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ANNA
QUINDLEN
Author of Black and Blue



**Object
Lessons**
A NOVEL
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It is the 1960s, in suburban New York City, and twelve-year-old Maggie Scanlan begins to sense that despite the calm surface of her peaceful life, everything is going strangely wrong.

When her all-powerful grandfather is struck down by a stroke, the reverberations affect Maggie's entire family. Her normally dispassionate father breaks down, her mother becomes distant and unavailable, and matters only get worse when her cousin and her best friend start doing things to each other that leave Maggie confused about sex and terrified of sin.

With all of this upheaval, how can she be sure that what she wants is even worth having?

Object Lessons Details

Date : Published March 22nd 1992 by Ivy Books (first published April 9th 1991)

ISBN : 9780804109468

Author : Anna Quindlen

Format : Paperback 323 pages

Genre : Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Contemporary

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From Reader Review Object Lessons for online ebook

Jennifer says

I enjoyed this. I am not a student of the mid-60s in any way, but I do recognize that this book is an extremely narrow portrayal of human experience at that time. I found, however, the characters to be well-written and their dramas to be realistic and I thought Quindlen took a very narrow world and deepened it so that, even though we were not provided much outside of that world, we were given a very three-dimensional view of it.

I liked how Quindlen presented a time period of change from the viewpoints of people outside of those changes; Helen Malone's storyline was a secondary one, but Maggie's experience of it, and her mother's, and her father's, all provided a new sort of perspective. Quindlen also demonstrated that the gesture toward independence did not in any way affect everyone, nor did everyone want to experience it.

I thought this was enjoyable; I liked some of the characters, disliked others, thought they were all believable and that they carried the novel well.

Cathy Ryan says

There's a reason Anne Quindlen won the Pulitzer! It's because she is an incredible writer. GREAT coming of age book.

Michelle says

I rate this book a solid "fine". Quindlen's first book, it lacks the devastating plot points of her later work. I thought it made for pleasant reading without much to provoke thought or feeling.

Kyra says

12 year old Maggie Scanlan has one of those pivotal summers that people in books always seem to have. I enjoyed the book - it is well written and never dull. I am also of that generation which was 12 years old about the same time as Maggie so I could relate to some of it - and some not. Maybe because I grew up on the West Coast and was not a Catholic kid in New York, maybe because I was patently out of the loop (or backward) when I was 12, I have a hard time believing in what to me are implausibly precocious 12 year olds. I spent the summer I was 12 playing marathon Monopoly sessions with my brother and another neighbourhood kid - not obsessing about death and sex. Perhaps I am being unfair to the author, but I think that when one is 12, one is bombarded with experiences perhaps but one does not have the acumen to sort them out into neat threads. Only adults have that capability (or the urge to categorize their memories). Nonetheless, I enjoyed reading this - Anna Quindlen writes very very well indeed - and I recommend it to anyone interested in large Catholic families with domineering pater familias and one super smart grandkid. Oh and I loved the graveyard stuff.

Don says

It took awhile for the book to get going but it's worth reading. I'm always a sucker for anything set in the 60's.

Marcie Crandall says

I forced myself to "muddle" through this one because I feel like I have given up on so many books lately. It seems that for every good book, there are 100 terrible books (this one falls into the latter category). I don't even recommend it...to anyone. Sorry.

Becky says

This book teaches that we are always in a phase of learning and discovery about ourselves, our relationships, and our environment. I would like to say it is mainly a coming of age story, but the mother and father are also learning lessons. Quindlen has a marvelous way of expressing feelings that we experience as we learn these lessons. The second quote (I typed below) rang SO true to me, it was like she could read my mind.

"...and Maggie had lost the knack for being happy there. Until this horrible sweaty season, lines had been drawn, in her house, her neighborhood, her relationships. Some of them were lines that connected people - mother and father, friend to friend. They had all been rubbed out as surely as if they had been written in chalk, not stone, and Maggie knew she could not live without them. Sometimes she sat for hours with her back against the rough bark of the tree, blowing on a blade of grass between her fingers, wondering what would happen next. Often she cried."

"..there are somethings that aren't important. There are things that seem tremendously important at the time and then years later you look back and thing you can't believe you ever worried so much about them."

"She had supposed that a husband and children would teach her to be one of the group, but instead she felt more and more alone among more and more people, a woman whose universe was contained beneath her own sternum."

"This was what his entire married life had been like: long stretches of tedium illuminated by moments, unexpected, when he knew that without her he would be lost. For weeks or months they moved through their separate lives and slept side by side as though they were two strangers who had mistakenly been assigned the same hotel room. And then something would happen and he would find himself staring at her as though he could see the soul of her, looking for an end to his troubles inside the loop of her arms, and he would be snagged with the fishhook of herself, with the barbed hook of his powerless infatuation with something that she seemed to have, some answer that she seemed to offer."

