Along for the Ride
By Sarah Dessen
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# Along for the Ride
by Sarah Dessen

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About the Author

Sarah Dessen has always loved to read, which is not surprising when you learn that both of her parents are professors at the University of North Carolina. Her mother is a classicist, teaching about myths, Latin, and words, and her dad teaches Shakespeare. For Christmas, Sarah always got books. When she was eight or nine, her parents gave her an old manual typewriter so she could type her stories, the products of her “wild imagination.”

Sarah still lives in her hometown, so it’s easy for her to stay in touch with high-school friends who inspired many of her stories. After high school, she earned a degree in English from the University of North Carolina. She also worked part-time waiting on tables at a Mexican restaurant. After graduating from UNC, instead of getting a Real Job, as her parents had hoped, she moved into a little house, wrote during the day, and waited tables at night. Eavesdropping on her customers’ conversations offered more ideas for stories.

Three years later, Sarah sold her first book, That Summer. A year later, she became a teacher and stopped waiting tables, although she still misses that. She did not intend to write for young adults, but her agent recognized the strong teenage voice in her stories. Soon Sarah realized that writing for teens suited her just fine.

Fortunately, Sarah is writing full-time now and still has many stories to tell from her high-school days. Her books have received several awards, including Barnes and Noble Best Teen Novel of the Year, ALA Best Book for Young Adults, ALA Teen’s Top Ten pick, School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, Amazon Editors Choice, and New York Times Bestseller. Look on page 29 for a list of her other books.

Sarah is married and has a daughter and two spoiled dogs. Along with writing, she likes to work in her garden—and shop. (She admits being addicted to clearance racks!) Check her Web site (www.sarahdessen.com) to find out if she will be appearing in your area. Or chat with her online at this address: http://writergirl.livejournal.com

Sarah Dessen Talks about Along for the Ride

Sarah Dessen admits she’s never been much of a night person. “All that changed, however, when I had my daughter a year and a half ago,” she admits. “Suddenly, I found myself up at all kinds of hours I’d rarely seen before: two a.m., four a.m., often catching the sunrise and sunset of the same day.”

Sarah knew she wasn’t alone at these varied hours of the day and night, no matter how solitary her time might seem. “People were up somewhere,” she says, “and I found myself wondering why and what they were doing as they waited for daylight.” This was the beginning of Along for the Ride.

“I wanted to write a novel about families,” Sarah explains, “because I now had one of my own, but also about childhood. My narrator, Auden, has always been a serious girl. She’s been taught that it’s a waste of time to play. Having a toddler, I am reminded every day how much joy there can be in the world and how simply it can be found. I think it’s a good lesson to learn, no matter what age you are.”
Prereading Activities

Book summary:
Auden just graduated from high school and, at her mother’s urging, is headed for a challenging college in the fall. Battling insomnia since her parents’ divorce, Auden goes to spend a “fun summer” with her dad, his new wife Heidi, and their newborn daughter. However, Dad’s second marriage isn’t going much better than his first, so Auden escapes from their house by doing the bookkeeping at a boutique that Heidi owns. There, Auden finally finds what she was missing: the world of girls. She also meets Eli, another insomniac. He tries to help Auden recapture her childhood, as she tries to help him cope with his own problems.

Understanding Genre: Realistic Fiction

Based on the summary above, why is Along for the Ride classified as realistic fiction?

It is set in modern times. The characters could be real people. Divorce does affect kids, and parents sometimes repeat the actions that had led to the divorce. Kids can suffer from insomnia. The other events in the summary could happen, too.

First Impressions

Look at the covers (front and back) and the opening “teaser” found on the first page of the book. Combine all of that with what you read in the summary and offer some first impressions of the book: What do you like? What questions come to mind? How much are you looking forward to reading the book? Why?

Answers will vary.
Prereading Activities

Making Predictions
Read this summary of the first two chapters and make predictions based on your own knowledge or personal experiences.

Auden’s dad and his new, young wife, Heidi, are expecting a baby any day, so Auden is surprised when Heidi invites her to spend the summer at their house near the beach. With nothing better to do, Auden accepts. When she gets there, Heidi is trying to cope with a screaming newborn. Auden’s dad, completely focused on writing his book, doesn’t seem to notice the crying baby.

