

Forever . . .

judy blume

Reading a novel for pleasure and reading a novel for scholarly purposes involve different practices. When you read for pleasure, you do not need to account for key passages or explain to someone else the way that characters are developed or plot points are set out. You may notice these things casually, but unless you are an English major with a lot of experience, you are more likely to let your impressions go without writing them down.

Pointers

Whenever you read a novel for a class, keep these guidelines and pointers in mind:

- Find out when the text was written; understanding the historical context of a novel helps readers to interpret it with more accuracy.
- Make a chart for each main character that allows you to keep track of their motivations and actions.
- Underline or mark passages throughout the text that stand out due to their significance in terms of content or language or insight.

Begin by listing descriptors that one could use for Katherine Danzinger:

Katherine Danzinger	Key Motivations	Major Decisions + What Those Reflect	Important Page Numbers
- guarded	- being in control	- doesn't smoke	- 30
- vanilla	- wanted to be	- weed (72)	- 79
- judgemental	- romantic and	- hard time	- 102
- seeks to retain	- sexuality active	- saying <i>I Love</i>	- 115
- control	- being an adult	- <i>You</i>	- 146
- plain	- wants to be	- Reads	
- average	- responsible	- grandma's	
		- package +	
		- makes Planned	
		- Parenthood	
		- appointment	
		- develops	
		- feelings for	
		- Theo and	
		- breaks up with	
		- Michael	

Michael Wagner	Key Motivations	Major Decisions + What Those Reflect	Important Page Numbers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - selfish - immature - aggressive - vulnerable - open - persistent - hot-headed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pleasure - college plans - Katherine - Katherine's love - control - happy parents - ski instructor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - has Kath keep the necklace - chose not to tell Kath about North Carolina - taking Kath to his sister's apartment (96) - lies that he slept around (206) - pretends to sleep in the car (161-2) - he says I love you first - VD (95) - sex with Kath (105-6) - surprises Kath at camp (200) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 77 - 99-100

Diana Danzinger	Key Motivations	Major Decisions + What Those Reflect	Important Page Numbers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open-minded - honest - insecure - 'cool' mom - accepting of sexuality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintain relationship with Kath - Kath's happiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pushing for Kath to go to Vermont (85) - permissive in marital roles - flabby thighs (166) 	

Roger Danzinger	Key Motivations	Major Decisions + What Those Reflect	Important Page Numbers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accepting of sexuality (less so than Diana) - more conservative - authoritative - protective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - worried about Kath's safety - wants Kath to explore more relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - helping when Michael and Erica got sick - ends up letting Kath go to Vermont - lets Michael and Kath hang out in the den (19-20) - gets Kath the job at Jamie's camp 	

Erica Small	Key Motivations	Major Decisions + What Those Reflect	Important Page Numbers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - outspoken - confident - dramatic - nosey (with unclear motivations) - self-proclaimed realist - has 'insight' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artie's sexuality - more interested in physical relationship (but this changes) - only wants Artie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pursues physical relationship with Artie - decides to want more from Artie - becomes 'therapist' figure for Artie - eventually wants Romantic love 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 30-1 - 45 - 88-9

Artie Lewin	Key Motivations	Major Decisions + What Those Reflect	Important Page Numbers
- confused	- drama school	- allows Erica to	- 45
- attractive	- pleasing	help	- 89
- "perfect" for Erica	Michael and Erica	- hangs himself in the bathroom	- 159
- quiet	- wants to fit-in	- honesty with Erica	- 161
- timid		- reaches out to Michael	
- passionate about acting		- leads Erica on	
- gay (?)			
- not concerned about relationships			
- dramatic			
- nerdy			
- moody			

Sybil Davison	Key Motivations	Major Decisions + What Those Reflect	Important Page Numbers
- promiscuous	- boys	- adoption /	- 1
- immature	- experience (boys + babies)	keeping the baby	- 146
- apathetic	- education	- silent	- 160-2
- random friends	- wants to be an adult	pregnancy with her parents	- 168
- low self-esteem	- love	- desire to name the baby	
- smart		- going to college	

Questions Regarding Characterization and Point of View

1. Throughout the course of the narrative, do Katherine's views regarding sexuality change? Does she ever contradict herself?
2. Does Michael pressure or manipulate Katherine into having sex? If you feel he does, can you find passages in the text that would back up this view?
3. Katherine's grandmother involves herself in Katherine's life by sending her pamphlets and giving her advice. Based upon your reading of their interactions, do you feel that Blume wants readers to view the grandmother sympathetically or view her as an interloper?

Questions Regarding Cultural and Social Issues

1. In Judy Blume's *Forever*, Katherine is shown to think that, "Back in the olden days girls were divided into two groups, those who did and those who didn't...Nice girls didn't naturally" (44). According to what society seems to be like, as reflected in the novel, would Katherine be considered a nice girl or not nice girl? In other words, has that much changed since "the olden days"?
2. Throughout *Forever*, much of the dialogue that attempts to help Katherine in making responsible decisions concerning sex is primarily conveyed through her mother, grandmother and, occasionally, her father. Readers do not learn very much about how Michael or any of the other male characters are feeling or what they are thinking unless they say so. It is suggested that *Forever* was written as a self-help book. What audience might *Forever* be intending to help? And what does that suggest about society and "gender rules" when it comes to sex and responsibility?
3. Based upon what we see of Katherine's parents' reaction to her burgeoning sexuality, what might their experiences have been as teenagers themselves? Where in the text can one find evidence for such a conjecture?

Questions Regarding Narrative Form

1. In *Disturbing the Universe*, Trites argued that a person's attitudes towards sex are constructed by his or her culture's attitudes—and these attitudes are typically conveyed through language. Thus, when Katherine, Blume's protagonist, thinks about other people having sex or thinks about having sex herself, what sort of words does she use to describe her feelings? What might those words tell us about the culture in which she is living?
2. Throughout the book, many of Katherine's friends go through a major struggle dealing with their sexual actions/feelings. For example, Michael talks about having an STD in his past, and Artie struggles with his sexual orientation. Why do you think Blume didn't have something so negative happen to Katherine? Do you think there was a reason for keeping Katherine "safe" within the text?
3. What do you feel Jamie's role was in the text?
4. At what point in the novel do you believe Katherine realized that she and Michael were not going to last "forever"? How and why did she realize this and what effects did it have on her?
5. What is the significance of Blume's choice to end the text with Katherine's mom telling her that Theo had called?

Questions Regarding Reception

1. Judy Blume's *Forever* is a controversial text that has been challenged and banned by parents, librarians, and school officials. Ultimately, this is because some adults believe that words have power, and they are afraid young adults will interpret the text as promoting sexual activity. Other readers have noted that *Forever* may actually discourage teens from having sex. Can you find evidence for both of these positions in the text itself?
2. Do you think that if Judy Blume were to re-write the story of *Forever* today, do you believe that the content would change? How might the powers between adult and adolescent be altered when we consider the content that is circulated today via television and Internet? Also, if you have read *Fifty Shades of Gray* by E.L. James, do you see any similarities or differences between the contemporary text (geared towards adults, but read by many teenagers) and the earlier text?
3. If you were developing a classroom library for your students, would you consider including *Forever*?