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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Along for the Ride
by
Sarah Dessen
(New York: Viking, 2009)

Author: Sarah Dessen grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and attended UNC-Chapel Hill, graduating with highest honors in creative writing. She is the author of nine novels, including *Someone Like You* and *Just Listen*. A motion picture on her first two books, entitled *How to Deal* was released in 2003. Sarah lives in Chapel Hill with her husband, daughter and two very spoiled dogs, where she spends her time gardening, watching bad TV shows and trying to break her addiction to the clearance rack at the Gap. [From teachervision.com]

Summary: When it comes to academics, Auden knows all about being the best in life, however, she's learned that it's easier to avoid the things that don't guarantee success. One of her biggest challenges is her insomnia, and so she fills her nights with studying and preparing for college. When a bizarre gift from her globe-trotting, carefree brother arrives, Auden is inspired to accept her father's invitation to join him and his new family for the summer before she heads to college. After witnessing the conflict between her father and his new wife, a late-night project lands Auden a job at Clemtine's, a local boutique; and it here that she opens her mind and heart to new friends and experiences. With the help of Eli, a local boy with a tragic past, Auden begins to learn that sometimes life can be messy and the success of failure isn't measured by how often you crash, it's measured by how many times you get back on the bike and try to ride. [From teachervision.com]

Questions:

1. Why is it so difficult for Auden to feel like a "normal" teenager?
2. In what ways are Hollis' and Auden's childhoods different? How has this affected them as they have matured and made important decisions about their lives?
3. Auden and her new sister, Thisbe, are named after literary influences in her father's life. Why are names so important to Auden's dad, Robert? What does he believe the right name will do for his children? How does the baby's name cause a conflict between Auden's dad and Heidi? What does the result of their disagreement indicate about their relationship?
4. Auden's mom tells her, "People don't change. If anything you get more set in your ways as you get older, not less." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Are there any characters in the novel that show considerable change throughout the course of the story?

5. Explain the significance of the picture frame Hollis sends home to Auden; why does the inscription, “The Best of Times” bother her so much? How does this gift serve as a catalyst for change in Auden’s plans?
6. Why does Auden feel she needs to stay with her dad and Heidi after the baby is born? What does she hope to gain from her visit?
7. In what ways is Robert contributing to Heidi’s sense of helplessness and depression? How would you describe his character?
8. On her first night in Colby, Auden has a personal encounter with Jake. Why does she regret her actions? How do the other characters regard her because of this experience?
9. Auden’s mother calls her daughter regularly in order to receive reports about how things are going at Auden’s father’s. Why does her mother show so much interest in Robert’s life?
10. From Auden’s perspective, the girls she works with at Clementine’s (Maggie, Leah and Esther) are typical teenage girls. In what ways is her vision reshaped as she gets to know them more intimately?

[From teachervision.com]