1. What do you think dinner will be like on Auden’s first evening at her father’s house?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I predict: Possible prediction: Auden might feel out of place with her dad’s new family. Dinner could be uncomfortable, especially if the baby keeps crying.</th>
<th>Your reasons: I think it would be hard to accept a parent’s new spouse. Heidi also might be trying too hard to get Auden to like her.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. How do you think Auden’s dad will respond to her?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I predict: Possible prediction: I think he will be glad to see her and make a special dinner, since Heidi is busy with the baby.</th>
<th>Your reasons: He probably feels bad about the divorce and wants to show Auden he still loves her.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Set a purpose for reading, based on your predictions above.

Possible response: I want to learn more about the relationships among Auden, her dad, and Heidi.
Chapters One and Two
Pages 1–39

After You Read
Checking Predictions
Review your predictions on page 4. Discuss how your prediction was similar to or different from what happened at that first dinner.

Possible response: I thought Dad would want to spend some time with Auden.

Mastering Vocabulary: Prefixes
The prefix extra- means “beyond” or “outside.” Something extraordinary is “beyond ordinary.” Define the words below, beginning each definition with the word beyond or outside. Consult a dictionary, if necessary. Then use each word in a sentence.

1. extraneous: ________________________________ [beyond what is needed]

Sample sentence: Those parts seem to be extraneous.

2. extravagant: __________________________ [beyond the limits; beyond expensive]

Sample sentence: Those shoes are too extravagant for my taste.

3. extracurricular: ________________________________ [outside the curriculum]

Sample sentence: The school is adding extracurricular activities, such as band.

Analyzing the Writing: Point of View
1. Which point of view is used in this story? How do you know?

It’s told in first-person point of view, from Auden’s perspective. The author uses pronouns such as I, me, and my.

2. How will this point of view limit what you learn during the story?

I will learn only what Auden sees, hears, and thinks and what she guesses the other characters are thinking.
**Getting to Know the Characters**
Read each excerpt below and explain what it shows you about that character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Action or Dialogue</th>
<th>What this shows about the character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auden</td>
<td>The more my parents bemoaned Hollis’s lack of initiative and terrible grades, the harder I worked. (p. 9)</td>
<td>Auden is trying to please her parents by being the opposite of her brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auden’s mom</td>
<td>. . . my mom liked to tell me that my name was actually a kind of litmus test. Auden wasn’t like Frost, she’d say, or Whitman. He was a bit more obscure, and if someone knew of him, then I could be at least somewhat sure they were worth my time and energy, capable of being my intellectual equal. (p. 13)</td>
<td>Mom is an intellectual snob.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auden’s dad</td>
<td>“Well, if you’re hungry, there’s a great burger place just a block away. . . . And get me a cheeseburger and some of those onion rings.” He reached into his back pocket, pulling out a couple of bills and handing them out to me. “Thanks a lot, Auden. I really appreciate it.” (pp. 29–30)</td>
<td>Dad is really self-absorbed and insensitive. He is sending Auden out by herself to get dinner for the family on her first night at his house.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Making Connections**
1. On page 7, Auden says that as a child, she was a “little adult.” Is this a good thing? Explain your answer.
   
   **Possible response:** No, because she didn’t get a chance to be a real child.

2. Based on what you have learned so far about Auden’s childhood, how was it like yours? How was it different?
   
   **Answers will vary.**

3. On page 14, Auden’s mom says that people don’t change. Explain whether you agree with her.
   
   **Answers will vary.**
Before You Read
Making Predictions
In these chapters, Auden, her dad, Heidi, and Thisbe are leaving for a restaurant when Heidi gets several phone calls from the clerks at her store. Their paychecks have bounced. Heidi says she has to stop at the store and straighten out the problem. How do you think Auden’s dad will react?

I predict:
Possible prediction: He gets angry with Heidi.

Based on what evidence?
So far, Auden’s dad doesn’t seem to care about anyone but himself.

After You Read
Checking Predictions
Review your prediction about Auden’s dad. Were you correct? How well do you think you know him by now?

Answers will vary.

Analyzing the Writing: Dialogue
Reread the next-to-last paragraph on page 51, which begins: “‘Really?’ she said excitedly . . .” One sentence (actually a fragment) in this paragraph contains only three words. The next sentence runs for thirty-four words. Why does the author write this way? Shouldn’t all these sentences be nearly the same length?

Combining short and long sentences sounds like someone talking. If the sentences were nearly the same length, the dialogue would sound unnatural.