"She's one of those people who sees everything bad. And there are other people who see everything good"

Marti says

This novel got off to a slow start and I must admit I set it aside for a few days while I read other things. In the interim, I had the pleasure of hearing Anna Quindlen speak at a luncheon. I have been a fan of Ms. Q for quite a while, especially the columns she used to write for Newsweek. In this, her first, novel, the times are changing and so are many of the characters' lives. The family patriarch, John Scanlon, is used to getting his way in all things. He came from poverty to amass an impressive fortune. He is very used to getting what he wants and tends to bully his large family while also making them financially dependent on him. His son, Tommy, scandalized the Irish Catholic family by marrying an Italian-American girl. His wife Concetta ("Connie") loves Tommy and her four children but is rather depressed and feels isolated. Their eldest child and only daughter is Maggie, who is a favorite of John's. Maggie is the central character of this novel. Connie loves her daughter but feels betrayed by Maggie's closeness to John. Maggie does not feel close to Connie but is very close to her best friend, Debbie's mother. Over the course of the summer when Maggie turns thirteen, the lives of all of these characters change causing changes in all of the relationships. While not a book with a fast moving plot, the characters are well drawn and I found myself being more and more drawn as I read through the book. In the end, I did like the book quite a lot and would recommend it to those who like strong characterization within a family drama.

Patty says

I always enjoy Anna Quindlen and I read this book in the early 90's. The new lessons, phrases and ideas this re-read sparked, however, really surprised me. I guess "ages and stages" in life really does make a difference in what will resonate with a reader. Great read. Again.

Lacygnette says

I love Quindlan but this one didn't quite hang together. After I was done, I read it was her first novel, so I understood. I'd say it was only for die-hard Quindlan fans.

Julie says

Loved the characters in this one, and the life lessons. Excellent.

Jen Mays says

(rating 3.5)

Maggie is a young teenager caught on the threshold of establishing her identity. She's a child, but growing into a young woman, confronted suddenly by confusions such as peer pressure, popularity, and boys in a

world that had seemed so calm. She's torn between two families: the well-to-do snobs of her father's lineage who seem to excel at looking down on others while failing to smell their own stink, and the more humble immigrants that her mother escaped from by getting pregnant before marriage.

Told mostly from the perspectives of Maggie and her mother, this is the story of one pivotal summer, a place in time that Maggie, now an adult looking back, can pinpoint as the time when everything changed.

While Maggie's specific experiences are unique (we didn't all spend summers as a teen lighting fires to partially built houses, for example), the feelings that her summer developed were very familiar. She had a lifelong friendship turn sour because of outside pressures, discovered that her mother is a complex human being and not just a "mom"...even her physical world is changing as the big open space behind her house is razed and developed with new housing. All of these experiences help shape the person she is becoming, but they all have that air of bittersweetness that comes with such changes. It's that drift of inevitability, sadness at leaving the familiar behind mixed with a bit of anticipation for what might be next. Curiosity over the new laces with a bit of fear that the old will fade away entirely and no longer be remembered...can people be as easily forgotten? And then, finally, realizing that what ultimately matters is that, no matter what it brings, the decision to move forward must be made by the person moving.

On the cusp of a major change in my own life, I found a lot of the sentiment here (though the causes were very different) to be really on point with how I'm feeling so the timing of the story seems like it was just right for me. Sometimes a story doesn't need to be perfectly written if it's read at a perfect time.

Katja Nielsen says

DNF

Amy says

I didn't expect to like this book as much as I did, because it was Anna Quindlen's first book. I picked it up at a used book sale some time back, and had kept it as a back up read for when I didn't have a book.

While it was a coming of age book, I kept expecting Maggie and her mother to be at complete odds by the end of the book. Instead I was pleasantly surprised by the bond/understanding they formed. I also expected the parents to be divorced, and Maggie's father Tommy Scanlan to commit some horrible act, but he's just a decent guy who loves his wife. I liked how at the end of the book there were some exchanges between family members and actions that were meaningful.

One reader/reviewer commented that Maggie at 12 (almost 13) did not seem realistic, as she (Maggie) was doing things that a 12/13 year old wouldn't be doing. I guess that depends on the 12/13 year old. Maggie's character and actions for that age resonated with me, and were comparable to others I had known at that age.

One part that didn't sit well with me was the continuous bickering/nasty exchanges between Monica and Maggie, as it seemed that some of the comments Monica made about Maggie's involvement in a criminal action would have sparked more curiosity or questions by other around them who would have heard the conversation.

One part I particularly enjoyed was the description of Connie's father Angelo Mazza, and the Italian-Catholic cemetery he cares for. And the comparison between this cemetery and the one grandfather John Scanlan is buried in.

