the first place.



# Chapters 11 and 12

## Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Bobby and the blind girl get on the elevator. Bobby has some concern about getting crushed on the elevator, but realizes that everyone crowds to the other side when they see the blind girl with her walking cane. Bobby observes how Alicia gets around using her cane to guide her. Even though they live in opposite directions, Bobby offers to continue walking with Alicia. Alicia thinks that Bobby is naked when Bobby tries to push her out of the way of a boy riding a scooter and Alicia feels Bobby's rib cage. She accuses him of being a creep, but then he admits to her that he is invisible. Alicia doesn't believe him until she asks a stranger if the guy standing next to her is taller than her or not. The guy confirms that there is nobody standing next to her.

When Bobby gets home, his mom on the phone. She's frantic because she and Bobby's father have been trying to reach him for hours. She tells Bobby that she will be home from the hospital tomorrow. He explains how he went out for a little while. When the phone rings later, Bobby suspects that it is one of his parents but it is Alicia, the blind girl he met at the library.

## Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Bobby and Alicia are one in the same. As Bobby hangs out with Alicia, he realizes that even though she is the one that cannot see, that the people around her act as if they are the ones that cannot see her. When they see she is blind, they step away from her.

When they see her whispering or talking to herself, when she is really talking to Bobby, they look away as if it must be normal for a blind girl to talk to herself. Even though people can see Alicia, she may as well be as invisible as Bobby is.

Alicia and Bobby are already starting to form a bond over how they are different from most of the people of the world. They are also able to get to know each other on a less trivial level than most people that make decisions or assumptions based on how someone looks.

For Alicia and Bobby, actions and words are much important than what each other looks like or what each other is wearing. It foreshadows a relationship, be it friendship or boyfriend and girlfriend, that is much deeper and less shallow than some relationships that are based on how someone looks, how popular they are, that they play sports or who they hang around with at school.



# Chapters 13 and 14

## Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Bobby's mom arrives home shortly after lunch on Friday. Bobby tells his mom he is going to meet a girl that he met at the library, that she is blind and that she knows he is invisible. When Bobby arrives at the library, he finds Alicia in her reserved soundproof booth. Bobby and Alicia make small talk and then Bobby asks her again how she went blind. Alicia explains she fell out of bed one night and bumped her head and then when woke up the next morning, she couldn't see anything. While Bobby and Alicia are talking, he notices a guy that keeps pacing outside of the soundproof booth. All of a sudden the man barges in and asks Alicia what's going on. The man is Alicia's father.

Bobby starts talking to Alicia's dad to explain why his daughter is talking to herself in her study booth. Alicia and her dad tell her mom about Bobby and Bobby goes to visit Alicia at her home one day. Bobby starts piecing together a timeline of events for the two days leading up to his disappearing to try to figure out what may have caused it. After missing three weeks of school, eventually the school calls the school board and the school board calls the health board to let them know that a high school boy has missed three weeks of school from the flu and has not provided a doctor's note about his absence.

## Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Bobby feels a sense of guilt about not being able to help his mom get out of the cab and into the house when she comes home from the hospital. He can sympathize with her need for someone else to help her and that she cannot do everything she used to be able to do on her own for right now.

As Bobby's mom scans the cleanliness of the house, because she had to cancel the cleaning lady and Bobby has not kept the house clean, Bobby expects his mom to criticize and bark orders like she usually does. Instead she simply asks him to clean up a little bit and Bobby complies. The old Bobby and the old mom come back a little while later when Bobby tells his mom that he is going out.

There is a struggle between Bobby and his mother on how Bobby should live his life. Bobby also has an internal struggle with this. He knows that his parents love and care about him, but at the same time he also believes that he is the one that has to live with the decisions he makes, and therefore should be able to make his own decisions.

Alicia compares herself to Bobby, saying they are one in the same, because when she first went blind she felt invisible like Bobby is. Alicia infers that people are superficial because she was popular before she went blind, but after she went blind, only one of her friends stood by her side.



Ironically, instead of completely freaking out that his daughter is talking to an invisible boy, Alicia's father, the astronomer, starts theorizing how Bobby got to be invisible. In a twist of irony, when Bobby tells his father that he has told Alicia and her family that he's invisible, his father reacts in a relieved and mellow manner. Bobby's dad says that he has heard of Alicia's dad and that maybe he can help with the situation.

