

Allegra Goodman

SAM

BOOK CLUB KIT

DEAR READER,

I am the mother of three bookish and well-behaved sons. When my boys were small, if I turned my back for a minute, they'd always be where I'd left them. Then I had a little girl. Miranda was never where I left her. In a house full of readers, Miranda despised quiet, and sitting around. When she was six and I couldn't get a babysitter, I brought Miranda to a talk I was giving. "I hate books!" my daughter told the president of PEN New England.

What Miranda enjoyed was rearranging furniture. Cutting her own hair. ("I'm sorry," her teacher told me. "She grabbed the scissors from the art table.") Miranda literally climbed the walls, wedging herself up doorframes. It was this energy that inspired me to write *Sam*, a novel about a girl climbing, falling, and striving.

When children are little, they run everywhere. I wanted to write about what happens to that eagerness—particularly in girls. What happens to the girl who wants to climb? I started with this question and a seven-year-old named Sam. But who was Sam? My daughter had inspired me, but characters develop their own lives.

When I first conceived of Sam, I was commuting an hour each way to the North Shore of Massachusetts where my third son, Elijah, attended high school. Our drive was a reverse commute, and it did not make sense for me to return home to Cambridge after dropping him off. While he was at school, I worked, and I walked. I spent a lot of time in the Beverly Library. I drove along the coast to Gloucester. I stood on the beach and looked at the ocean in all seasons and all lights. This place was not mine, but it belonged to Sam.

I thought as well about how to tell her story. Should I use a third person narrator? Should I write from the point of view of several characters? As so often happens when writing fiction, the voice chose me. I adopted Sam's point of view and wrote from her consciousness, starting with the first line: "There is a girl, and her name is Sam."

When viewing time-lapse photography, you can quickly watch seasons change and snow melting and flowers bloom. On one level, my novel is a time-lapse of Sam's life—but because I am not a photographer or filmmaker, I show her growth in words. I do this by shifting diction and syntax so that the voice of the book matures with Sam. The novel moves fast, but the effect is subtle. The narrative carries you along so that you can't quite pinpoint when the little girl becomes a woman, when hope shades into sadness, and discouragement becomes determination. Like a sunrise, the change in a person is spectacular, but while it happens, nearly imperceptible.

My struggle writing *Sam* was with my fear that the novel might seem small and simple. In early drafts I found it difficult to resist adding complications, augmenting the plot, and embellishing the narrative with more voices, more twists and turns, more complexity. However, *Sam* resisted this. The book resisted. One day, I wrote in my notes, The book is about the opening of her heart and mind. Isn't that enough? I began to strip away everything that distracted from my character and her subtle evolution. As I did so, I realized that my subject—girlhood, then womanhood—is not small, but big. *Sam's* story is not simple, but layered and rich.

In the Jewish tradition, it's said that to save a life is to save the entire world. I would add that to write one life is to create an entire world. This was what I felt when I was writing *Sam*, and what I hope readers will feel.

ALLEGRA GOODMAN

MOOD BOARD

JOYFUL. HEARTBREAKING. COMPLICATED. JUST LIKE GROWING UP.



dreams

"Watching Sam grow up before my eyes was captivating."
-Goodreads Review

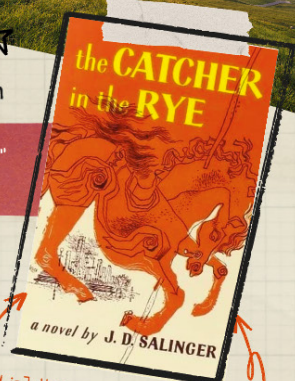
SAM

honest

By New York Times bestselling author Allegra Goodman

"A deeply wise and empathetic portrait of this unforgettable girl"
-Amy Bloom

☆☆



"[SAM is] the new *Catcher in the Rye*. Heartbreaking." -Sharon Weinberg, Chatham Bookstore



freedom

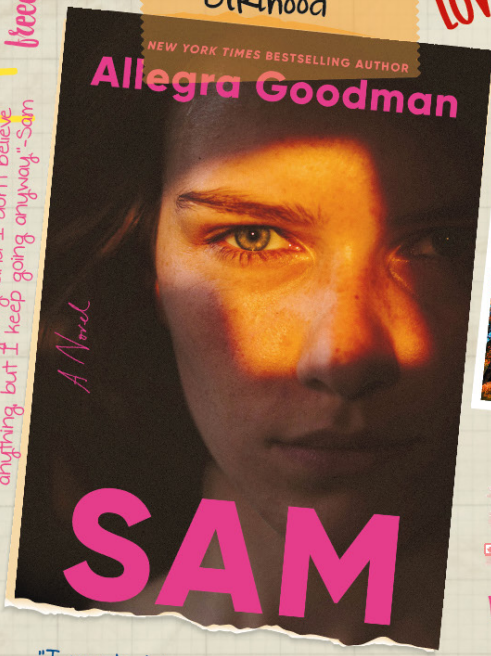
This tender coming-of-age novel sneaks up on you.
-Mallory Melton, BookPeople

