

PinkMonkey® Literature Notes on . . .

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/>

Sample MonkeyNotes

Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.

The Lovely Bones

by

Alice Sebold

2002



MonkeyNotes by Diane Clapsaddle

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/>

Reprinted with permission from TheBestNotes.com Copyright © 2005, All Rights Reserved
Distribution without the written consent of PinkMonkey.com or TheBestNotes.com is strictly prohibited.

KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel, *The Lovely Bones*, is set mainly in a small town near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from

CHARACTER LIST

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Susie Salmon - She is the main character and narrator of the novel, the young girl who has been raped and murdered. She tells us everything she sees happen to her family for eight years after her death.

George Harvey - This is the man who murdered Susie. The reader sees through Susie's eyes all the.....

Jack Salmon - He is Susie's father; his undying love and devotion for her is examined by Susie....

Abigail Salmon - She is Susie's mother, who cannot face Susie's death and yearns

Lindsey Salmon - She is Susie's sister, who faces Susie's death with a.....

Buckley Salmon - He is Susie's little brother, who after her death, sees,.....

Ray Singh - He is the boy who gives Susie her first kiss before she

Ruth Connors - She is the girl in Susie's class who becomes obsessed with.....

Len Fenerman - He is the detective who investigates Susie's death. He falls in love with.....

Ruana Singh - She is Ray's mother, who has been all but abandoned by her ambitious.....

Samuel Heckler - Lindsey's boyfriend and future husband, he helps her by filling the....

MINOR CHARACTERS

Grandma Lynn - She is Susie's grandmother, her mother's mother, who provides support for the.....

Hal Heckler - He is Samuel's brother and runs a motorcycle shop where Susie will make love.....

Nate - He is Buckley's friend. He can't see Susie even though Buckley can.

Clarissa - She is Susie's friend whom Jack attacks in the cornfield, believing she's.....

Many other minor characters are outlined in the complete MonkeyNotes study guide

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force.

Susie is the protagonist of *The Lovely Bones*. She presents her story as the narrator and observer of how life changes in a family where a murder takes place. She gives us a deep understanding of each.....

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a character at all.

On the surface, the antagonist is Mr. Harvey. After all, he is a serial killer with deep emotional problems. He is a danger to any young girl or woman whom he seeks to “free from.....

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. This moment occurs when Susie has her greatest wish fulfilled: she makes love with Ray.....

Outcome - The outcome is the final resolution of the story or the denouement. In the end, every family member has accepted his or her way of grieving for Susie and cut the

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The novel revolves around the story of Susie Salmon’s rape and murder and the resulting pain her family faces as they journey through the process of grief. The five stages of grief as identified by psychologists are obvious for each family member as the novel unfolds over an eight year period from 1973 to 1981.

Knowing the process of grief is helpful in understanding the steps each member of the family takes:

THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

1. **SHOCK AND DENIAL** - The reality of death hasn't hit home, it hasn't yet been accepted. You.....

THEMES

Grief - The theme of grief is the most obvious message Alice Sebold uses in her novel. People react differently when the tragedy of death strikes and especially when the death is a gruesome one like murder. The author wants us to know that facing this overwhelming sense of loss is a long process for.....

Love and Acceptance - The theme of love and acceptance is also prevalent. It isn’t just love for the dead person and acceptance of her death. It is also love and acceptance of the way those.....

Other themes are identified in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide.

MOOD

The mood is, for the most part, very poignant and sad. We mourn for Susie right along with her family and friends. We grieve as well for the unfulfilled desires she feels in heaven and her inability.....

AUTHOR INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Alice Sebold was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1963. She grew up in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and graduated from Syracuse University in 1984. She also attended graduate school at the University of Houston and ultimately earned a Masters in Fine Arts degree from the University of California-Irvine in creative writing.

Her first novel was *Lucky* (published in 1997), *Lucky* is a memoir of her own rape while she was a freshman at Syracuse University and the effect that the trauma of that rape and the ensuing trial had.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

Chapter 1

Summary

In this chapter, Susie Salmon (like the fish) introduces herself and gives the reader all the details of her murder. She was 14 years old and she took a shortcut home from school through the cornfield behind the junior high. It was already dark, because it was December 6, 1973. She wasn’t paying much attention and so was startled when Mr. Harvey, her neighbor just two doors away, spoke to her. Because she had been taught to respect

authority and he was an adult, Susie spoke to him. She is surprised he knows her name, because no one in the neighborhood ever really knew him. Her father had spoken to him once, but they had never socialized.

