

What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know Study Guide

What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know by Sonya Sones

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Plot Summary

What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know is a novel award-winning author Sonya Jones. The story follows the main character, Robin Murphy, who is a loser that the kids have made fun of since he moved to town when he was in the fourth grade. Robin improves his own social status when he starts dating one of the prettiest and most popular girls in school, Sophie Stein.

Unfortunately, for Sophie, her status for dating Robin loses Sophie her two best friends, Grace and Rachel. It also puts Sophie in a position where she is now the butt of the kids' jokes at school. "Don't be such a Murphy" is a line the kids at school coined to call someone a loser using Robin's last name. After Sophie continues to date Robin, the kids coin a new term, "Don't be such a Stein."

Sophie and Robin have attitudes that put them together against the world. They laugh at the cruel things the kids say and do until Robin hears them using "Stein" as a derogatory term. Then he decides that it is in Sophie's best interest to break up with her. Sophie doesn't agree and so they work out their difference. Eventually, Rachel, Sophie's friend stands up for Sophie and Robin, and begins to hang out with them.

In the meantime, Robin is such a talented artist that his art teacher talks his friend who teaches art at Harvard to allow Robin to sit in on the class without earning credit for it. In college, it's as if Robin is leading an entirely new life. The kids in his class think he's funny, smart, and a talented artist. Even later when they find out he's only in high school, they continue to want to be his friend.

One of the college girls allows Robin to get to "second base" with her. Unfortunately, for Robin, Sophie catches them making out on the street and breaks up with him. This coming of age story allows the characters to learn how to overcome problems at school such as bullying, but also how to deal with the daily life of being a teenager including first loves, first kisses, first time getting to "second base," and puberty in general.



Pages 1-12

Pages 1-12 Summary

Robin Murphy, who is the main character of the novel, is also the narrator. He's remembering back how over Christmas break, he landed Sophie Stein, one of the prettiest girls in school, as his girlfriend. Now that they are back at school, Robin thinks that Sophie is going to break up with him. Instead, she surprises him by approaching him and grabbing his hands in the cafeteria. Her two best friends come over and ask her what she's doing and Sophie introduces them to Robin.

Pages 1-12 Analysis

Prior to dating Sophie Stein, Robin Murphy was a guy at school that the kids make fun of. It foreshadows that his life while dating Sophie will change for the better, possibly skyrocketing him to one of the most popular kids in school.



Pages 13-25

Pages 13-25 Summary

As Robin and Sophie walk through the halls holding hands, all of the other students are staring and whispering. None of them can believe that a girl like Sophie would be with a guy like Robin. They run into Sophie's ex-boyfriend and he thinks Sophie is playing a joke by being with Robin. When Robin and Sophie go to art class together, Robin sees something in Sophie's eyes. After school, Robin and Sophie meet up on the football field and Sophie tells Robin everything is going to be okay.

Pages 13-25 Analysis

The look Robin sees in Sophie's eyes foreshadows that Sophie isn't really in love with Robin and that she will dump Robin. Robin thinks Sophie sees him for the person he really is rather than what everyone sees on the outside. He wishes that the other students could see him as the same person that Sophie does.



Pages 26-38

Pages 26-38 Summary

While Robin and Sophie are kissing on the football field, someone throws a snowball that hits Robin on the back between his shoulder blades. Robin and Sophie start making puns as they walk down a different street to reach Sophie's house - a street where they won't run into Sophie's best friends. When they get to Sophie's house, they go into the kitchen. Mrs. Stein catches them kissing so she keeps making excuses as to why she has to keep coming into the kitchen. Robin and Sophie spend the afternoon doing homework and doodling until it's time for Robin to walk home.

Pages 26-38 Analysis

It seems as if Sophie's mom doesn't realize that Robin and Sophie are boyfriend and girlfriend until she walks in on them kissing in the kitchen. Sophie and Robin seem to really understand each other and make each other laugh, even though up until now they have lived two very different lives.



