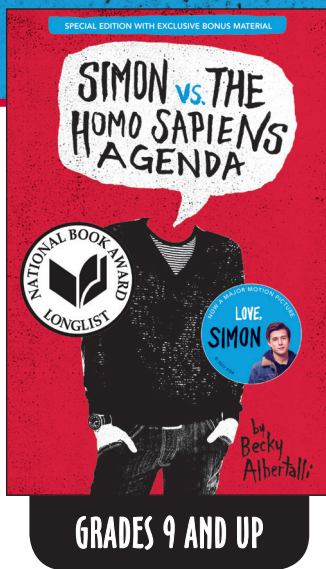


BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE



SIMON vs. THE HOMO SAPIENS AGENDA

By Becky Albertalli:

 NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE!

BOOKTALK

It's his junior year in high school, and Simon is starting to find his place. He's got a part in the school musical, killer taste in music, and a solid group of close friends . . . but he hasn't told any of them his secret. He's been emailing back and forth with another guy anonymously, and Simon's starting to fall for him. When another student finds out, Simon has to decide how far he'll go to keep his crush a secret—and what to do about his growing feelings for the guy who knows him better than anyone, even though they've never met.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

THE FOLLOWING DISCUSSION GUIDE CONTAINS SPOILERS.

Do not read unless you have already finished *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* and *Leah on the Offbeat*!

- 1. PERFORMANCE.** Simon claims that he can't just talk to his parents, but he has to "perform it" (6). What does he mean about performing for his parents? What are some of the other ways Simon performs in order to navigate his relationships—with family, friends, and Blue? How does the theme of performing appear throughout the novel? Do you ever feel like you have to perform a role for others? How does this affect your relationships with the people around you?
- 2. PERSPECTIVE.** For most of the novel, Simon communicates with Blue only through their email messages. Why do you think the author chose to present their relationship from this perspective? How do you think this influences the way their relationship develops? Do you think it's possible, as Simon wonders, "to fall in love over email" (258)?
- 3. CHANGE.** Simon explains that his parents "have this idea of me, and whenever I step outside of that, it blows their minds" (54). What are some of the ways that Simon steps outside of other people's ideas of him? What other characters in the novel grow and change beyond others' expectations of them? How does Simon respond to these changes? Can you name a time when someone else had an idea about who you were that was no longer true?
- 4. IDENTITY.** In an email to Blue, Simon writes, "Sometimes it seems like everyone knows who I am except me" (59). What do you think Simon means by this? Why does he choose to share it with Blue? Do you think there are other characters in the book who feel this way, and why? Can you name a time when you or someone you know has felt the way Simon does?
- 5. FORGIVENESS.** Near the end of the novel, Martin apologizes to Simon, writing, "I'm not even going to ask you to forgive me" (289). Do you think that Simon should forgive Martin for the harm he caused? Do you think that Simon eventually forgives Martin? Why or why not? What are some of the other relationships in the novel that require forgiveness?
- 6. SOCIAL MEDIA.** Simon describes the creeksecrets Tumblr as a "sinkhole of gossip and bad poetry and misspelled Bible quotes. And I guess it's kind of addictive either way" (18). What role does social media play in the relationships between Simon and his friends? Do you think that the benefits of social media outweigh the negatives? How does social media affect your life, in either positive or negative ways? How would your life be different without it?
- 7. DRINKING.** Simon drinks beer occasionally, but when Nick and Abby take him to a gay bar, he accidentally gets drunk with a group of older guys. What role does alcohol play in the social life of Simon and his friends? What are the risks of Simon's actions that night? When Simon comes home drunk, why do you think his parents react the way they do? Do you think his punishment was fair?
- 8. BULLYING.** After Simon is bullied for being gay, Martin claims, "I didn't think people still did shit like that" (195). What do you think Martin means by his statement? Why do you think the other students at the school try to hurt and harass Simon? Do you think that his experience is typical of high schoolers who come out as gay? What do you think would happen to Simon if he were a student at your school?
- 9. UNSPOKEN.** Simon and Blue have an "unspoken agreement" not to ask each other identifying questions over email (17). During a later conversation with Leah, Simon reflects, "I spent six years not asking that question" (285). What is the significance of the things Simon doesn't say? Why do you think he hesitates to ask certain questions of his friends? Is it better to leave some things unsaid, or is it better to ask the unspoken question?
- 10. KNOWING.** "The problem is, I'm beginning to realize I hardly know anything about anyone" (211). Why do you think Simon feels this way? Do you agree with him? What does it mean for him and Bram to get "to know each other from the inside out" (258)? By the end of the novel, do you think Simon feels differently? How can you tell when you really know someone?



BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

LEAH *on the* OFFBEAT By Becky Albertalli

BOOKTALK

Leah thought she'd have more things figured out by her senior year—but now her girl band is about to break up, her personal art Tumblr still isn't perfect, her friend group is going through some serious drama, and Leah still hasn't come out to any of her friends as bisexual. With senior prom, romantic breakups, and college decisions looming, Leah has to fight to stay true to herself and to keep her friends together—even when one of those friends just may turn out to be something more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

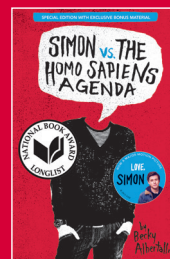
- 1. SELF-ACCEPTANCE.** In spite of social pressure to be thin, Leah doesn't diet and wonders, "Is it that hard to believe I might actually like my body?" (14). However, she also observes that "having a mother who's hotter than you sucks balls" (27). What does self-acceptance look like for Leah and her friends? How do you think Leah fights social pressure to look or act a certain way? Do you notice those same pressures influencing you or your friends?
- 2. MONEY.** While her friends are all from wealthy families, Leah is from a single-parent household with limited income. How does money, or the lack of it, influence Leah and her relationships? How does it affect her life and the decisions she makes? How does learning about Wells' background change the way Leah perceives him? Why do you think money and status change the way people treat each other?
- 3. LEFT OUT.** According to Leah, "Sometimes I feel left out even when life's moving along with me" (17). Why do you think Leah struggles with feeling left out? Do you think she's the only one who feels this way? How does Leah overcome these feelings throughout the course of the novel? Has there been a time when you felt left out, and if so, how did you handle it?
- 4. IN PROGRESS.** Looking at her art Tumblr, Leah reflects, "I don't like people seeing me in progress" (228). What does Leah mean by her statement? Do you think it's better to have talent that emerges "fully formed," as she wishes, or to develop ability through hard work? Why do you think she ultimately decides to accept art commissions? What does this reveal about her character's growth?
- 5. RACISM.** When Morgan doesn't get into UGA, she bitterly implies that Abby was only accepted because she's black. Why does Morgan respond this way to her own college rejection? Do you agree with the way Leah and her friends react to Morgan's comments? How do attitudes like Morgan's negatively affect Abby and Bram throughout the novel? What would you do in Leah's position, if your friend made an offensive comment?
- 6. LOVE.** In thinking about Simon, Leah wonders, "He has to know I love him to pieces, right? But maybe I don't say it enough" (33). Why doesn't Leah always tell the people she loves about her feelings? Are there people in your own life who don't say "I love you," but show it in other ways? Why is it important to tell people when you love them?
- 7. HONESTY.** Leah advises Simon to be honest with Bram, while recognizing that she herself struggles to share her emotions. Why does Leah have a hard time being honest about her feelings? How does honesty, or the lack of honesty, fragment the relationships in her friend group, and how does Leah work to repair them?
- 8. IMPERFECTION.** Leah's mother advises her to "Embrace the suck. Let your guts hang out a little" (128). What does her mother mean by this statement, and why does she give Leah this advice? Why do you think Leah is uncomfortable with imperfection? Do you think she eventually overcomes it and learns to "embrace the suck"?
- 9. ABBY.** After kissing Leah for the first time, Abby reveals her sexual confusion, saying, "I thought we were two straight girls experimenting" (201). How does Leah respond to Abby's uncertainty about being bisexual? Why do you think Leah responds the way she does? How does this moment change the relationship between Leah and Abby?
- 10. NEW BEGINNINGS.** On their spring break road trip, Abby and Leah debate whether leaving for college and starting a new phase of life is "terrifying," or "amazing" (171). Why do you think each girl feels the way she does about new beginnings? Do you agree that college signifies the beginning of "real life"?
- 11. OFFBEAT.** Leah describes the feeling she gets "when a song changes key, or starts on the offbeat, or shifts its meter halfway through" (156). What does it mean to Leah to feel a little offbeat? What are some of the other meanings of the word "offbeat" and how might they apply to Leah? What does the book's title mean to you?

COMPANION NOVELS: SIMON vs. THE HOMO SAPIENS AGENDA & LEAH *on the* OFFBEAT



COMMON THEMES

The following prompts can be used to examine common themes that appear throughout Becky Albertalli's novels.



COMING OUT. Both Simon and Leah wait until the right time to come out about their sexuality, and each one ends up coming out to Abby before any of their other friends. Why do you think Simon and Leah both hesitate to come out to each other? Why does each one confide in Abby first? How does each one's coming out change their relationships?

FAMILY. Simon and Leah come from strikingly different family backgrounds. How does each one's family shape their character? How does Simon's relationship with his parents compare and contrast to Leah's relationship with her mother? In what ways has your own family background shaped you?

RACE. Abby explains to Leah that she has to be perfect, "Because that's my life. Because black girls have to work twice as hard" (*Leah*, 186). What does Abby mean when she explains this to Leah? What role does race play in Simon and Leah's romantic relationships and friendships? How do the characters confront the racism they witness in their own community?

MUSIC. Music is integral to the way Simon and Leah both interact with the world. What role does music play in both Simon's and Leah's lives? What does each one's music choices reveal about their characters? How does each one use music to get closer to others, or to push others away? What is some of your favorite music, and what do you think it reveals about you?

DEFAULT. After meeting Bram, Simon reflects, "White shouldn't be the default any more than straight should be the default. There shouldn't even be a default" (*Simon*, 269). What do you think are some of the other "defaults" in today's society? Why do these defaults exist, and why do they continue? How do you think these defaults might eventually change?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo by Decisive Moment Events

Becky Albertalli is the author of William C. Morris Award winner and National Book Award longlist title, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (now a major motion picture, *Love, Simon*); the acclaimed *The Upside of Unrequited*; and the upcoming *What If It's Us* (cowritten with Adam Silvera). Becky lives with her family in Atlanta. You can visit her online at www.beckyalbertalli.com.