Mr. Harvey lures her into a hiding place he's made in the ground, and Susie naively goes inside with him. In fact, she even tells him it's "neato!" He offers her a Coke and convinces her to take off her parka. When she becomes nervous and tries to leave, he blocks the entrance with his body. She tells us that she fought as hard as she could, but it just wasn't enough. At the time, she says this must be the worst thing in the world to have a sweating man on top of you and be trapped inside the earth with no one knowing where you are. She pleads with him over and over, but he finally shuts her up by stuffing the hat with bells her mother had made her into her mouth. The only sound she made after that was the "weak tinkling of bells." She knows he is going to kill her, especially when he reaches for the knife on the ledge with his razor and shaving cream. He makes her say she loves him, and she does, hoping he might let her go. But "the end comes anyway."

After Mr. Harvey rapes Susie, he stabs her to death and then cuts her body into pieces, inadvertently leaving behind her elbow, which is later brought home by the Gilberts' dog.

Notes

Several important ideas surface immediately in this first chapter. First, it is 1973, so it is still at a time when people believed things like raping and murdering a young girl didn't happen. Second, although Susie is 14, girls her age, in 1973, were probably more like 11 year old girls are today. They were not nearly as mature as they are now.

Furthermore, Susie relates a story to us about Mr. Harvey being old-fashioned and using eggshells and coffee grounds as fertilizer for his garden. This foreshadows that even though Mr. Harvey's garden stinks, no one investigates, because he has made it known what fertilizer he uses.

In heaven, Susie reveals several aspects of her death that she should have noticed at the time. For example, she remembers there had been the light scent of cologne in the air as she walked through the field. That should have made her more watchful. Also, Mr. Harvey knows her name. That should have raised her suspicions. She watches Mr. Harvey tell her mother later, "I hope they get the bastard. I'm sorry for your loss." She sees then that he had no shame, but she didn't know it at the time of her death. She enters the hiding place and never asks herself why a grown man would have such a place. Then, when he tells her he had built it for the neighborhood kids, she knows he is lying, but just feels sorry for him for his loneliness. Finally, Susie is amazed that he has lantern inside the hiding place as well as his razor and his shaving cream. She just attributes this to his oddness – her father had once told his family that Mr. Harvey was harmless, just a "character" – and doesn't hear any warning bells. Now, we know that he was preparing himself for her murder.

Chapter 2

Summary

In this chapter, Susie describes her heaven. At first, she thinks that everyone sees what she sees: her high school, people throwing shot put and javelin and soccer goalposts in the distance. She sees the high school rather than the junior high, because she had thought, since she was going to graduate from junior high that high school would be a fresh start. Then, she could be called Suzanne and all the boys would want her. She would protect all the misfit kids and she would take over in a matter of days. These were her dreams when she was on earth.

After a few days in heaven, she realizes that all the people she sees on the field are all in their own version of heaven and it just fit with hers without really duplicating it. She gets a roommate named Holly whom she meets sitting on a swing-set. Their heaven expands as their relationship grows and they both have Franny as their

“intake counselor.” She is the same age as their mothers, because it is something they both want: their mothers. She tells them she is there to help them and that if there is something they desire and understand why they do, it will come. What Susie realizes eventually is she desires what she had not known on earth. She wants to be allowed to grow up. She, also, knows she cannot have what she wants most: Mr. Harvey dead and her living. But she thinks if she watches closely and wants it enough, she can change the lives of those she loved on Earth.

The beginning of the end of her parents’ hopes come when Detective Len Fenerman tells them have found a body part, Susie’s elbow. When her father says that they can’t be certain Susie’s dead, Detective Fenerman responds with what becomes the family’s mantra for awhile: Nothing is ever certain. Susie notes that her parents have a difficult time knowing how to touch each other, because they had never been broken together before. One had always been there to support the other and what’s more, they had never known the meaning of the word *horror* before. The next day, her father tells her sister Lindsay about the body part and she throws up.