"A POWERFUL AND ENDEARING PORTRAIT OF A GIRL"
-LILY KING

"I don't know anything. And I don't believe anything, but I keep going anyway." -Sam

One of the most evocative and tender examinations of youth that I've ever read
-Kevin Wilson

"To write one life is to create an entire world" -Allegra Goodman



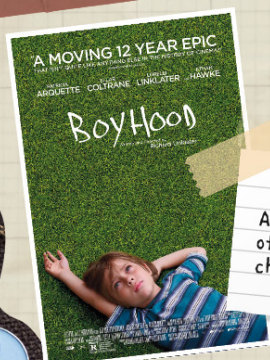
LOVE

ANGER



One of the best books I read this year. It is just a book about a girl, but the author creates such a real character ... in a very compelling way. -Goodreads review

DETERMINATION



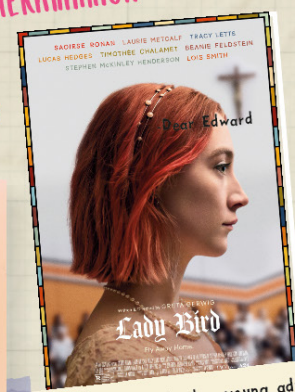
"I wanted to write about what happens to eagerness-particularly in girls." -Allegra Goodman

An intimate character study of a young protagonist from childhood through coming-of-age.

"This seemingly simple plot, turns into a complex tour de force" -Goodreads Review

"Goodman expertly nails ... childhood. Written with such overwhelming empathy ... Sam will grab a hold of you and never let go." -Seth Tucker, Charmichael's Bookstore

POWER



A poignant story about a young adult who has always felt like an outsider.

"A beautiful meditation on all the ways we love and fail each other." -Ann Napolitano

CONFIDENCE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your biggest takeaway from *Sam* and its titular narrator? What was most compelling to you about Sam's story? How, if at all, did you identify with Sam's personal challenges and desires?
2. For Sam, climbing is "not just a sport; it's an art." What does she mean by that statement? How does Sam express herself, and her unique vision, through the art of climbing?
3. Declan notes that climbing requires "half knowledge, half instinct . . . and a little bit [of] experience." Discuss climbing as a metaphor for coming-of-age in this novel. You may also wish to factor in Sam's burgeoning interest in geology—what does it take for Sam to feel grounded in her world?
4. Family instability is a major factor in Sam's life (and theme in this book). Her home life is the exact opposite of Halle's, for example; it's also quite different from the multigenerational structure of Justin's. What does the novel say about what families look like? How does Sam's upbringing shape, disadvantage, or motivate her?
5. Talk about the two fathers at the heart of *Sam*. Is Mitchell a sympathetic character? How do you feel about Jack? Do either of these men's struggles—with such issues as employment and substance abuse—resonate with you, and how?
6. What does *Sam* show us about the pursuit of the American Dream? What are the risks and rewards of following your heart? Finding your passion? What sacrifices do the adults in this novel, from Courtney and Adam to Beth and Ann, make (or not) on behalf of their children?
7. Sam's mother tells her not to be superstitious. "You make your own luck," Courtney says. But Sam isn't so sure; she thinks that "other people's luck can crush you." Do each of their beliefs hold true throughout the course of the novel? How or why not? Which, if at all, do you believe?
8. We are taught, as young readers, that there is a moral to every story. Do you believe that fiction, by and large, is meant to teach us some thing important about the world and ourselves? And, if so, what do you think Allegra Goodman intends for us to take away from *Sam*?
9. If you had the chance to ask the author one question about *Sam*—about the writing process, the characters, or the plot—what would it be?
10. What kind of future do you imagine for Sam beyond the final chapter of this book?
11. Take a look at the playlists below. Which songs might you add to each, and why?

SAM'S PLAYLIST

**SMELLS LIKE
TEEN SPIRIT**

Nirvana

**WAKE ME UP WHEN
SEPTEMBER ENDS**

Green Day

**SUGAR, WE'RE
GOIN DOWN**

Fall Out Boy

NO SCRUBS

TLC

WANNABE

Spice Girls

MOVE ALONG

All American Rejects

MITCHELL'S PLAYLIST

THE BOXER

Simon and
Garfunkel

**OVER THE
RAINBOW**

Israel Kamakawiwo'ole

MAYONNAISE

Smashing
Pumpkins

CREEP

Radiohead

I'M GONNA BE

The Proclaimers

COURTNEY'S PLAYLIST

TAKE A BOW

(RIHANNA'S VERSION)

Ne-Yo

**I MELT
WITH YOU**

Modern English

**YOU WERE
MEANT FOR ME**

Jewel

STAY (I MISSED YOU)

Lisa Loeb

HERE WITH ME

Dido