Pages 39-51

Pages 39-51 Summary

As Robin is walking home, he hears two kids on the playground saying, "Don't be such a Murphy!" The kids are using Robin's last name as an adjective to describe a loser. Robin remembers how using his last name as an insult started back in fourth grade when he first moved to the area. When Robin gets home, he tries sneaking past his parents so he doesn't have to tell them everything that happened today. Robin rushes through dinner so he doesn't have to make eye contact with his parents. Then he calls Sophie and they talk while she's taking a bath. Tuesday at school, Robin is in the library when he hears Sophie, Grace, and Rachel talking in the next aisle.

Pages 39-51 Analysis

Robin really likes Sophie. He also thinks that Sophie really likes him. Overhearing a conversation between Sophie and her friends, Rachel and Grace, foreshadows that he'll find out that Sophie doesn't feel as strongly about him as he does about her.



Pages 52-64

Pages 52-64 Summary

Robin overhears Rachel and Grace asking Sophie if she's really with Robin. Sophie says she is and ends up leaving the library in tears. Robin wants to run after her but then she'll know he was eavesdropping. Later, in the cafeteria, Sophie tells Robin that Rachel and Grace cornered her in the bathroom and made her choose between them and Robin. Sophie chooses Robin. Sophie and Robin celebrate their three-week anniversary at the art museum where they first talked to each other. Robin says he'll grow a beard so Sophie can experience what it feels like to kiss someone with a beard. Sophie invites Robin over after school while her parents are at marriage counseling.

Pages 52-64 Analysis

Robin and Sophie are growing closer. It is still not clear if Sophie really has strong feelings for Robin or if she's just trying to prove a point by being with the most unpopular guy in school. Sophie inviting Robin over after school while her parents are gone foreshadows them having sex with each other for the first time. Since Robin is working on a STD project for school, it also foreshadows Robin catching an STD from Sophie.



Pages 65-77

Pages 65-77 Summary

When Robin and Sophie arrive at Sophie's house, they start to make out. When Robin starts to go up Sophie's shirt, the look on her face makes Robin realize she's not ready. Robin gives his presentation on STDs to his health class. In art class, someone draws a picture on the board showing Robin with his hands down a girl's pants. Robin and Sophie think the girl is Sophie, but the teacher has already erased her face when they come into the room. The art teacher tells Robin his friend is an art teacher at Harvard and when he showed him Robin's work, the teacher offered to have Robin sit in on the class unofficially. Robin and Sophie have dinner plans on Friday night, but Sophie's mom makes her cancel for a family dinner. On Saturday, they go to the museum to celebrate their five-week anniversary and then buy a yellow hat for Robin at the thrift store that makes him look like the man in their favorite Renoir painting of two lovers. Robin's mom drops him off at the Harvard art class.

Pages 65-77 Analysis

Robin is very insecure about the way he looks. His insecurities make the other kids at school pick on him even more than they normally do. Robin chooses, however, not to react to the teasing, but instead ignores it. Robin attending a college art class foreshadows exposing him to older and more mature students, which might also show him that life in high school does not define you as a person.



Pages 78-90

Pages 78-90 Summary

As Robin is walking into the classroom, a short girl with wire-rimmed glasses recites lyrics from a Doors song that Robin identifies correctly. As the students start to introduce themselves, Robin feels as if he belongs in the classroom. For the first time, he is making people laugh because he is funny rather than having them laugh at him. The assignment in art class is drawing a naked female model, which is distracting Robin, giving him the inability to draw.

Pages 78-90 Analysis

Robin is ahead of his time. he feels more at home and comfortable with students that are older than him than he does with his own peers. The art class at Harvard represents a clean slate for Robin because it allows him to learn about who he really is without being ridiculed in the process.



Pages 91-103

Pages 91-103 Summary

Robin is finally able to get over the model's nakedness and sketch the pictures. When he shows them to Sophie, she tells him that in each sketch his drawing gets better and better. Back at school, someone wrote all over the girls' and boys' bathrooms nasty things about Sophie and what she likes to do to Robin. Robin overhears Grace and Rachel talking about the writing so he doesn't think it was them who wrote it. Sophie and Robin eat lunch out on the bleachers that day. When Robin goes to the second art class at Harvard, a college girl flirts with him, saying she likes his hat and his beard. This makes Robin wish Sophie was there so that she could see she's not the only girl that thinks he is great.