The police find Susie’s blood soaked into the ground where the hiding place had been, but they are frustrated at not finding the rest of her body. They also find her copy of *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, the paper she had written on *Othello*, her notes from Mr. Botte’s class, and a love note from Ray Singh, a boy of Indian descent who calls himself the Moor, after Othello. Ray becomes a suspect, but he has an airtight alibi. Unfortunately for this young man who was socially unacceptable because he was different, this news doesn’t help him at school at all. Later, they find her hat with the bells and when Detective Fenerman returns it to Susie’s family, he tells them that with all the blood, the signs of violence and only one body part, they have to believe that Susie has been killed. Her mother wails with the grief, but her father waits until he can put his face into the soft fur of their dog, Holiday, and sob.

Lindsey, Susie’s sister, handles her grief by hardening herself, not letting herself cry. She even returns to school where she is called into the principal’s office so he can express his sympathy. He is so inept in how he handles the situation that Susie, from Heaven, begs him to try to make Lindsey laugh. He also tries to soften her grief by telling her that Coach Dewitt wants her to try out for the boy’s soccer team. Lindsey bursts his bubble by asking him why she would want to play in a field that is only twenty feet from where her sister was murdered. She stays strong and refuses to break before him. Later, at home, she keeps the grief away by doing sit-ups and push-ups until she is exhausted. Mr. Harvey, meanwhile, builds dollhouses, which he makes for a living, and “he wears his innocence like a comfortable old coat.”

In heaven, Susie finds herself desiring simple things and she gets them: dogs of all kinds. They run through the park in her heaven and she has them to give her comfort. Her roommate, Holly, plays the tenor sax for her comfort and the oldest resident of her Heaven, Mrs. Bethel Utemeyer, plays the violin while the dogs howl. Then, they all sleep and this becomes Susie’s Evensong, a song or prayer said every evening.

Notes

Heaven is obviously, in this novel, what each person dreams. A counselor, Franny, is even ready to offer help adjusting to death, but the dead one can still see her family and watch events on Earth as well. However, Susie cannot have what she wants most, so the author is implying that Susie’s adjustment to death will be a difficult one. It is also interesting to note that Susie capitalizes the word Earth whenever she talks about it while *heavennis* always lowercase. It is an indication of where he heart really lies.

The family’s mantra, “Nothing is ever certain,” is a reflection of the first step of the process of grief: shock and denial. The reality of Susie’s death hasn’t really hit home yet. The family is stunned and bewildered. It’s important to note that they react in different ways to her death. Then, when Detective Fenerman brings home the hat and tells them about the body part, they enter the second step which is anger. That’s when her mother wails and her father sobs into the dog’s fur and Lindsey toughens herself so she won’t break. Her little brother,

Buckley, who is only four and doesn't really understand what *gone* means, draws a picture in which a thick blue line separates the air from the ground. This is what Susie will call the Inbetween, or perhaps, what we know as Purgatory. Susie watches the family walk past the picture and wants the picture to be a real place. She wants to be there, because she, too, needs an escape from the reality of her own death.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Susie - Susie is the narrator of the story. She has been raped and murdered and feels enormous pain, even in heaven, for what has happened to her. However, she also presents careful analyses herself about her family and friends. In these, we see her great love and compassion for those she misses dreadfully. We must not forget.....

Jack Salmon - As Susie's father, he feels enormous guilt for having failed to protect his little girl, but he also remains devoted to her memory and actively seeks her appearance in some manner in.....

Abigail Salmon - Abigail grieves several things: the loss of her daughter, the collapse of her family, and the loss of the life she never had the opportunity to live. She is profoundly unhappy even

Lindsey Salmon - Lindsey is the one of the family who suffers in silence and wills herself to be strong for everyone else. Yet, her pain is deep and she bears many burdens: because she looks like Lindsey, people.....

Ray Singh - Ray is the man who should have been Susie's soul-mate. He too is tied to her memory and can never completely put her out of his mind. He is not very popular at school, like Susie, and he.....

Ruth Connors - She is depicted as a young girl whose status as a kind of outcast among her classmates makes her obsessive about Susie. Susie had touched her as she died in the cornfield and began to rise to heaven. This has a profound impact on Ruth who spends the rest of her life believing she has the second.....