Responding to the Story
1. On page 40, Auden thinks about the photo of Hollis and decides to walk out to the Tip. How does his picture influence her decision?

The picture frame says “the best of times.” Auden is looking for an experience that she can call “the best of times.”
2. At the bottom of page 49, why do you think Auden is so critical of Heidi?

   **Possible response:** She is still angry about her parents’ divorce and doesn’t want to like Dad’s new wife.

3. On page 67, Auden and her dad are eating dinner at the Last Chance. Somehow the onion rings don’t taste as good as they did before. Why not?

   **Auden feels guilty about abandoning Heidi and the baby, and she’s angry with Dad for being so insensitive.**

4. On page 69, Auden notes that sometimes a question can hurt more than an answer. What do you think she means?

   **Dad’s question hurts because he doesn’t know why Auden is there.**

---

**Getting to Know the Characters**

Now reread the first two paragraphs on page 57. Auden is describing her current relationships—or lack thereof—with her dad and Heidi. What do these paragraphs tell you about Auden?

**Possible response:** She is hurt by her father and annoyed by Heidi. Auden needs her own space but wants her father’s attention.

**Making Connections**

1. Which character or characters are you feeling most sympathetic toward? Why?

   **Answers may vary, but most will choose either Auden or Heidi or both because they are not being listened to or cared about by Dad.**

2. Which of the characters do you predict will change the most in this story? Explain the reasons for your prediction.

   **Answers will vary.**
Chapters Five and Six  
Pages 71–108

Before You Read  
Making Predictions  
In these chapters, Auden agrees to work at Heidi’s store part-time, doing the bookkeeping. Three girls Auden’s age are clerks there. How do you predict Auden will feel about this job? How well do you think she will relate to the other girls?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I predict: Possible prediction: Auden likes the job because it gets her out of her Dad’s house. She feels awkward with the other girls.</th>
<th>Based on what evidence? The tension is very high at Dad’s house, so Auden would want to escape. She is not used to doing “girl things,” so she feels awkward around the clerks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

After You Read  
Checking Predictions  
Review your predictions about Auden’s new job. Did the chapter turn out as you thought it would? What new information surprised you?

Answers will vary. Possible response: I was surprised to find out that Maggie just broke up with Jake.

Analyzing the Writing: Similes  
On page 79, Auden says that approaching a group of girls who have made up their minds about you is “like walking a plank, no way to go but down.”

1. How does this simile, “like walking a plank,” help describe this scene?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It shows that Auden expects a very unpleasant experience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Write another simile that would fit this situation. Like the author, compare how Auden feels while approaching these three best friends with another action or experience.

Answers will vary. Possible similes: like swimming with sharks; like jumping from an airplane without a parachute.
Getting to Know the Characters
Use this chart to record what you know and what you predict about these two characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I know so far:</th>
<th>Predictions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Answers will vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible responses: He's Jake's brother; something serious happened with his best friend Abe; he seems to be a loner; he might like Auden.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollis</td>
<td>Answers will vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible responses: Unlike Auden, Hollis is carefree and maybe irresponsible, but Mom still thinks he's wonderful; he's a charmer and goes through girlfriends quickly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responding to the Story
1. On pages 74–75, how does Auden stand up to her father? Why does she do this?

   When Dad suggests that working for Heidi will keep Auden from enjoying her summer, Auden says she wants to work. She is tired of her father trying to control every situation.

2. On pages 95–96, why is Auden so annoyed with Maggie?

   Auden thinks selling—or even caring about—clothes is a waste of time. She thinks Maggie should focus on more important things.

3. On page 104, why is Auden so surprised to learn the Maggie jumps bicycles?

   Auden thinks Maggie is a girly-girl, silly, and boy-crazy, not daring or adventurous.

4. On page 93, Auden says that the wave machine sums up everything that is wrong with her family. What do you think she means?

   Everyone is being fake but she seems to be the only one who notices.
Before You Read

Making Predictions
In these chapters, Auden’s mother unexpectedly shows up and finds Auden working in the back office at Heidi’s store. What do you predict will happen during Mom’s visit?

| I predict: Possible prediction: I think Mom will pump Auden for information about how Dad’s new marriage is going. | Based on what evidence? In an earlier chapter, Mom wanted to know all the details about the new marriage. |

After You Read

Checking Predictions
Did Mom’s visit turn out as you expected? Explain whether this visit changed or reinforced your opinion of Auden’s mother.