Pages 91-103 Analysis

As the kids at school continue to make fun of Sophie and Robin, it is starting to wear Sophie down. It's making her sad and depressed. Suddenly, her mood springs back to an "it's us against them."



Pages 104-116

Pages 104-116 Summary

The next art class at Harvard, the model is a large and overweight woman. At first, Robin is grossed out by her. As he starts to draw her, however, he realizes that she is even more interesting to draw than Chelsea, the beautiful model from their previous class. After class, some of the students invite Robin out to eat with them but he declines because his mother is probably already waiting to pick him up. He tells his mom not to pick him up until he calls after his next art class and their model this time is a man. At high school, the kids still make fun of Robin and one boy even throws Robin's hat in the trash.

Pages 104-116 Analysis

It's as if Robin is living a double life. In high school, he is the same loser he has always been. In college, however, he has a new and exciting life where he fits in with the other students, makes them laugh and where he is forming real friendships.



Pages 117-129

Pages 117-129 Summary

Everything continues to act in the same way at high school with both Rachel and Grace ignoring Sophie and Dylan constantly stealing Robin's hat. Everything continues in the same way at the college art class where Robin is included in both after-class dinners and jokes. This time, the model in class is the hot college girl that was flirting with Robin. Her name is Berry.

Pages 117-129 Analysis

Robin continues to lead a double life. His insecurities still creep into his college persona every once in a while, so he continues to think that his classmates are not including him, but they always are.



Pages 130-143

Pages 130-143 Summary

Robin tells Sophie how he feels as if he belongs at the college art class. He notices that things at school are getting increasingly hard for Sophie. One day, Robin is rounding the corner in the school hallway when he hears someone say not to be a "Stein." As Robin sees Sophie coming to meet him after school at the goalpost, he runs from her home. Robin realizes that he has to break up with Sophie for her own good. He tells his mom to send Sophie away if she comes to the house, which his mother does.

Pages 130-143 Analysis

Ironically, it's not Sophie that wants to break up with Robin, it's the other way around.



Pages 144-156

Pages 144-156 Summary

Robin shuts off his cell phone when Sophie starts calling it. Then Sophie calls the house phone every 10 minutes. Robin's parents are thinking about not going to in Vermont they're supposed to attend on Saturday, but Robin tells them to go. He wishes he could call his college friends to discuss his problems, but realizes he can't because then they'll find out he's in high school. By Saturday afternoon, Robin has yanked the phone cord out of the wall, so his parents send the neighbor, Mrs. Jeffries, over to check on Robin. Robin calls his parents and they tell him they are snowed into Vermont and they won't be home until the morning. Someone is ringing the doorbell insistently and when Robin flings open the door it's Sophie. She walks past Robin and goes upstairs to his room. When Robin gets there, Sophie has drawn a picture of herself standing on the football field with a boy running away from her and a dialogue bubble with a big question mark in it. Robin starts to draw the next picture.

Pages 144-156 Analysis

Robin is trying to avoid breaking up with Sophie because he really doesn't want to break up with her. He knows, however, that it's probably the best thing he can do for Sophie because she keeps getting hurt. Since Sophie doesn't know the source of Robin's change in behavior, she is using the medium they share, drawing, as their means to communicate what's going on between them.



Pages 157-169

Pages 157-169 Summary

Robin and Sophie draw back and forth until Robin tells her what he heard Dylan saying. Sophie says she knows that people have been saying it and that it hurts, but that they can't let people break them up. Sophie and Robin say they love each other at the same time. Sophie takes off her shirt and writes on the front, "I'm such a Stein." On the back, she writes, "And proud of it." Robin takes his shirt off and writes "I'm with Stein" on it. They decide to go to the museum, but Robin calls his parents first to tell them where he is going. He doesn't tell them Sophie is with him. While at the museum, Robin sees two of his friends from art class, but doesn't want to introduce Sophie to them.