Bobby starts to see both his parents' accident and his being invisible as a learning lesson. He realizes this a few weeks later when his dad comes home from the hospital. Their relationship has changed, so that Bobby really listens to what his dad says and Bobby's dad really listens to what Bobby is saying. They are communicating with each other now instead of simply talking at each other. Bobby also learns that he can be friends with a girl, as he and Alicia become closer and closer. Bobby learns how to talk and communicate with her, regardless of the fact that she is a girl. He simply sees her as a person.

There is some foreshadowing that the nosiness of people reaches beyond Mrs. Trent and that soon the story of Bobby being invisible is going to unravel.



# Chapters 15 and 16

## Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

After three weeks of Bobby being out of school, a truancy officer shows up at the Phillips' household. Mrs. Phillips tells her that Bobby is staying with a relative in Florida and that they are going to withdraw him from his Chicago school. When the truancy officer leaves, she stops and talks with Mrs. Trent. Bobby's mom calls Aunt Ethel to tell her the story about Bobby being invisible so that she can cover in case anyone calls her.

Bobby's mom tells Bobby to clean up his room and get things in order to make it look like he hasn't been at home for the past few days. The truancy officer returns to Bobby's home with some Chicago police officers and a search warrant with her. The police officers search the house, especially Bobby's room, looking for him. While the police officers are searching the home, the truancy officer continues to question Bobby's mom about his whereabouts. She tells Bobby's mom that they will be contacting Aunt Ethel in Florida and have the Florida child protection agency check in on Bobby and his situation.

## Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

An investigation is brewing as to what has really happened to a missing 15-year-old boy. Bobby's mother predicts that the storm will get worse before it gets better. She also predicts that the story she just fed the truancy officer is not going to end the investigation as where Bobby really is and what has really happened to him.

While Bobby's mother predicted that the truancy officer would be back with a search warrant in about an hour, she was wrong. It only took the truancy officer 45 minutes to return to the Phillips' residence with the right to search for and talk to Bobby.

While Bobby thinks his mom is crazy, his thoughts turn around when the truancy officer pulls up to the curb of the house with two Chicago police officer cars. The whole irony of the story is that the truancy officer and the police officers are only doing their jobs. The true irony is that Bobby is missing, but not in the way they assume he is missing.

A family matter is slowly turning into a legal matter, which foreshadows that the family may have to present Bobby to the proper authorities in his current state, if they can't figure out a way to make him visible again in the meantime. The truancy officer tells Bobby's mom they have five days to present Bobby and verify that he is in good health or it will become a legal matter. Bobby's thoughts at the end of the chapter infer Bobby is about to put a plan in place to become visible and save his parents from being hauled off to the Cook County Jail.



# Chapters 17 and 18

## Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

The phone rings and Bobby goes to answer it, but his mom grabs the receive out of his hand. She tells the caller that Bobby isn't there and instructs Bobby not to answer the phone. The caller was Alicia, so Bobby's mom hands Bobby her cell phone and tells him to call Alicia back from that phone. Bobby runs his plan by Alicia, which is to find other people who are invisible so they can compare notes and possibly figure out what caused it to happen. The challenge is how to find these other invisible people. Alicia tells Bobby that she is there to support him, just like her friend Nancy was there to support her.

Bobby's dad invites Alicia and her family over for dinner, so the two dad scientists can figure out what's going on with Bobby. Everyone eats pizza and drinks root beer, having a normal dinner before getting to the heart of the matter. During dinner, the two mothers figure out they went to the same university and they both majored in literature. Bobby and Alicia decide to go online while their moms talk and their dads work on figuring out the invisibility problem. The dads have a theory that the electron field from Bobby's electric blanket on his bed may be what is causing his invisibility, so they set to work to see if the electric blanket is working properly. Bobby's dad discovers that the electric blanket is giving off six times the amount of power it should. In the end, the blanket theory does not lead to any results, so Alicia's family says goodnight, goes home and Bobby's family cleans up the dinner dishes.

## Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Alicia tells Bobby she just finished listening to the book, *The Invisible Man*, with Bobby being the symbol of an invisible man, just as the main character in the book by H.G. Wells. When Alicia starts to summarize the book for Bobby, there are a lot of correlations between Bobby and the character in the book. For example, the invisible man is a genius, but feels like a freak because he is albino. This is why he makes himself invisible. Bobby too is a genius and feels like a freak, so it foreshadows that Bobby may have somehow willed himself to be invisible and that by Alicia telling Bobby the story by H.G. Wells, Bobby may be able to figure out how he became invisible so that can reverse it and become visible again.

