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Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda by Becky Albertalli

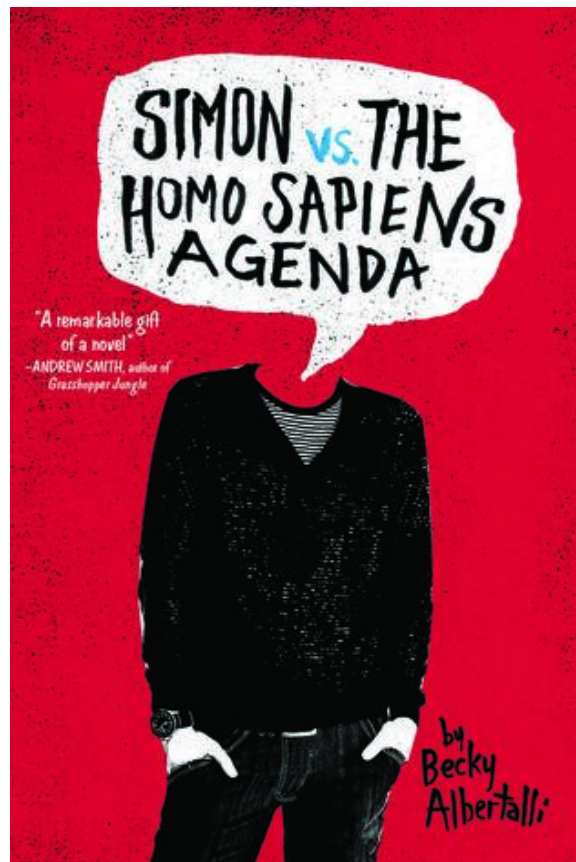


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https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/19547856-simon-vs-the-homo-sapiens-agenda?ac=1&from_search=true&qid=0hBRsqZowJ&rank=1

About the Author:

Image source: <https://www.nationalbook.org/people/becky-albertalli/#fullBio>

Becky Albertalli is a New York Times bestselling author of young adult novels and a former psychologist. She was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. Albertalli attended Wesleyan University, where she majored in psychology. She went on to earn her doctorate in clinical psychology from George Washington University. For a couple of years, Albertalli worked as a psychologist who specializes in working with LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming teens, but she ended up retiring in 2012 after her son was born. On her website, Albertalli reveals she has been writing stories since she was in preschool. In 2015, she published her debut novel, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, which became a huge success and went on to win the William C. Morris Award for Best Young Adult Debut of the Year. *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* was also adapted into a 2018 film called *Love, Simon*. Since then, Albertalli has continued to write and publish coming of age novels that typically feature queer protagonists and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Summary:

Sixteen-year-old Simon Spier seems to have it all: caring, supportive parents, a good relationship with his two sisters, and a tight-knit group of friends. However, nobody in his life knows that Simon is gay, except for one person—a boy who goes by the pseudonym “Blue.” Simon has been exchanging emails with Blue through an anonymous account and knows that not only is his pen pal a fellow Creekwood High student, but Blue is also secretly gay. Their emails serve as a safe, private space for the two boys to bond over their shared sexual orientation without having to reveal their identities. One day, Simon and Blue’s emails are discovered by a classmate—Martin Addison—when Simon mistakenly forgets to log out of his account on the school library’s computer. Martin sees this as an opportunity to blackmail Simon into helping him get close to his best friend, Abby. To protect his and Blue’s secret from getting out, Simon hesitantly agrees to be Martin’s wingman. But soon enough, things begin to spiral out of control, and Simon must grapple with the possibility that his relationship with Blue may come to an end.

Quote #1:

“But I’m tired of coming out. All I ever do is come out. I try not to change, but I keep changing, in all these tiny ways. I get a girlfriend. I have a beer. And every freaking time, I have to reintroduce myself to the universe all over again” (36).

Throughout the novel, Simon repeatedly expresses his aversion to change. He takes note of all the changes occurring around him, from his older sister, Alice, moving out of state for college to his younger sister, Nora, piercing her ears without their parents’ permission. However, Simon is most put off by the changes he sees within himself. Despite his aversion to change, Simon is evolving in ways that signify his developing maturity—he is now attending house parties and drinking beer. In this passage, he reveals that his dislike of change is partially due to his parents and their need to know every detail once they spot even the tiniest shift in him. Simon equates change with the act of coming out because of his parents’ tendency to make a big deal out of everything he does, which suggests that maybe they also struggle with change as it is an indicator of their children growing up. That being said, this passage highlights that change, as an inevitable part of a young adult’s coming of age journey, affects not only the individual teen but also their family members, who must learn to accept and embrace these changes to support and navigate their teen through adolescence.

Quote #2:

“I completely understand what you mean about feeling locked into yourself. For me, I don’t even think it has anything to do with other people thinking they know me. It’s more that I want to leap in and say certain things and do certain things, but I always seem to hold myself back. I think a big part of me is afraid. Even thinking about it makes me nauseated” (38).

In their emails, Simon and Blue connect over their shared feelings of being trapped in their identities. Both boys feel that no one except them truly knows who they are. In this quote, Blue reveals how he is always holding himself back, afraid to say or do certain things because of the fear of being judged by others. While this applies to his hesitancy to come out, Blue's fear of being judged also dictates how he chooses to present himself to others. He does not feel like he is living his authentic self. This passage exemplifies the longing for acceptance that young adults often desire as they are figuring out their identity and how they will do anything in order to fit in.