Pages 157-169 Analysis

Robin's two worlds are about to collide. This scares Robin because his college life makes him so happy and makes him feel as if he belongs. His high school life on the other hand makes him feel the exact opposite.



Pages 170-182

Pages 170-182 Summary

Sophie and Robin stop by the pizza place after the museum and then go back to Robin's house. They make out until Sophie stops and admits she's a virgin. She says she wants to go further with Robin but that wants to take it slow. They make out until Sophie's mom calls to say she's picking Sophie up in 10 minutes. At school on Monday, Sophie and Robin walk into the cafeteria with their homemade t-shirts. They sit at their normal lunch table and suddenly Rachel sits down with them, points at Robin's shirt and says she's with Stein too.

Pages 170-182 Analysis

Robin and Sophie are both struggling with puberty and the intense feelings it creates between a boyfriend and a girlfriend. Sophie and Robin also realize that there is power in numbers, so if they stand up against everyone at school together, they have a better chance of getting through the problems. Rachel, Sophie's former friend, suddenly realizes what true friendship is about and returns to being friends with Sophie. This foreshadows that Grace will follow Rachel's move and start being friends with Sophie again too.



Pages 183-195

Pages 183-195 Summary

Robin escorts the girls, Rachel and Sophie, into Mr. Schultz's art room so they can make up in private. When Schultz walks in and sees their t-shirts, he makes one of his own. After Rachel and Sophie make up, Rachel is always with Sophie and Robin, so they are getting to spend very time alone together.

Pages 183-195 Analysis

Ironically, all Robin has wanted is for Sophie to make up with her friends so that she'll be happy again. When Sophie and Rachel make up though, it seems as if Sophie is happier without Robin—as if she doesn't need him anymore. What's truly ironic is that Sophie being with Robin is what caused the split with her friends to begin with. While it is Robin that intended on breaking up with Sophie for her own good, it might be Sophie that ends up breaking up with Robin.



Pages 196-208

Pages 196-208 Summary

Things continue on pretty much the same with Rachel, Sophie and Robin. Robin does notice that some of the kids at school are coming around. They aren't making fun of him as much and some of them are even doing the secret handshake that Robin and Sophie made up and have been doing around school.

Pages 196-208 Analysis

Ever since Robin and Sophie have stood up to the kids at school that were making fun of them, the kids at school have been going through a transformation. Sophie is having a hard time learning how to juggle the relationship she has with Ever since Robin and Sophie have stood up to the kids at school that were making fun of them, the kids at school have been going through a transformation. Sophie is having a hard time learning how to juggle the relationship she has with Ever since Robin and Sophie have stood up to the kids at school that were making fun of them, the kids at school have been going through a transformation. Sophie is having a hard time learning how to juggle the relationship she has with Robin and her friendship with Rachel. Robin is maturing because when Chelsea returns to model for the class, he actually focuses on the art of it rather than thinking about his hands want to do to Chelsea's body.



Pages 209-221

Pages 209-221 Summary

Robin and Sophie rush home to Robin's house after school to make out. In the middle of it Rachel calls to tell Sophie she's going with her for the weekend to Bermuda. Robin confronts Sophie saying that she would rather go to Bermuda than make out with her own boyfriend. That night at his art class Robin takes out his rage in the form of art. After class, the two girls from the class press their legs up against Robin's in the booth at Finale, a restaurant they go to eat desert. The next day at school, Robin and Sophie do everything they can to avoid each other, which makes them run into each other more so.

Pages 209-221 Analysis

Robin is jealous because now Sophie's focus is not solely on him. Sophie thinks it's Robin's fault that her and Rachel's friendship broke up in the first place, so she thinks Robin should be happy that she and Rachel have made up. Robin is starting to notice when other girls, girls besides Sophie, flirt with him.