Alicia points out to Bobby that he is the exact opposite of the character of the invisible man. While the invisible man is a schizoid maniac that is lonely, Bobby has a family that cares enough about him to go to jail for him in order to protect him.

Bobby's dad inviting Alicia's family over for dinner to work on Bobby's problem represents the need to depend on other people at certain times in life. While independence is a good characteristic, everyone needs help sometimes. Right now,



Bobby's family needs the help of Alicia's family to resolve Bobby's problem of being invisible. There is a sense of irony in the fact that both Bobby and Alicia's dads are both scientists. While they are different types of scientists, together, they may just be able to figure out how to make Bobby visible again.

Alicia and Bobby decide to search for invisible people on the Internet and Bobby is surprised at how much information the search provides. One of the studies is of particular interest, which is a paper written by a lady who has interviewed people that have become invisible to other people. Alicia and Bobby talk a lot about science versus "hocus-pocus" or the unknown. Some people relate invisibility to a supernatural phenomenon, but scientists relate it to an event.





# Chapters 19 and 20

## Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Bobby wakes up the next morning with a new idea—that if the electric blanket is faulty that there may be records of the people who returned the blankets or of a recall. Bobby goes to the parlor, where his father has the blanket and all his notes, and Bobby writes down the model number and the manufacturer of the electric blanket.

Bobby contacts Sears, which is the seller and the customer service representative says that they are exchanging this blanket with a comparable electric blanket for free, and that they are encouraging people with pacemakers not to use the blanket at all. Bobby tries to find out how many people have returned the blanket or if there are any records of the names of people who returned the blanket, but the customer service representative doesn't have this information.

Bobby calls Alicia with the information he has and she suggests he call the legal department of Sears. Alicia agrees to call the legal department to try to get more information for him.

When Alicia is walking toward Bobby on the corner where they agree to meet, Alicia's mom is following her. They agree to go to the library and wait her out until she gets bored. Alicia's mom stays on a bench outside of the library for about 10 minutes and then gets up and heads back home. Alicia hails a cab and she and Bobby head toward the corporate office of Sears. When the pair arrive at Sears headquarters, Alicia asks to speak to someone in the employment office, while Bobby looks at the directory to find out where the legal department is.

## Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

Since the Sears legal department will not share any information on the number of the electric blankets that were returned or who returned the blankets, it foreshadows that Bobby will use his invisibility as an advantage to get into the Sears legal department and into the records. Bobby enlists Alicia as his accomplice to hail a cab to and from the Sears offices and to hold the printouts or the disk copy he makes of the records of the names and contact information for the people who returned the same electric blanket Bobby owns.

Working together as a team, Alicia and Bobby each put their own set of skills to work. Alicia uses her ability to call a cab, talk to and pay the taxi cab driver to get her and Bobby to the Sears corporate offices. Bobby uses his stash of cash to pay for the ride. Bobby also uses his invisibility to get the information he needs to find the legal department.



Once he sees that someone from employment comes to speak with Alicia, Bobby heads off on his mission to find the other people who have returned the electric blanket he owns. This foreshadows that once Bobby obtains these records that he will find other people that have experienced the invisibility problem, and possibly other problems, that Bobby is currently experiencing. There is also a sense that Bobby may somehow get caught while rummaging through and trying to copy these records while in the legal department.



# Chapters 21 and 22

## Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Bobby gets into the locked legal department by following in another employee. He goes to the office of Amber Carson, which is the person Alicia spoke to on the phone. Bobby accesses her recently accessed files to find the information Bobby needs. Bobby finds and prints out the names and contact information for the people who exchanged the electric blanket for a new comparable blanket.

When Bobby and Alicia exit the Sears offices, Bobby tells Alicia he got the list and drops it into her backpack. The taxi arrives and they head back toward their houses. When the cab driver reaches Bobby's house, he jumps out with the papers, and Alicia asks the driver to take her to the library, that she just realized she forgot she has to run an errand.

When Bobby gets home, he gets past his mom and goes to his room to get dressed. He grabs the cell phone and starts making phone calls. He makes 58 phone calls with mixed outcomes, but with no information that helps him with his invisibility problem.

After dinner, Bobby makes the 59th phone call and talks to a father who says the blanket was his daughter's and that she has been "gone" for three years now. The way he says it, Bobby thinks he knows what he means and that he has hit the jackpot. He finds out that the old man last heard from his daughter via email. Bobby asks for the email address so he can contact her. Bobby conducts a reverse email search from Sheila's email address on an online website and finds her address and phone number in Miami, Florida.

## Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Bobby is beginning to embrace the powers that his invisibility provides to him. Instead of returning to the lobby, where he and Alicia agreed to meet, Bobby decides to peruse the offices of Sears. He has to wait for a couple employees to go in to the personnel area to try to find Alicia.

He finds Alicia in a conference room with three employees, but he doesn't want to Alicia to think he is spying on her, so when the meeting ends, Bobby returns to the lobby and meets Alicia there. Bobby arriving home with the contact information of other people who have exchanged the same blanket he owns is the beginning of the unraveling his invisibility problem.

As Bobby looks at the list of names he stole, he has mixed emotions. On one hand, he feels bad for having to sneak and steal the list of names. On the other hand, he knows that he had to do something to move his investigation forward to figure out how he became invisible. This is the only way that Bobby feels he can find the solution to make



himself visible once again. Bobby believes at least some of the people on this list hold the secret.

Bobby believes that Sheila, the old man's daughter, did not run away or just go missing, but instead she became invisible. He sets out to contact her so he can find out if his theory is true and talk to her about her experience. Bobby goes up to his room and calls Alicia to fill her in on what he has found.

Ironically, even though the trip to Sears was to help Bobby, it turned out to help Alicia too. Alicia now realizes that her being blind does not mean that she cannot live a normal life. There really are jobs out there for blind people like her, just like one of the blind employees that she met at Sears.



# Chapters 23 and 24

## Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

Bobby wakes up on Wednesday morning from a nightmare. He takes a shower and plans out what he is going to say to Sheila when he calls her today. As Bobby is about to call out for his mom to bring him a towel, he hears the truancy officer's voice talking to his mom downstairs.

The truancy officer is telling Bobby's mom that the Florida authorities have visited Ethel's house and that Aunt Ethel and Bobby are nowhere to be found. After Bobby's mom gets rid of the truancy officer and heads off to teach her class, Bobby calls Sheila. At first, Sheila acts very defensive and even hangs up on Bobby. When Bobby calls back and starts to explain his situation on her answering machine, Sheila picks up the phone and admits she knows that he's talking about being invisible.

When Bobby tells Alicia about his conversation with Sheila, Alicia convinces Bobby to tell his dad and her dad the information he found out from Sheila. When Bobby tells his dad, his dad is thrilled and starts asking a lot of details that Bobby doesn't have the answers to. Bobby's dad says that the details are important because it can help them to figure out what the problem is and possibly how to reverse it.

## Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

When Bobby realizes that Sheila's experience with invisibility is the same as his, he feels as if he has found a long lost relative or a kindred soul. Sheila describes how once she became invisible how she adapted to her new life, her new situation.

She learned how to carry on with life using a computer, electronic transfers, and disguising herself as an Islamic woman in an Islamic community in Miami, so that she can go grocery shopping. Sheila's adaptation is a symbol of how people have to learn how to adapt to change and deal with situations in the best way that they can.

The Internet is a symbol of "Things Not Seen," the title of the book. The Internet makes everyone invisible. The Internet allows anyone to be anyone they want to be and do almost anything anonymously, without someone knowing who they really are.

When Bobby hangs up the phone, he has confirmation that the electric blanket is part of turning both him and Sheila invisible, but there has to be another contributing factor, or more people who returned the blanket would be invisible too. Sheila also warns Bobby against telling anyone about her. When Sheila finds out Alicia already knows, she warns Bobby to be careful because she has had to move three times because she told people she thought she could trust and was betrayed.



Bobby feels a shift within himself that makes him feel like he is growing up. Even though his father is pushing him for details about Sheila, Bobby refuses to give it to his father. He tells his father that he made a promise to Sheila to keep her out of it and he refuses to break his promise. Finally, Bobby's dad relents and says that he is right and that they will figure it out without dragging Sheila into it.



# Chapters 25 and 26

## Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

After Bobby's dad talks to Alicia's dad, Alicia's dad says he can use his relational database using the information that they have about the two blankets. Alicia's dad shows up at Bobby's house with the results of his search.

On the dates and in the places that both Bobby and Sheila disappeared, there was a dramatic increase in solar wind, which agitated the electric controller of the blanket and caused the magnetic field to increase significantly. The problem is that they have to figure out how to reverse the process, which could realistically take years. And, even then, they may not be able to find a way to reverse it.