Quote #3:

““And you know what? You don't get to say it's not a big thing. This is a big fucking thing, okay? This was supposed to be—this was mine. I'm supposed to decide when and where and who knows and how I want to say it.’ Suddenly, my throat gets thick. ‘So, yeah, you took that from me. And then you brought Blue into it? Seriously? You fucking suck, Martin. I mean, I don't even want to look at you’” (118).

For context, Martin ends up creating a Tumblr post revealing Simon's sexuality, forcing Simon to come out to his family and friends, even though he was not prepared to. When he witnesses other students harassing Simon at school, Martin attempts to apologize, but Simon refuses to accept his apology because the damage had already been done. What Simon says in this quote is highly significant; his decision to come out should have been on his own terms. By creating that post, Martin callously robs Simon of any control over a major decision that was not his to make in the first place. Due to Martin's selfish actions, Simon is bullied at school, a situation he feared would happen once he eventually came out. However, because he had no control over the timing of his coming out, Simon experiences more difficulty in dealing with the harassment as he is not given a chance to fully prepare for the situation he finds himself in. This passage stresses the importance of respecting personal choices and understanding that people have the right to make their own decisions, especially when those decisions play a huge role in their personal identity. It also exemplifies the dangers of outing someone out before they are fully ready because not only is it a violation of their privacy, but it also strips them of their autonomy.

Classroom Use + Why Teens Should Read This Book:

Due to the presence of strong language and sexual content, this novel would be best suited for grade eleven or twelve students if used in a classroom; however, I think any teens from the ages twelve and up will be able to appreciate this book. Self-discovery, acceptance, coming out, and friendship are prominent themes in the novel, themes that resonate with many young adults. For teens who feel uncertain of their identity or sexuality, this novel can offer comfort and support by showing that they are not alone in their feelings.

One way I can go about teaching this novel is by having students write their own “anonymous email” to send to a pen pal. This pen pal can be a fellow classmate from a different period to prevent students from figuring out each other's identities. For this assignment, students would be assigned topics pertaining to the novel, such as writing about a time they felt judged, did something to protect a friend, or share a secret (big or small) they have been hiding. I would use this assignment to help students engage with the novel's themes by encouraging them to reflect on how these concepts manifest in their own lives, while offering them a safe space to express their thoughts and feelings on these topics.

On a similar note, another assignment that I would have students do is draft a letter addressed to Simon. In their letters, students can reflect on the changes happening in their lives or within themselves and discuss whether or not they can relate to Simon's fear of change. I believe this assignment can help remind students that change is an inevitable part of growing up and that they are not alone in facing it.

This novel can be used to facilitate engaging class discussions. I would have students share their reactions to big moments in the story, such as when Simon discovers Martin's Tumblr post or when he meets Blue for the first time, and discuss whether they would make the same decisions as Simon or the other characters if they found themselves in similar situations.

How it best fits in Chapters 4-8 of *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*:

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences

- The novel is set in modern, contemporary times
- The setting takes place at a high school
- The novel depicts teens navigating relationships and friendships, learning how to deal with change, and coming to terms with their identity and sexuality

Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

- Simon is a closeted teen, struggling to come out to his family and friends
- Throughout the novel, Simon is in search of his identity and experiences a difficult time coming to terms with all the changes happening in his life and within himself
- When he is blackmailed by Martin, Simon has to make the decision of agreeing to play wingman for his classmate or be outed as gay
- Simon and Blue both have to make the decision of revealing their identities to each other

Chapter 7: Courage and Survival

- After Martin creates that Tumblr post, Simon finds the courage to come out to his family and friends, even though he was not fully ready to do so
- When he is harassed and mocked at school for his sexuality, Simon’s friends stand up to his bullies and rally behind him
- Blue comes out to his parents
- Simon and Blue both find the courage to reveal their identities to each other and agree to meet face-to-face, signaling that they are no longer afraid to be their true selves

Quantitative Analysis

Page Count: 303

Word Count: around 96,000

Lexile: HL640L, Age Range: 14-17

Interest Level: Grades 8-12

ATOS Level: 6.01

Dale-Chall Readability Level: 6.76

Qualitative Analysis

Structure

- The story is told from the first-person perspective of Simon, giving readers access to his inner thoughts and feelings
- There are a total of thirty-five chapters that alternate between the present and the emails between Simon and Blue
- The story is told in chronological order, allowing readers to witness Simon’s development and growth as a character
- The chapters of Simon and Blue’s email offer readers glimpses of the boys’ personalities, their worries about coming out to their family and friends, and the romantic relationship blossoming between them.

Language Conventions and Clarity

- There is a presence of strong language, including profanity and derogatory terms
- Told from the perspective of Simon, the writing style is conversational, with lots of humor and sarcasm sprinkled throughout
- The writing style captures the voice and inner thoughts of a teenager; words and phrases such as “freaking,” “I guess,” “you know” are used frequently
- Sentence fragments are used to mimic realistic thoughts; Simon’s inner monologues are filled with sentence fragments

Knowledge Demands

- This novel requires some understanding of the challenges many LGBTQ+ teens have to face: coming to terms with their sexuality, anxiety and fear of coming out, discrimination and harassment, and social stigma

Levels of Meanings

- On the surface, this novel is about a closeted teenage boy who has not yet come out to his family and friends. Simon finds himself in a sticky situation when his emails with Blue are discovered by another classmate, who proceeds to blackmail him into playing wingman. On top of all this, Simon must learn how to adapt to the changes in his life, while juggling his relationship with Blue and coming to terms with his sexuality
- On a deeper level, this novel reveals the less glamorous aspects of growing up such as fear of being judged, feeling loss in the midst of constant change, and maintaining friendships. It also highlights the anxiety and fear many LGBTQ+ teens experience when coming out due to the rejection, bullying, and ostracism they may face.