Pages 222-234

Pages 222-234 Summary

When Robin gets home from school, he finds out that his parents have lice from the day care they run. Robin doesn't have it though. Robin steals his dad's Red Sox hat so he can play a trick on Dylan, the boy at school that's always stealing Robin's hat. Robin puts the lice-infested hat in a Ziploc baggie and takes it to school the following day. His plan works and Dylan steals it and puts it on his head. Now, Robin just has to wait a day or two to see if Dylan contracts lice too. Friday night Robin is sitting in his room when Tessa calls his cell phone to tell them they are meeting at 7:30 am on Saturday to start Tessa's birthday celebration.

Pages 222-234 Analysis

Again, Robin is learning how to defend himself against the kids at school that have been teasing him. Robin's increased confidence by hanging out with his college friends is starting to make him realize the beauty that other girls possess—girls beyond Sophie that is. Robin noticing other girls while Sophie is away in Bermuda foreshadows him having a relationship with someone else that might just break him and Sophie up for good.



Pages 235-247

Pages 235-247 Summary

After the running with the brides, the group goes to the dirt museum. Afterwards, they go to the Chocolate Bar and gorge on chocolate. Dylan walks in with his parents. Robin notices that Dylan is scratching his head. They all go back to Tessa's dorm room suite and Honk brings in what Robin thinks is Jell-O and they all toast to Tessa's birthday. After three Jell-O shots and dancing to the mixed CD Robin made for Tessa, Honk asks Robin which dorm he lives in. Robin admits that he doesn't go to Harvard. Honk realizes that Robin's been eating the Jell-O shots so they tell Robin there's vodka in them and Robin says that explains why he's so wasted.

Pages 235-247 Analysis

Dylan is going to blow Robin's cover. Dylan scratching his head concludes that Dylan has contracted lice and Robin's plan to give it to him worked. The Jell-O has alcohol in it, so Robin is going to get drunk but not even realize it. Ironically, when the group finds out he's in high they still think he's cool, which is the direct opposite of how Robin thought they would react.



Pages 248-260

Pages 248-260 Summary

Richard falls asleep on Tessa's couch. Eve and Honk are making out and Tessa leads Robin to her bedroom. Tessa admits she's only 16. Tessa and Robin start kissing and then Tessa slides Robin's hands up her shirt. Robin admits that Sophie is his girlfriend, but Tessa says she doesn't mind. Robin's mom calls and says she and his father are going to pick them up on their way home. Robin begs her for 30 more minutes, but she says no. Tessa says they can pick up where they left off tomorrow. Robin throws up on the drive home.

Pages 248-260 Analysis

Robin starts to experience the rites of passage that a typical teenager experiences. First, he gets drunk for the first time. Second, he gets to second base with a girl, Tessa. Third, he is actually contemplating carrying on a relationship with Tess while continuing his relationship with Sophie—without telling Sophie about Tessa. He's operating under the motto that what Sophie doesn't know can't hurt her.



Pages 261-273

Pages 261-273 Summary

Tessa calls Robin the next morning and they make plans to meet for dinner. When Robin gets out bed to go to bathroom, he realizes he has a hangover. Tessa and Robin meet for dinner. Tessa takes Robin into an alley and they start making out. As they are heading towards Tessa's dorm room, Robin realizes that the next day is Valentine's Day. He starts thinking about Sophie and then tells Tessa that they can't be together. As Tessa leaves for her dorm, Robin sees Sophie standing in the street staring at him. When Robin looks Sophie in the eyes, he knows she saw everything. Sophie smacks Robin and asks him how he could cheat on her. Robin says he loves her and that he ended it with Tessa.

Pages 261-273 Analysis

Robin allowing his hormones to control his actions will end up causing him to lose Sophie. While Sophie simply thought she and Robin had a fight, Sophie realizes that Robin took it to another level by cheating on her with another girl.