Bobby wakes up from a four hour nap after excusing himself from the dinner table. Bobby sneaks past his parents room and goes downstairs and boots up the computer. He researches some of the names Alicia's dad was throwing around and sees a press release that says that a higher than normal energy level is occurring and expected to occur for the next few weeks.

Bobby sends an instant message to Alicia to see if she is still awake. While they are talking, Alicia jokingly suggest that Bobby go take a particle bath to see what happens. Bobby signs off IM by telling Alicia he'll call her in the morning. Bobby takes his electric blanket upstairs and recreates the situation as it was the night he turned invisible.

## Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Now that they know what caused both Bobby and Sheila to be invisible, the question is how to reverse it. Bobby watches the silent conversation that takes place in the eyes of his and Alicia's dad and realizes the answer is that it could take years to find the solution. Bobby decides the best thing to do is to announce it to everyone, so that they can get the funding and the help they need to truly discover the cure and stop all this madness.

While making this information may help people, such as Bobby and Sheila, it can also create chaos. If the way to become invisible gets into the wrong hands, it can cause spy issues, criminal issues and overall security issues all over the world.

However, Bobby sees it as his parents making his choice about his life for him. His parents have decided that it is in his best interest also not to make this information public. They believe they can handle the legal issue by changing their story to say that he ran away.

Bobby starts to envision his life when it returns to normal, the way that things used to be. The ironic part of this is when his life was normal, Bobby did not see it hat way. He



saw himself as a misfit and as if people saw right through him rather than see him for who he truly is. The information Bobby finds suggests that he may be able to reverse the process by using the electric blanket under the same conditions that were present when it turned him invisible in the first place.





# Chapters 27 and 28

## Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

At 4:30 in the morning, Bobby is woken up by voices downstairs, which turn out to be the truancy officer and the police with a search warrant. They head straight to Bobby's room. Bobby removes his boxer shorts before the police officer enters, gets out of bed and stands by his desk. When the officer enters the room, he looks Bobby straight in the eyes and asks who he is. Once the police and truancy officer leave, Bobby tells his parents about his experiment.

After Bobby's mom leaves for work, Bobby calls Sheila and tells her that he is visible again. He asks Sheila if she wants him to mail or email the instructions on how to reverse it. Sheila tells him to forget about her. Bobby walks to Alicia's house to tell her in person that he isn't invisible anymore. Alicia is happy to hear the news and reaches out to touch Bobby to feel that he is wearing clothes and then she starts touching his hair and his face to "read" what he looks like. As Bobby leans in to kiss Alicia, it looks like she's going to cry and rushes out of the room.

After Bobby leaves Alicia's house, he goes home and boxes up the blanket and information for Sheila. He takes the box to post office to ship it to her, just in case she changes her mind in the future. When Bobby returns, he has an instant message and email from Alicia explaining how she feels. Bobby prints out the poem that Alicia wrote for him and heads to her house to tell her how much he loves it.

## Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

It seems as if Bobby's experiment has worked and he is now visible again. Bobby can see the wheels in his father's head spinning. Bobby can see that his father cannot wait to conduct the experiment on something else, such as a mouse. Now that Bobby is back to normal, he can return to his normal life, but Bobby also knows his life will never be the same again. While he can get up and go to school since he is no longer invisible, Bobby thinks to himself that he has some things to take care of first.

Sheila explains to Bobby that she was becoming invisible in life long before she actually did. She said if it hadn't been the blanket incidents, it may have been drugs, alcohol or an abusive boyfriend. Sheila says she has been living this way for three years now, she has adapted to her life and she likes her life the way it is.

Bobby thinks that he does understand how Sheila feels. Being invisible also erases all sorts of responsibilities that cannot be avoided when you are visible. Now that he is visible, all of this has come rushing back.

While Alicia is happy that Bobby's life has returned to normal, she is sad to know that her own outcome will not be as positive as Bobby's life is. At the same time, she holds

some hope that at some point in the future, the doctors will be able to identify what has caused her blindness and then determine a way to reverse the blindness. When Bobby heads to Alicia's house to tell her how much he loves the poem that she has written for him, it is also his way of telling Alicia how much he loves her.



# Characters

## Bobby Phillips

Bobby Phillips is a 15-year-old boy. He is the son of a professor mother and a physicist for a father. Since his mother is a professor, Bobby attends a special private school, the University of Chicago lab school. Bobby is the main character and narrator of the book. Bobby is a very intelligent boy. He is also musically inclined. Bobby loves to listen to music and play the trumpet.