Students might write that this visit just reinforced their opinion of Mom.

Mastering Vocabulary: Connotation and Denotation
A word’s *denotation* is its dictionary definition. Its *connotation* is an emotional meaning that has become attached to it. A word can have synonyms with both negative and positive connotations. Authors purposely choose words with positive or negative connotation to help them establish a mood or character trait. Choose the word from the pair that best completes each sentence with a negative connotation.

1. Auden felt ___________________ in the pink rain jacket.
   *(radioactive or noticeable)*

2. Mom thinks that certain swimsuits ___________________ little girls’ innocence.
   *(take advantage of or exploit)*

3. Esther does not want to look ________________.
   *(undignified or foolish)*

4. Auden knew her mom was ________________ Eli instantly.
   *(cataloging or evaluating)*
**Getting to Know the Characters**
Now that you know Auden’s parents better, why do you think they did not get along with each other?

*Possible response: Both are very self-centered, insensitive, and bossy.*

---

**Responding to the Story**
1. On page 112, Auden wonders if her dad was always so pompous and impossible. Do you think he was? How could Auden have missed that?

   *He probably was. She might have been so focused on getting her parents’ approval that she didn’t see the situation clearly.*

2. On page 121, Auden’s mom asks her, “When have I ever taught you to take another person’s view on anything?” What is the honest answer to this question?

   *Mom has always insisted that Auden agree with her on everything.*

3. By page 147, Auden has had a day of surprises. Why is the fact that Maggie is going to Defriese the biggest surprise?

   *Auden thought she knew Maggie, but she is discovering that she jumped to conclusions.*

**Making Connections**
1. Do you agree with Auden’s dad that your name affects how others react to you? Why or why not?

   *Answers will vary.*

2. On page 120, Auden tells her mom that Heidi is not only what she appears to be. Mom responds, “No one is.” Explain whether or not you agree with Mom.

   *Answers will vary.*
3. On page 130, Auden admits that it’s not always easy being her mom’s daughter. Maggie says, “. . . sometimes it’s hard no matter whose daughter you are.” Do you agree? Do you think it’s harder being a daughter or a son? Why?

Answers will vary.

4. On pages 132–133, the girls talk about getting supplies before they go somewhere. Auden decides that if you don’t know where you’re going, it might be good to have more supplies than you need. What do you think she means?

You need to be prepared for anything. Better to have too much than not enough.

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**Cultural Connection**

Names are important for identifying people, and naming babies has often been associated with family heritage, religious beliefs, character traits, etc. Find out how your friends and classmates were named. Write a short survey that asks for the following information:

- Complete name
- Meaning and/or heritage of name (Irish, African, etc.)
- Why that name was chosen
- How the person feels about his or her name
- Any additional information about the name

Compile all your information into a short presentation or report. Use charts or graphic organizers to show trends.

Finally, choose a boy’s name and a girl’s name that you like and research the origins and meanings of both names. You can find plenty of information at the library or on the Internet.
Before You Read
Making Predictions
In these chapters, Eli leads Auden on a quest to capture the childhood experiences that she missed. What kinds of things do you predict they will do?

I predict:
Possible prediction: I think they might build a fort, eat ice cream cones, or play on a playground.

Based on what evidence?
As a child, Auden had to be a “little adult,” so she missed the everyday things that kids do.

After You Read
Checking Predictions
1. Which of the things that you predicted did Eli and Auden do? Have you done any of the things that the two friends did? Which ones?

Answers will vary.

2. What other experiences do you think Auden missed as a child?

Answers will vary.

Responding to the Story
During a party, the friends have a food fight. On pages 20–203, Auden says that suddenly “something felt different.” What caused this change?

In the chaos, Auden finally feels free to tell Eli she’s sorry about his friend, Abe. Her kindness brings them closer together.
Making Connections
1. Dad’s book is finally finished. Do you think it’s a book you would like to read it? Why or why not?

   Answers will vary.

2. Do you agree with what Eli says on page 171: “It’s never too late to have a happy childhood.” Explain your response.

   Answers will vary.

3. On page 179, Auden links expecting little girls to be “everything nice” with eating disorders and abuse. Explain what you think she means.

   Answers will vary.

4. On page 208, Maggie says, “Who says you have to be smart or pretty, or into girly stuff or sports? Life shouldn’t be about the either/or.” What does she mean? Do you agree with her?

   Maggie means that you don’t have to be one thing and not the other; you can be both.