Pages 274-286

Pages 274-286 Summary

When they get home, Robin's father comes into Robin's room to check on him. He tells Robin that he messed up because tomorrow's Valentine's Day and asks if Robin has any red paper so he can make a Valentine for Robin's mom. Robin thinks his idea is great and makes a set of Valentine's for Sophie. The next morning, Robin wakes his dad early to stop at the store before school so he can buy roses. Robin spends his day at school placing a rose and Valentine at Sophie's desk in each of her classes. He even convinces Shultz to let him skip the class he and Sophie have together. Robin waits for Sophie by the goalpost and then goes to the museum to see if she's waiting in front of their favorite painting. Not only is Sophie not there but the painting is gone too.

Pages 274-286 Analysis

The painting Robin and Sophie share as part of their love is gone. This symbolizes the love between Sophie and Robin being gone as well. Even though Robin realizes he made a mistake and that he really loves Sophie, it's too late. Sophie is not willing to forgive Robin for cheating on her.



Pages 287-291

Pages 287-291 Summary

Robin hears footsteps and sees Sophie walk through the door. When Sophie sees the painting is gone, she starts to cry. Then, she notices Robin is there. Sophie hands Robin her sketchpad and pencil and they start to draw to make up with each other.

Pages 287-291 Analysis

Robin and Sophie make up. They continue to be boyfriend and girlfriend. This time, however, Robin goes into the relationship with the knowledge of what's it's like to be with someone else, which is something he didn't have before Tessa.



Characters

Robin Murphy

Robin Murphy is a freshman in high school. He has reddish hair. Even at 14, he is able to grow a full beard, which he does to resemble the man in a famous painting, so his girlfriend, Sophie, will know what it's like to kiss a man with a beard. Robin talks to Sophie Stein for the first time at the art museum, where they discuss their favorite Renoir painting of two lovers kissing.

Robin Murphy has been made fun of by the kids at school since he moved to the Boston area in fourth grade. The kids made up a saying using Robin's last name, saying "Don't be such a Murphy." They have replaced loser with Robin's name.

Robin falls in love with Sophie, but when they make an appearance at school as boyfriend and girlfriend, Sophie's best friends, Rachel and Grace, dump her. Eventually, the other kids at school start making fun of Sophie for dating a loser like Robin. Sophie loves Robin too though, so she decides to stand up to the kids at school with Robin against them.

Sophie Stein

Sophie Stein is one of the prettiest and most popular freshman in high school. She meets Robin at the art museum and falls in love with him because of their mutual love of art. Robin and Sophie have art class together as one of their classes in school. When Sophie's friends dump her because she is dating Robin, Sophie pretends like it doesn't bother, but Robin can see that it does.

Sophie decides to stand up to the kids at school on Robin's side. Eventually, Rachel becomes friends with Sophie again. As Rachel and Sophie grow closer, Robin and Sophie grow slightly apart. When Sophie catches Robin cheating, she tries to break up with him, but in the end they make up and stay together.

Rachel

Rachel is one of Sophie's best friends. She is also one of the most popular girls in school. When Rachel and their other friend, Grace, find out that Sophie is dating Robin, they think she has lost her mind. In the end, Rachel makes up with Sophie and they become friends again.



Grace

Rachel is one of Sophie's best friends. She is also one of the most popular girls in school. When Grace and their other friend, Rachel, find out that Sophie is dating Robin, they think she has lost her mind. In the end, it appears as if Grace and Sophie might make up, but this is unknown by the time the novel ends.

Mrs. Murphy

Mrs. Murphy is Robin's mother. She co-owns a day care facility with her husband. Robin is her only child. Mrs. Murphy has a love for classic rock and roll, which is something she shares with Robin and her husband.

Mr. Murphy

Mr. Murphy is Robin's father. He co-owns a day care facility with his wife. Robin is his only child. Mr. Murphy has a love for classic rock and roll, which is something he shares with Robin and his wife.

Mrs. Stein

Mrs. Stein is Sophie's mother. When the novel first starts, Mrs. Stein is under the assumption that Robin and Sophie are just friends. When she catches Robin and Sophie kissing in her kitchen, however, she becomes very proactive in trying to keep Robin and Sophie apart.

Mr. Shultz

Mr. Shultz is the high school art teacher. Robin and Sophie attend his art class together. Mr. Shultz recognizes Robin's talent for art. He talks to his Harvard art teacher friend to get Robin into his class.