## Emily Phillips

Emily Phillips is Bobby's mom. She is a professor of literature at the University of Chicago. Bobby refers to her as the "Director" because she is always giving orders. While she seems like a tough, organized, and regimented person on the outside, she does have a motherly instinct that makes her truly care about her son. Emily comes to realize that she has been taking her relationship for granted after she is in a car accident with her husband and after Bobby becomes invisible.

## David Phillips

David Phillips is Bobby's dad. David is a physicist at FermiLab, where they smash atoms, take pictures of the pieces, and evaluate them. David has a scientific answer for everything that happens, but he is at a loss when Bobby becomes invisible. Mr. Phillips too has been taking his relationship with Bobby for granted. He realizes this once he has the car accident with his wife and after Bobby turns invisible. Mr. Phillips changes his outlook on work and life in general after these incidents occur.

## Dr. Van Dorn

Dr. Van Dorn is Alicia's father. Dr. Van Dorn is also an astronomer. Alicia's dad works with Bobby's dad to figure out what caused Bobby to become invisible and they start to try to figure out a way to reverse the invisibility. He is the one that ultimately determines how the electric blanket and the occurrence in the universe is what caused Bobby and Sheila to turn invisible.

## Mrs. Van Dorn

Mrs. Van Dorn is Alicia's mother. Alicia's mother is a former public relations professional. When Alicia went blind, Mrs. Van Dorn quit her job to take care of Alicia. Mrs. Van Dorn is a very overprotective mother. She is very apprehensive about her blind daughter hanging out with an invisible boy. By the end, when Bobby becomes invisible again,



Mrs. Van Dorn feels much better about Alicia hanging around with Bobby because she can visually see that Bobby is actually a normal 15-year-old boy.

## **Mrs. Trent**

Mrs. Trent is the nosy neighbor that lives across the street from Bobby's house. She's always in everyone's business and she consistently comes to Bobby's house after his parents get into an accident to check on him. Bobby thinks that she wants to know what's going on more than caring about him.

## **Aunt Ethel**

Aunt Ethel is Bobby's aunt that lives in Florida. She is the person that Bobby's mom tells the doctor that is coming to stay with Bobby while she and her husband are in the hospital. Bobby tells everyone who asks, including Mrs. Trent, that Aunt Ethel is staying with him while his parents are gone.

## **Alicia Van Dorn**

Alicia is the blind girl that Bobby runs into at the entrance of the library. Over the course of the book, Alicia and Bobby build a bond because Alicia cannot tell that Bobby is invisible. While Alicia is helping Bobby to deal with his own disability, Alicia is also struggling with her disability of being blind. The two disabilities is what initially bonds the two together, but ultimately getting to know each other as people is what creates a relationship between Alicia and Bobby.

## **Mrs. Paggett**

Mrs. Pagget is the truancy officer that comes to the Phillips' residence to investigate why Bobby has been out of school for three weeks. Mrs. Pagget also involves the Chicago police to conduct a search of the home with a search warrant to try to find out what has happened to Bobby.



# Objects/Places

## Library

The library is one of Bobby's favorite places to visit. He even visits on several occasions during the month he is invisible. The entrance of the library is also where Bobby runs into Alicia for the first time.

## Walking Stick

The white walking stick that Alicia carries is what helps her to get around by herself since she cannot see. The stick also comes in handy when Bobby is walking with Alicia so that nobody runs into him when he is naked and invisible.

## Electric Blanket

The electric blanket is on Bobby's bed and he sleeps with it turned on during the winter months. The blanket ends up having a malfunction, combined with a surge of energy in the universe, that is the cause of turning Bobby into an invisible boy. The electric blanket is also what turns Bobby back into a visible boy.

## Soundproof Library Booth

The soundproof library booth is a central meeting place for Bobby and Alicia as their relationship develops. The location allows Alicia and Bobby to communicate with each other without other people in the library to really notice that Alicia is talking to herself, even though she is talking to Bobby. The soundproof booth also represents a refuge for Alicia away from her mother ever since Alicia went blind. Alicia feels smothered by her mother, as if Alicia's mother has made it her job to take care of Alicia, when Alicia feels she can take care of herself.

## U of C Lab

The U of C lab is a special private school. The school is for the children of the professors that work at the University of Chicago. The U of C lab is the school where Bobby attends because his mother is a professor at the University of Chicago.

