

The Grown Ups

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By Robin Antalek

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Introduction

From the author of *The Summer We Fell Apart*, an evocative and emotionally resonant coming-of-age novel involving three friends that explores what it means to be happy, what it means to grow up, and how difficult it is to do both together.

The summer he's fifteen, Sam enjoys, for a few secret months, the unexpected attention of Suzie Epstein. For reasons Sam doesn't entirely understand, he and Suzie keep their budding relationship hidden from their close knit group of friends. But as the summer ends, Sam's world unexpectedly shatters twice: Suzie's parents are moving to a new city to save their marriage, and his own mother has suddenly left the house, leaving Sam's father alone to raise two sons.

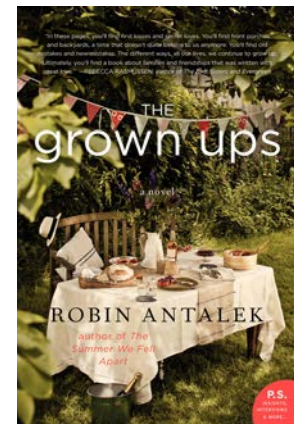
Watching as her parents' marital troubles escalate, Suzie takes on the responsibility of raising her two younger brothers and plans an early escape to college and independence. Though she thinks of Sam, she deeply misses her closest friend Bella, but makes no attempt to reconnect, embarrassed by the destructive wake of her parents as they left the only place Suzie called home. Years later, a chance meeting with Sam's older brother will reunite her with both Sam and Bella—and force her to confront her past and her friends.

After losing Suzie, Bella finds her first real love in Sam. But Sam's inability to commit to her or even his own future eventually drives them apart. In contrast, Bella's old friend Suzie—and Sam's older brother, Michael—seem to have worked it all out, leaving Bella to wonder where she went wrong.

Spanning over a decade, told in alternating voices, *The Grown Ups* explores the indelible bonds between friends and family and the challenges that threaten to divide them.

Questions for Discussion

1. Robin Antalek introduces us to the summer of Suzie Epstein by writing, "It was the summer all the children in the neighborhood caught a virus." Why do you think she begins with this detail? How does the set piece of the virus add to the tension of the summer, and how does it foreshadow the themes of the novel?



2. Why do you think Suzie chose to hurt Sam? Even if she were to tell Sam about his mother and Mr. Epstein, why did she build a relationship with him first, and why did she wait until the day she left to show him the pictures?
3. Why do you think Marguerite and Hunt choose to renovate the family home? Does it go beyond the physical space? What are they trying to achieve?
4. Did you have a group of friends in your life similar to the one Sam had? Did you keep in touch? What pulls people together and pushes them apart over time?
5. On the surface, Sam and Michael are complete opposites. What do you think their most inherent difference is? Do they have anything in common? Who do you think ends up happier?
6. When Sam leaves Bella's apartment, Bella says, "Pretending was nice, wasn't it?" What do you think she's referring to? In their relationship, what is real and what is pretend?
7. When Suzie and Michael get engaged, Bella says that she is happy but that she doesn't "quite feel there." What does she mean by this?
8. He says that he is going to tell his father he is flunking out of school, but instead Sam goes to see his mother in Vermont. Why is it so important for him to see her at that moment in his life?
9. Of Suzie, Sam says, "I loved her only if love was all about getting to the next base." Do you think this is true? Is a fifteen year old capable of love, and is that what Sam felt?
10. Each of the characters experiences personal tragedy. How does their tragedy shape each of them?
11. The concept of being "grown up" is a recurring motif in the novel. How does each of the main characters define this differently?