Tessa

Tessa is a short girl that Robin meets at his first night attending the Harvard art class. Tessa loves classic rock n roll too, so she's always quizzing Robin on the topic. They are close friends throughout the class. When Tessa's birthday rolls around, the people from the art class go out together, including Robin. After Robin confesses that he is only in high school, Tessa confesses to Robin that she is only 16. She puts Robin's hands up her skirt while they kiss and make out in her dorm room. Tessa is also the girl Sophie catches Robin cheating with.

Honk

Honk is another member of the college art class. When Robin admits to being in high school, Honk takes away the Jell-O shots from Robin, telling him that there's vodka in the Jell-O. Even after Robin admits he's only a freshman in high school, Honk treats Robin the same as everyone else and he even says that Robin's a great artist.



Objects/Places

Football Field Goalpost

The goalpost on the football field is the meeting spot for Robin and Sophie. Throughout the novel, they meet at the goalpost after school and then they either go to Robin's house, Sophie's house, or the museum.

Cafeteria Table

When Robin and Sophie start dating, they have a table that they sit at together in the cafeteria to eat their lunch. When Rachel and Sophie become friends again, Rachel joins Robin and Sophie at the table.

Bleachers

When the teasing from the kids at school becomes too much for Robin and Sophie, they eat lunch together on the bleachers. The bleachers represent a respite for Robin and Sophie from the chaos that their dating is causing at school.

The Art Museum

Robin and Sophie first talk to each other on a trip to the art museum. They bond over their mutual love for art. From this point on, Sophie and Robin start dating. Throughout the novel, Robin and Sophie spend many days at the museum, sitting and sketching their favorite painting together.

Harvard

Harvard is the college where Robin is allowed to sit in on an art class without earning credit. This is also where Robin can be himself and the other kids like him for who he is. Robin finds solace in attending the art class at Harvard because he is able to be himself and enjoy activities that normal teenagers and college students like to do.

T-shirts

Sophie writes on a t-shirt with a black magic marker, "I'm such a Stein." Robin writes, "I'm with Stein." They wear these t-shirts to school to show solidarity and to stand up against the other kids at school. It's these t-shirts that bring Rachel and Sophie back together. In addition, the high school art teacher also makes a t-shirt of his own to show his support for Sophie and Robin.



Sketchpad

Robin and Sophie use their sketchpads as a form of communication. When Robin cannot put into words why he's ignoring Sophie, they sketch it out. At the end, after Sophie catches Robin cheating on her, they also use the sketchpad to get out their feelings and express their love for one another.

Homemade Valentine's

Robin creates a series of homemade Valentine's day cards to place at Sophie's desk in each of her classes. He uses the notes to try to get Sophie to meet him at the goalpost after school so they can make up from their fight.

Yellow Hat

The yellow hat that Robin and Sophie find in the thrift store makes Robin look like the man in their favorite painting. Robin starts to wear the hat everyday and Dylan, a boy that picks on Robin at school, is constantly stealing Robin's yellow hat and throwing it out the window.

Jell-O Shots

Robin thinks that the college kids are eating Jell-O. He doesn't realize that the Jell-O has vodka in it. After eating a couple of Jell-O shots, Robin gets drunk for the first time.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Robin is close to both of his parents, but in different ways. Mrs. Murphy tends to coddle Robin, but Mr. Murphy tends to lead Robin by example.

Friendship is another type of relationship the novel tackles. First, Sophie is popular and has two best friends, Grace and Rachel. After Sophie starts dating Robin, however, these friendships are put to the test and they fail. Rachel and Grace stop being friends with Sophie. Eventually, Rachel and Sophie rekindle their friendship, but Grace and Sophie don't.

Romantic relationships are also tackled in the novel. Sophie is Robin's first girlfriend and first kiss. While Robin is not Sophie's first boyfriend, he is her first true love. Robin and Sophie experience the cruelty of other kids because of the feelings they have for each other. They also experience jealousy and the pain of cheating by the time the novel comes to an end.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as being teased and bullied at school. Robin struggles with the fact that his coming of age includes having his first girlfriend and the hormones of going through puberty. Sophie struggles with her love for Robin and how far she should go with him sexually.