## **FermiLab**

FermiLab is where Bobby's father works as a physicist. Bobby and his father believe that his father's work and experiments at the lab may lead to a solution to reversing Bobby's invisibility.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that runs throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age. In some way, each of the characters learns lessons about growing up and dealing with responsibilities in life. Primarily, Bobby's invisibility forces him to see life, his parents and the actions of others from a different point of view. When Bobby was visible, he felt invisible anyway, so when he becomes visible again, Bobby appreciates his life, his parents and his relationships in a more mature manner.

Even Alicia, Bobby's parents and Alicia's parents go through a transformation when they are working together to help Bobby overcome his invisibility problem. While Bobby and Alicia start out as friends, their relationship has blossomed into a budding young love story by the end of the book.

## Friendship

The underlying theme of the novel is friendship. The novel talks about how Bobby did not really have many friends when was visible. When Bobby becomes invisible and meets Alicia, who is blind, Bobby feels less self-conscious about himself. This allowed him to feel more self-confident and to be himself as he gets to know Alicia better.

Alicia and Bobby also feel a special connection because of their disabilities. Because Alicia is blind, people treat her as if she is a freak. Even when Bobby was visible, he felt like people treated him as a freak. When he becomes invisible, he also is treated as a freak. This is a connection that binds and strengthens the friendship between Bobby and Alicia.

## Family

Family is one of the central themes throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of the Phillips' family, as well as the Van Dorn family, and how these families interact. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Bobby's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, no matter what is happening, they are united as a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

# Style

## Point of View

The book is written in the first-person point of view. The book narrator is from the point of view of a 15-year-old boy, Bobby Phillips. Bobby is telling the story as it unfolds, but he also gives insight to the past that has brought the family to where they are today.

The point of view of this book provides an intimate point of view to allow the reader to connect closely with the main character, who also happens to be the narrator of the story. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place to him and his family members without having to move out of character or interrupt the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this play and the author's writing style.

## Setting

The book is set in the home of the Phillips family, which is in Chicago. While it does state the year in which the story is told, it is relatively modern because the characters are using the Internet, computers and cell phones. The setting of this novel is important because the story revolves around the culture, family dynamics, and coming of age of this particular family. The Phillips' family is also very representative of what a lot of families similar to them go through with two parents working and trying to make time for raising their children at the same time. The main characters of the novel are two families. The Phillips' family is a mother, father and son. The Van Dorn family consist of a mother, father and daughter.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware of all of the family dynamics that exist. However, as events unfold, one behavior after the next is exposed as interpreted by the narrator.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is modern. The language of the novel is not formal and is set in modern times, such as the late '90s or early 2000s. The language is educated, strong, and descriptive enough that it creates a flow that leaves the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel ends.

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



## Structure

The novel is divided into 28 chapters. Each chapter is anywhere from 5 to 12 pages long. The chapters tell the story both in exposition and dialogue. The author is the narrator and main character of the book, so it seems as if he is injecting his own voice throughout the novel. The author also seems to provide his own opinions of the events surrounding the setting of the novel, as well as the actions taking place within the plot.

The novel contains one main plot and a few subplots. The main plot involves the coming of age theme. The subplots involve friendship and family.



## Quotes

"Now everyone just calm down. What we need to do most of all is think carefully. There's no such thing as a problem that can't be solved or...or a process that can't be explained. It just takes clear thinking." (Chapter 1, p. 8).

"Now lay your hand right on the desk. See that? That outline? It's the shape of your hand, but there's no color, no definite form, and the desk underneath is hidden. And see how the edge seems all wavy? That's because of the refraction. Now pull your hand up slowly. Hold it there! See that? When you get six or eight inches away from something - bing! - you're gone." (Chapter 2, p. 14).

"Yeah, working on a special project." (Chapter 3, p. 21).

"So then what do my responsible parents do? They make sure I'm asleep and they leave. Because so many other things are really important." (Chapter 4, p. 32).

"Your mother suggested that you might call your Aunt Ethel. Does that sound right to you?" (Chapter 5, p. 39).

"I hate you being home by yourself, but there is nothing we can do about it." (Chapter 6 p. 51).

"Mom? Mom, it's me. I got home fine, and now I'm fixing some food...it's about nine, I guess. So...say hi to Dad, and I'll call you tomorrow. Or you can call me. Bye." (Chapter 7, p. 55).

"The second I get out of here, I'd like to run some tests at the lab. (Chapter 8, p. 62).

"I called you back because no one ever asks me about being blind or how it happened or anything. Most people just try to avoid me, especially other kids." (Chapter 10, p. 80).

"The guy there next to you? Miss...actually, there's no one there." (Chapter 11, p. 90).