Health Connection
Auden says that mornings are for sleep, evenings for work, and nights for Eli. She and Eli aren’t getting much sleep. Is that okay? Use the Internet to find answers to these questions:

- Are teens’ sleep patterns the same as those of younger children? Are they the same as adults’ sleep patterns?
  
  No, teens naturally fall asleep later and wake up later than both children and adults. Teens’ bodies produce a hormone called melatonin later at night, making it hard for them to fall asleep.

- How much sleep do teens really need?
  
  Teens need about 8.5 to 9.25 hours a night, compared to 7.5 to 8 for adults.

- What are some high schools doing to take into account teens’ natural sleep patterns?
  
  Some high schools are starting classes later in the morning.
Chapters Eleven and Twelve
Pages 225–274

Before You Read
Making Predictions
In these chapters, Auden’s brother Hollis has a new—serious—girlfriend named Laura. However, Hollis’s (and Auden’s) mom strongly dislikes Laura. What kind of young woman do you think Laura will be?

I predict:
Possible prediction: She might be as wild and immature as Hollis. Or she is pretty and friendly. Mom might be jealous.

Based on what evidence?
Hollis's girlfriend in an earlier chapter was pretty and friendly but not a “scholar.”

After You Read
Checking Predictions
What surprised you about Laura? Why do you think Hollis likes her so much?

Answers will vary.

Analyzing the Writing
One of the strengths of good writing is that the author can show what characters are like instead of telling the reader directly. For example:

Telling:  Tom is very tall.
Showing: Tom easily pulled the box from the top shelf.

In Chapter Eleven, the author shows what Laura is like. List some ways that the author shows something about this new character:
Possible answers:
Heidi says she looks just like Auden’s mother.
She took off her sunglasses and folded them.
Standing off to the side watching with a clinical expression.
Quietly but pointedly cleared her throat.
Laura gave me another tight smile.
Analyzing the Characters

1. What different expectations does Mom have for Auden and for Hollis? Include details from the story to support your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mom’s Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auden</td>
<td>Possible response: Mom wants Auden to “take herself seriously.” (p. 252) For example, she pressures Auden to live in a dorm that has neither roommates nor parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollis</td>
<td>Possible response: Mom wants Hollis to be a free spirit and worries that Laura will suck all the life out of him (p. 227), forcing him to work in a bank (p. 248).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. On page 249, Mom says, “I didn't raise either of you to be like most people.” Do you think this approach has helped her children? Explain your answer.

Possible response: No. Auden is having trouble fitting it with her peers, and Hollis is having trouble growing up.

3. On page 252, Mom complains about Auden’s sudden lack of drive and focus. Auden replies, “I haven’t changed. This is just me.” Why is Mom silent in response?

Possible response: She doesn’t like Auden being herself, Mom wants to control her daughter completely. She is also having trouble letting Auden grow up.

4. In Chapter Twelve, how does Heidi change? Is this a change for the good? Explain your response.

Heidi finally stands up to her husband and demands time for herself. This change might have been good for Heidi, but Robert can’t cope with it, so he moves out.

Making Connections

Is it better to try but fail rather than not trying at all, as Eli says on page 260? Explain your answer.

Yes, failure is better. You will not grow if you don’t try new things.
Chapters Thirteen to Fifteen
Pages 275–323

Before You Read
Making Predictions
In these chapters, Eli surprises everyone by organizing a game of kickball, which he hasn’t done for a long time. Yet Auden doesn’t go to the game. Why do you think she avoids it?

I predict:
Possible prediction:
Auden might be angry with Eli. Maybe he’s back with Belissa.

Based on what evidence?
Eli and Belissa used to date, and Auden is jealous of her.

After You Read
Checking Predictions
1. Why does Eli suddenly decide to join in the group’s activities again, even organizing a game of kickball?

In Chapter Twelve, Auden helped him feel less guilty about Abe’s death.

2. Did you predict the reason why Auden avoids the game? If not, why does she avoid it?

Possible response: She feels angry and scared about her father moving out. Maybe she thinks that Eli will force her to face her feelings.

Analyzing the Writing
Page 320 includes this description: “It was like reaching out for someone’s hand, then missing their fingers, or even their arm, and hitting their shoulder instead.” What is the author comparing with this action? How does this comparison strengthen the description?