Robin also experiences what it's like to be a college student while just being a freshman in high school. He gets to see the side of life that is yet to come for him. It encourages Robin to plow on and not allow the kids at school to get him down or sway him from his journey in life.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of these two families—the Murphys and the Steins. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Robin's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view, from the perspective of the main character and narrator, Robin Murphy. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after Robin and Sophie are a couple. The past represents the time leading up to them becoming a couple.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Robin Murphy. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Robin's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in Boston, Massachusetts during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the aftermath of the relationship forming between the class loser and one of the most popular girls in school.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the characters are from different worlds. However, as events unfold, the relationship is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The author, however, interjects some foreign words to fit into the setting of the novel. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is not divided into chapters. The novel tells the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects his own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing his opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot revolves around human relationships including friendship and romantic ones. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Robin Murphy. Another subplot is family relationships.



Quotes

"You are a real Murphy" (p. 6).

"About being outlaws. It's just you and me - against the world" (p. 14).

"That was the most fun I've ever had drawing in my entire life" (p. 36).

"Us being together no matter what anyone else thinks" (p. 48).

"No problem, I'll grow one for you" (p. 58).

"With this hat and your red beard, you look exactly like the guy in Le Bal a Bougival" (p. 74).

"No, just relax and get started, Robin" (p. 90).

"Did you see the look on Fee's face when she saw it" (p. 95).

"Until you came along, I'd never met another teenager who know as much about old rock and roll as I do" (p. 107).

"We're counting on you to settle the tie" (p. 128).

"Robin! It's you" (p. 150).

"I love you" (p. 236).

"Brilliant...Where can I get one of those" (p. 186).

"I brought you something. Something I forgot to give you yesterday."
Pages 196-208, p. 204



"Amazing that my own girlfriend couldn't care less that she's going to be away from me all weekend" (p. 212).

"Afraid you're gonna get my cooties" (p. 229).

"You're an amazing artist, bro" (p. 247).

"That's okay, Robin. Then we can just be friends. Friends with lots and lots and lots of benefits" (p. 248-260).

"You were kissing her, Robin. I saw you" (p. 272).

"Girls go gaga over that stuff" (p. 277).

"Don't worry, Sophie. It's only on loan...It'll be back...It's coming back" (p. 290).

Topics for Discussion

Who is the real Robin Murphy? Why do you think the kids at school started picking on him when he moved to the school in fourth grade? When Robin starts dating Sophie, what do think his expectations are for his own social status? What does Robin ultimately realize about his relationship with Sophie?

Who is the real Sophie Stein? Why do you think the kids at school start picking on her for dating Robin? When Sophie starts dating Robin, do you think she expects the reaction that occurs? Do you think she thought it would affect her social status? What does Sophie ultimately realize about her relationship with Robin?

Discuss the relationship between Robin and Sophie. Are they friends, foes or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Robin feel about Sophie? How does Sophie feel about Robin? How do Robin's feelings change? What does he do about it? What happens to Sophie?

Discuss the relationship between Rachel and Sophie. Are they friends, foes or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Rachel feel about Sophie? How does Sophie feel about Rachel? How do Rachel's feelings change after Sophie and Robin wear their homemade t-shirts to school? What does Rachel do about it? What happens to Rachel?

Discuss the relationship between Robin and his Harvard classmates. Why are they so accepting of Robin? Is there true competition in their relationship? Why does Robin conceal that he is a freshman in high school? Why does he ultimately reveal his age? How do his classmates' feelings change when they discover his real age?

Who is Tessa? Is she the female equivalent of Robin? Why do you think Tessa talks Robin into being "friends with benefits?" What role does Tessa play in the demise of Robin and Sophie's relationship?

Discuss Robin's popularity. What impact does his social status have on the characters in the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives? Does Robin's social status change by the end of the novel? How do you know this?