Additional characters are analyzed in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The novel takes place over a period of eight years after Susie Salmon's death. However, it is filled with flashback scenes where Susie remembers something in her life and the lives of her family and friends and they are inserted into the story.

There is also a mini-Prologue, which involves Susie's memory of her father and the penguin snow globe, which causes the reader to focus on the idea of a perfect world. The whole novel then

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The theme of grief is the most important theme in the book. The author herself understands what this family experiences. In her book, *Lucky*, she tells the story of her own rape and near murder. This kind of experience can be so devastating that the victim must grieve what happened to her and how she has changed. We see her own experience in Susie, who not only must follow her family's progress through.....

The theme of love and acceptance weaves throughout the narrative. The farther the Salmons move away from each, the more they begin to realize they need to turn around and move back. This theme emphasizes.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide

RIISING ACTION

The rising action begins with the scene of Susie's murder and ends just before she falls to earth and enters Ruth's body. In between are the eight years the Salmons endure the burden of grief. We see such

FALLING ACTION

The falling action first involves the wonderful experience between Ray and Susie through the miracle of her entrance into Ruth's body. It is very uplifting, because it shows how love triumphs in the end. The falling action also involves the

POINT OF VIEW

The entire point of view is first person. Susie relates everything that happens to every character, including their thoughts as well as their deeds. She is an omniscient character in that she can see and.....

GENRE

This book fits within several genres. While in the basic genre of fiction. It can also be.....

OTHER ELEMENTS

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. The most prevalent one is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. For example, when Susie is walking home and meets up with Mr. Harvey, several factors present themselves as warnings she never heeds: his cologne fills the air even before she sees him, he knows her name, but she really doesn't know him; why would a grown man have a hiding place?

Other examples include:

- 1.) Ruth's eccentric thoughts about rabbits and stuffed animals prepare us for the life she leads later in New York City.
- 2.) Susie's obsession with Ray will prepare us for the love scene at the end of the novel.

IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. In this novel, irony often makes us stop for a moment and have that “What if?” feeling about the characters. Some examples of irony include:

- 1.) Mrs. Flanagan's remarks, “What do you have in here? A dead body?” when Mr. Harvey brings her the safe holding the actual body of Susie. She doesn't know what the reader knows.
- 2.) Mr. Salmon turns to his daughter for comfort rather than him comforting her, this, in spite of the fact that he feels guilty for not protecting Susie.....

QUOTATIONS

The following quotations are important at various points in the story:

(*The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold / Little, Brown and Company, Boston, New York, and London, 2002)

- 1) “**Nothing is ever certain.**” (p.21)

This mantra helped the family keep their sanity while they continued to hope Susie would come home.

- 2) “**He wore his innocence like a comfortable old coat.**” (p. 26)

This describes Mr. Harvey, the serial killer, who has killed and gotten away with it so often that he almost believes his own innocence.....

SYMBOLISM/MOTIFS/IMAGERY/SYMBOLS

- **The Keystone State / Charm and the charm bracelet** - They represent Susie.
- **The old shoe from the Monopoly game** - It represents Susie Buckley.
- **The funeral pyre in Abigail's dream** - Symbolically, Abigail can burn away her old self and begin again.....

Many other Symbols and Motifs are identified in the complete MonkeyNotes Study Guide

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

- **Title:** The Lovely Bones
- **Author:** Alice Sebold
- **Date Published:** 2002
- **Genre:** Fiction, Supernatural Thriller, and a

STUDY QUESTIONS / MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. One reason why Mr. Harvey has an easy time getting Susie in his "cave" is:
 - a.) Susie has been taught to respect authority
 - b.) Susie is curious about how Mr. Harvey built it
 - c.) both a. and b.
2. Susie's body is hidden
 - a.) in a trunk in the sinkhole
 - b.) in Mr. Harvey's back yard
 - c.) in an old safe.....

ANSWER KEY

1. c 2. c

ESSAY TOPICS / BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Analyze the character of Susie Salmon by explaining how she must learn to let go of Earth before she can find her wide, wide Heaven. use examples from the story to explain this idea.
2. How does Jack Salmon remain devoted and loving to both Susie and Abigail?.....

Copyright ©2005 TheBestNotes.com.

Reprinted with permission of TheBestNotes.com. All Rights Reserved.

Distribution without the written consent of TheBestNotes.com is strictly prohibited.

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/>