The author is comparing trying to communicate with someone with reaching out for him/her and missing the connection. The comparison creates a visual image of this experience.
Analyzing the Characters
1. How is Maggie’s mother like Auden’s?

   Both are controlling and demanding.

2. On page 291, Auden starts to tell Eli why she suddenly wants to get serious about preparing for college. She says, “Look. I just…” Auden doesn’t finish her sentence. Finish it for her, explaining the real reason why she’s retreating to her books.

   “I just . . . Possible answer: I just am so upset about my father leaving again that I can’t deal with my feelings. Studying is easier, something I can control.

3. Why is Auden learning how to ride a bike?

   She hopes it will help her reconnect with Eli because riding bikes is important to him.

Responding to the Story
1. Reread the paragraph on page 302 that begins “It was the strangest thing . . .” What is Auden thinking about, besides her father’s avoidance of the problems in his marriage? What does she suddenly realize?

   She is thinking about her relationship with Eli. She realizes she needs to fix the problem between them. She needs to try again, not avoid him.

2. On page 310, Auden worries about reconnecting with her parents. If she spoke to either of them, “whatever I’d barely tapped into that day leaving the Condor would spill out like a big wave, engulfing us all.” What did she barely tap into that day?

   her anger about her parents’ separation

3. On page 323, Auden finally decides to “just go along for the ride.” What does she mean?

   She is going to stop trying to analyze the conversation among the friends and just enjoy it.
Making Connections
1. For several days after her father moves out, Auden does not answer calls from her mother or her father. Was this the best thing for her to do? Give reasons for your answer.

   Answers may vary. Students might decide that Auden needs this time to adjust—or that she should have talked out her feelings.

2. Do you think that Jason would be a good match for Auden? Explain your answer.

   Answers may vary. Students may feel that it’s not a good match because, like her mom, Jason would push Auden to be an overachiever.

3. Like Auden and her father, we often avoid problems instead of trying to solve them. What are some reasons we do that?

   Possible response: We don’t want to admit that we are part of the problem, that we did something wrong that led to the problem.

4. On page 318, Auden realizes that it’s “so easy to disown what you couldn’t recognize, to keep yourself apart from things that were foreign and unsettling.” We all have a tendency to do this. How does this tendency affect our relationships?

   Possible response: We don’t get to know people who seem “strange” to us. We miss out on important relationships.

Social Studies Connection
It looks as if Robert might be headed for his second divorce. Auden thinks he is making the same mistakes that led to the end of his first marriage. Certain factors do increase the risk of a first or second divorce. Use the Internet or other resources to list these factors. Then share what you learned with your classmates. Use what you have discovered to predict whether a marriage between Auden and Eli would last.

Factors that lessen the risk of divorce, according to a 2006 Time article: husband and wife are both at least 25, the husband helps with housework and childcare, they practice their faith, they have an income of $50,000 or more, they own their home, their parents did not divorce, the bride has a close relationship with her father, and the couple attended premarital classes before marrying.
Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen
pages 324–359

Before You Read
Making Predictions
Auden decides to go to the Beach Bash prom. With whom do you think she goes?

I predict: Possible prediction: She breaks down and invites Eli to go with her. Or he surprises her and asks her to go. Or she goes alone.

Based on what evidence? She really misses Eli, and it’s nearly the end of the book, time for resolving problems. Or she decides she’s okay by herself.

After You Read
Checking Predictions and Making a New One
1. Were you surprised about Auden’s prom-related experiences in these chapters? Explain your answer.

Students might be surprised that both young men turned her down.

2. Will Auden go to the prom? Make a new prediction for the final two chapters.

Students might predict that she will go with her friends—or stay home to baby-sit

Thisbe.

Mastering Vocabulary: French Phrases
This author uses many French words in the story. Find the words below on the pages listed. Then use context clues to complete these sentences with the French words and phrases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>boutique (p. 31)</th>
<th>fiancée (p. 229)</th>
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1. Surprised at the award, she gave an ________ speech.
2. Did you buy that in a ________?
3. Actually, most Americans are part of the ________.
4. At the engagement party, Ted introduced his ________.
5. The sculpture was the ________ of the art show.
6. Do you like colonial furniture, or do you prefer a more modern ________?
7. Some older people lose their ________.
Analyzing the Writing
1. How does the author use Adam’s box of photographs?
   
   She uses it to show how much he likes Maggie and to provide a flashback to Maggie’s experiences at the school prom.