Cindy says

Quindlen has a way of making me like her, but I'm not sure why. This book was hurky jerky in its story and the grandfather Mr. Scanlan made me mad. But even though I didn't love the story, Quindlen will sometimes write an insight from a character that will make me gasp-and consequently understand myself more!!

The insight in this story was when Margaret told Tommy to leave his mother alone when she couldn't decide on the details of a funeral. Margaret said, "It's called displacement. You focus on the little details so you don't have to face the bigger ones." And suddenly I thought of myself and why I did the things I did when my father died. I also thought it was insightful the way she described how Maggie's life could change so much in one summer. And how Mary Frances' life was forever scarred by the loss of a baby daughter. Okay and one more, how Connie's father poured all his quiet love into the care of the cemetery plots.

So although I didn't love the book, I will keep seeking Quindlen out for reading material. She's like a friend that annoys me but I like all at the same time.

Nenette says

A coming of age novel, both in a literal and figurative sense. Young and old alike, the characters all realized in the end that whatever effect that other people have on them - genetically or otherwise, it is what they decide on what or who they will become that matters.

The narrative was well put together, but I am a little bit wanting for more dialogue. Paragraphs seem to be unending, and they almost always lulled me to sleep.

Carol Storm says

Anna Quindlen has many gifts, but subtlety is not one of them. Nor is originality. Just about every character and plot device in this novel has been used before -- many, many times before. Oddly, for a hell-on-wheels nagging feminist, Anna Quindlen seems unduly influenced by male authors (and cliches.) She steals much, but understands little.

Let's see, a family saga about a wealthy immigrant clan ruled by a shady, all-powerful patriarch. GODFATHER, anyone? Just as John Scanlan is clearly Don Vito, so is uber-achiever teen girl Maggie Scanlan clearly in the Michael Corleone position. She's all but anointed as his successor -- at thirteen! The only problem is, all the tough moral questions Michael Corleone has to face are carefully airbrushed away for Maggie. The old man is a brute, a bully, and all the usual feminist crybaby stuff -- but it's perfectly all right for Maggie dearest to inherit all that yummy money.

On the other hand, this book also owes a surprising debt to TOM SAWYER. Tom Sawyer and Maggie

Scanlan are both the smartest, liveliest, most charismatic kids in the neighborhood. Both are surrounded by dumb, weak-willed sidekicks who exist only to make them look good. Maggie has the blandly obnoxious Debbie Malone, and Tom has Ben Rogers, Joe Harper, and -- dare I say it -- future hero Huck Finn. Tom Sawyer and Maggie Scanlan are both expected to have brilliant futures, if they don't drown, burn, or blow themselves up in the process of having their amazing but never truly subversive teen adventures.

The most interesting TOM SAYWER parallel is in the use of the hero's nemesis or arch-enemy. Tom has Injun Joe, and Maggie has her cousin Monica Scanlan. At first glance a vicious murdering half-breed and a luscious Grace Kelly lookalike might not seem to have much in common. But it seems that compassionate feminist Anna Quindlen hates blondes even worse than Mark Twain hated Indians -- she's just less honest about what she feels!

Look at all the amazing similarities. Injun Joe and Monica both torture the hero in secret, when no one can see them. Both are masters of disguise. Both meet horrible fates that the heroes don't create but -- oh, so sorry! -- don't manage to prevent on time. There's a certain have it both ways hypocrisy in both novels. Twain claims to present America as a land of innocence and hope -- only the Indians have got to go. Anna claims that Maggie and her luscious college girl mentor Helen are going to build "A New World" for all women -- but first the blondes have got to go the way of the Indians. Ah, Sisterhood!

This tiresome business of bashing beautiful women goes back a long, long way in feminist literature. Poor Monica Scanlan is in good company, along with Hetty Sorrel, Rosamund Vincy, and Lucy Deane. (You can look up these fascinating ladies in the novels of George Eliot -- better yet, don't bother.) It's good to know that, like the nobility of the Bourbon restoration, the feminists of today have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

Did I mention that the budding romance between Maggie and her shy boyfriend Bruce is handled with unusual skill and sensitivity? It's the best part of the book by far. Anna Quindlen has missed her calling -- she should be writing YA romance!

But of course, that sort of novel would be beneath a Barnard graduate.

Jennifer says

While I loved that it was essentially a feminist coming of age story, I had heard so many great things about Anna Quindlen that I expected to like it more than I did.

Sara says

I've read some really good books by this author but reading this was a chore. I had to force myself to slog through it, hoping it would get good. It didn't.

Lynn Dickerson says

I usually love Anna Quindlen's work but not this one. I slogged through it. None of the characters were likable. I found it very depressing.