"I think you're so brave, Bobby. Really. Like, to go and visit your mom? And this afternoon, telling me about what's going on? That was brave too." (Chapter 12, p. 97).

"I guess I was popular before it happened, but that didn't help. All of the kids I hung around with just disappeared—all but Nancy, Nancy Fredericks." (Chapter 13, p. 107).

"Mrs. Phillips, isn't it? And how's that Bobby? He has the flu, right?" (Chapter 14, p. 118).

"This is a real mess—and it's dangerous for you. I don't want these people taking you away from me." (Chapter 15, p. 124).



"They'd take you to a hospital or a research facility, and God knows how we'd ever get you back. And I'm not going to let them break up our family."  
(Chapter 16, p. 132).

"So you're saying...maybe there's this whole squad of other invisible people out there somewhere?...That's pretty hard to believe." (Chapter 17, p. 138).

"Interesting way to describe your old life, don't you think?" (Chapter 18, p. 161).

"And you think the records are in their legal department somewhere?" (Chapter 19, p. 170).

"I'm with personnel, and I'd be happy to try to answer your questions. Let's head this way. Would you like to take my arm?" (Chapter 20, p. 179).

"So you got something?" (Chapter 21, p. 185).

"Maybe you meeting those people was what today was really about, you know what I mean?" (Chapter 22, p. 198).

"You can't just call someone up and say, 'I turned invisible one day,' can you?" (Chapter 23, p. 205).

"I don't know how you located this woman, Bobby, but it's not a small thing. This is first class work, son. First class." (Chapter 24, p. 216).

"So this blast of high-energy particles cuts through the exaggerated electrical field caused by the faulty blanket controller, and bingo! No more Bobby!"  
(Chapter 25, p. 218).

"Go turn on the blanket and take a particle bath—you can't get more invisible—maybe it'll be like two negatives make a positive—that's the point, smarty pants!" (Chapter 26, p. 227).

"I-I'm Bobby Phillips." (Chapter 27, p. 233).

"Mrs. Van Dorn, I'm Bobby Phillips." (Chapter 28, p. 241).



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Bobby? Why does he feel like his parents do not allow him to make his own decisions and live his own life? What happens to Bobby when he wakes up in the morning? What is Bobby's challenge in the book? Why is this important? How does it change his life? Do you think that Bobby turning invisible is a scientific matter or more of a psychological matter that represents how Bobby feels? Do you think that Bobby feeling like an outsider at his school is normal for a 15-year-old or do you think that there are other circumstances that are making Bobby feel this way?

Discuss the relationship between Bobby and his parents. Is it a typical relationship that parents have with a teenager or is it different? Is there a sense of guilt in their relationship? How does Bobby feel about his mom? How does Bobby feel about his father? Does Bobby feel that his parents careers are more important than he is to them? What does he do about it?

How does Alicia go blind? How does this affect the way she sees her future? How do people react to and treat Alicia because she is blind? Why does Alicia think her mother quit her job after Alicia went blind? Does Alicia being blind make a difference in the friendship that Bobby and Alicia form? Why or why not?

Who is Mr. Phillips? What does he do for a living? How does Mr. Phillips' career play into the plot of the novel? Why does there seem to be a strain in the relationship between Bobby and his dad? How does the reader know this? Is there a resolution in their relationship by the end of the novel. If so, how do you think the relationship has changed. How do you think the car accident and Bobby's invisibility affected the relationship, if at all?

Who is Mrs. Phillips? Why does she continuously bark orders at Bobby? What kind of relationship does Bobby have with his mother? What changes their relationship? Is it the car accident that Bobby's parents have or is it Bobby becoming invisible? What is Mrs. Phillips' outlook on life by the end of the novel?

What would you do if one morning you woke up and you were invisible? Do you think you would handle the situation the same way that Bobby did or in a different way? Do you think you would handle the situation that Sheila did or differently? What would you do to explore the world as an invisible person? Do you believe that it is possible for scientific actions to turn someone invisible or do you believe the novel is simply fiction?

What would you do if one morning you woke up and you were blind like Alicia? Do you think you would handle the situation the same way that Sheila did or in a different way? How do you think you would feel - angry, scared or another emotion? How would handle the the fact that the doctors do not really caused your blindness and they don't know how to cure it? Do you believe that science is fact? If so, why can the doctors not explain why Alicia went blind and what may be able to reverse her blindness? Do you

believe that Alicia's blindness may be psychological so that she could be taught a lesson about life?