2. How is the time and place of this setting important to the story?
   
   Possible answers: If the story were set in the past, the young people probably would have been monitored more closely by their families. The beach town makes the setting more relaxed, like a vacation.

Responding to the Story
1. On page 325, Adam says, “. . . what defines you isn’t how many times you crash, but the number of times you get back on the bike. As long as it’s one more, you’re all good.” What is he telling Auden?
   
   to keep trying, no matter how many times she falls/fails

2. On page 334, how does Auden use the symbolism of learning to ride a bike to describe her dad’s approach to life?
   
   He leaves/ quits at the first wobble—the first sign of trouble—and never gets back on the bike.

3. On page 335, Auden admits she once thought that she was “the smartest girl in the room.” What is she trying to explain?
   
   how she jumped to inaccurate conclusions about Heidi

4. On page 345, Heidi says, “Sometimes, you have to manufacture your own history. Give fate a push, so to speak.” What is the author trying to tell readers?
   
   They have to take some responsibility for how their lives turn out.

5. Why does Auden suddenly decide to ask Eli to the prom?
   
   She has been thinking about trying again and, if you get hurt, about getting back on the bike. She has decided to give fate a push.
Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen
pages 360–383

After You Read
Checking Predictions
On page 22 of this study guide, you predicted with whom Auden would go to the prom. Was your prediction accurate—or partly accurate? What didn’t you know that would have improved the accuracy of your prediction?

Answers will vary.

Analyzing the Writing
1. On page 368 of the book, Auden is looking through Heidi’s dresses: “Each one like a shell, a skin, a different way to be, even if only for a day.” This simile suggests that clothing is a way to change personalities, maybe even a way to hide or change your true self.
   Riding bikes is a recurring theme throughout this book. Below, create a simile that reflects how the author uses this device in this story.
   Possible response:
   Riding a bike is like taking a trip to somewhere new, taking a risk that you might fall or end up somewhere unexpected, learning how to balance things, etc.

2. Also on page 368, what does the black dress symbolize?

   The dress is what she has been looking for. She has also been trying to understand why Heidi and her father’s separation has weighed on her. Now she realizes that she’s afraid that Isby will face the same fate as she did and not have the support she needs.

3. This story is told from Auden’s point of view. Reread the paragraph on page 363 that begins, “I handed Isby over . . .” Then rewrite it from her mother’s point of view.
   Students should describe how Mom feels as she holds Isby and perhaps thinks about Auden as a baby.

4. How would this story change if it were told from Mom’s point of view?

   We would know much more about her struggles and disappointments, but much less about the changes in Auden.
Responding to the Story
1. Earlier, Maggie said Auden would be leaving Colby with more than a new bike. On page 361, Auden admits that there is a true difference in her now. How is she different from when she arrived at the beach house?

Possible response: Auden is better able to recognize and express her feelings. She is more content with her life and more aware of why she acts in certain ways.

2. People do change. Who changed more in this story: Auden, her mom, or her dad?

Possible response: Auden, because she has opened herself to new challenges and experiences and better relationships with those around her. Mom has changed in her relationship with Auden and is more respectful of her daughter. Dad might not have changed at all.

3. What is the symbolism of Auden riding her bike to the prom instead of driving?

Riding the bike shows that she is no longer a quitter and will work toward a goal, including her relationship with Eli, until she reaches it.

4. On page 371, why does Auden respond so strongly when she hears Mom tell Isby, “Shh, shh. Everything’s all right”?

Auden had thought that she comforted herself with those words when her parents argued. Now she realizes that her mother had been comforting her. Her mother cared about her, which Auden didn’t always think was the case.

5. On page 374, Eli says that Auden looked “ready” as she sped toward the curb on her bike. She replies, “Yeah, I think I was, actually.” What are they really talking about?

being ready to face life and tackle new challenges

Fine Arts/Technology Connection

Use the media of your choice to create two versions of Auden: at the beginning of the story and at the end. Find a way to indicate the changes that have taken place within her. You might draw an illustration using chalk, markers, watercolor, or another medium; you might create a collage or sculpture; or you might create a multimedia presentation using computer software. After the class’s comparisons are displayed, discuss their similarities and differences.
Wrap-up

Reviewing Predictions
Were you able to improve the accuracy of your predictions as you progressed through this book? If so, what helped you? If your accuracy did not improve, why?

Ideally, students made better predictions as they got to know the characters.

Analyzing the Writing
Explain whether this author's style of writing appeals to you and why. Would you like to read more books by Sarah Dessen?

Answers will vary.

Thinking About the Genre
Realistic Fiction
1. In writing realistic fiction, do you think it's a good idea to exaggerate the positive or negative aspects of a character's personality? Explain your answer.

Exaggeration can make a character seem as if he or she belongs in a comic book rather than in a realistic novel. Characters should seem real, including their flaws.

2. Do the main characters in this story seem real to you? Could they fit in at your school? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

3. Auden's dad and Eli's mom are not aware that the young friends don't sleep at night and instead roam around town together. This roaming is important to the plot, but is it realistic that Auden, especially, roams all night without Dad or Heidi noticing? Explain your answer.

Answers will vary.
Thinking About the Story Elements
1. Use the diagram below to graph the plot of Along for the Ride.

- **rising action** Auden was never permitted to be a child. Now she roams at night instead of sleeping. The baby cries constantly, but Auden’s father withdraws from her and Heidi to work on his book. To escape the house, Auden works at Heidi’s boutique and starts learning how to be a teen. She meets Eli, who helps Auden recapture her childhood. However, when Dad and Heidi separate, Auden pushes Eli away.

- **climax** Auden finally realizes that she doesn’t want to be a quitter (like her father) if she isn’t perfect at something, including a relationship. Instead, she needs to “get back on her bike” and try again with Eli. She has a second chance to make her life better.

- **falling action** To impress Eli, Auden secretly learns how to ride a bike. When Eli sees her jump a curb on her bike, he realizes she wants another chance at their relationship.

- **resolution** Auden and Eli are together, and Auden and her mom are closer.

2. What lesson do you think Sarah Dessen wants readers to take away from this story? Write the theme of the book in one sentence.

  Possible themes: If you try and fail, try again. Sometimes people do change. Don’t judge others based on appearances.

Making Connections
1. Why do you think Auden’s parents treated her and her brother Hollis so differently? Do most parents or guardians treat each of their children differently? Is this a good idea?

  Answers may vary. Auden’s parents were worn out from raising Hollis, so they were more lenient with Auden.
Library Applications

Pulling Together: Support During and After a Divorce
Auden is still trying to deal with her parents’ divorce. Even though she insists early in this story that she handled this situation well, her sleeping problems indicate otherwise. Probably her insomnia was caused by her anxiety and fear as she heard her parents’ argue and then watched them separate.

Many children and teens have to cope with difficult feelings during a divorce. Find out what support is available in your school or community to help young people through this stressful time, which can last for years. Just knowing that others share this experience can be helpful. Think of a way to share what you learn about local resources so that others at school can benefit from them.

Script Writing
On page 380, readers learn that Auden’s dad returned to his house on the night of the prom and found his first wife walking little Isby. We do not find out what Auden’s parents said to each other. Work with a small team to write a scene that shows this encounter. A narrator might set the scene, and two actors will play Mom and Dad. In your script, include stage directions to show them where to stand and what other movements to make.

Then write the next scene: After Mom goes back to her hotel, Heidi comes home from the prom, shoes in hand and excited about the evening. Finally, she and Robert talk about their marriage. Choose another actor to play Heidi. After finalizing the script, rehearse both scenes and present them to the class. After several teams act out the same scenes, compare and contrast what the writers imagine these characters might say to each other.

Recycling Bikes
Do you have a bike at home that you’ve outgrown? Many children really want a bike, but their families cannot afford to buy one. Organize a “bike drive,” asking people in your school and community to donate bikes in good condition so they can be passed along to children who would not have one otherwise.

Just as the characters in this story think of a new name for the bike shop, you and your group can work together to come up with a catchy name for your bike drive. Then you can publicize it through morning announcements at school, posters in the windows of local shops, and articles in the school and community newspaper. The children you help will be really grateful!
Suggestions for Further Reading

Other books by Sarah Dessen:


_Keeping the Moon._ Viking Juvenile, 1999.

_Lock and Key._ Viking Juvenile, 2008.

_Someone Like You._ Viking Juvenile, 1998.

_That Summer._ Orchard, 1996.

_This Lullaby._ Viking Juvenile, 2002.


Note:
_Someone Like You_ and _Last Summer_ were combined into the movie _How to Deal_, released in 2003. _How to Deal_ was also published as a paperback by Puffin in 2003.
# Correlations to National Standards
## For Grades 9–12

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