

A Reading Group Guide to *Fallout* by Ellen Hopkins

ABOUT THE BOOK

The final installment in the *Crank* trilogy, *Fallout* picks up almost two decades after Kristina's parents assume custody of Hunter. Hunter is in college and has two half sisters and two half brothers. Told in alternating voices, the verse novel concentrates on the lives of Hunter and his two teenage half sisters: Autumn and Summer. All three are being raised by different families. Hunter has a steady girlfriend and struggles to understand and control his anger. Autumn has panic attacks and cannot handle the fact her aunt, Trey's sister, is marrying and moving away. She turns to alcohol and begins having unprotected sex, even fantasizing about getting pregnant. Summer has been abused at the hands of her father's girlfriends and does not know she has a sister until she begins questioning her father about her past. Lonely and longing for connection, Summer runs away with her boyfriend, Kyle. Hunter, Autumn, and Summer share the same anger and mixed feelings about their mother. Their lives intersect one Christmas at Kristina's parents' home, where they encounter their mother, who has little emotional connection with them. While the three fear they are predestined to follow in their mother's footsteps, they begin finding pieces of connection and dare to hope for better lives.

PREREADING ACTIVITY

What psychological impact might drug addiction have on offspring?

Is it possible for a drug addiction to be just one person's problem?

How else, besides drugs like meth, can an addiction manifest itself, especially in the life of a teenager?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Since the birth of her first child, Hunter, how has Kristina changed over the years? How has she remained the same? How has her relationship with her parents evolved?

How are Hunter, Autumn, and Summer alike? How are they different? Which of the three has a better chance at a successful life? Why?

Why is Autumn so careless about unprotected sex? How does she feel about getting pregnant? Is she grounded in reality? Explain.

Summer has feelings for both Matt and Matt's friend, Kyle. She describes Matt as a nice guy who has never pushed her to have sex and who has never belittled her or yelled at her. However, these positive characteristics "make him boring" How can this be? What characteristics in a boy excite her? Why? What similar responses to men does her mother have? Consider her mother's relationship with Ron.

Trey and Autumn's journey to Autumn's grandparents house is also a journey through Trey's relationship with Autumn's mother and, ultimately, his relationship with Autumn, his daughter.

Along the way, Trey says, “I’ve/spent the last fifteen/years hating your mother . . . What I couldn’t see/ was that hate controlled me.” What does Trey mean? Give examples. What other characters have been controlled by hate? Explain.

Anger is a recurring theme in *Fallout*. Hunter reflects on his own rage and wonders why people take it out on those they love. Why do you think those closest often are hit the hardest by rage? Is Hunter’s anger justified? What about his mother’s? Explain.

How might anger be self-contempt? Use Kristina as an example.

Hunter’s mother remarks in the closing pages that she “used to live ‘mad’”. What does she mean and how has she changed? Has she found peace? Explain.

Autumn and Summer both want desperately to be loved. Explain their desperation. Why are they so quick to fall for a boy? Why are they so needy? In what ways are they like their mother? In what ways are they different from their mother? How will they need to change so that they can have healthy relationships with men?

How do Kristina’s children define love? Would you say they “misname” love? If so, explain.

Kristina has hurt everyone she has touched, and she seems to know she has. How does she respond to the pain she has caused?

Will Kristina’s family ever heal? What scars might remain? Explain.

Fallout ends with the phrase, “. . . look/very long at/Kristina, I see/me/me/me.” Each use of the pronoun *me* represents one of Kristina’s three older children. What do all three wish for? What are their fears? Will each of them be able to stop the “monster” from destroying their own families?

ACTIVITIES

Draw and/or use computer software to generate a relationship tree, highlighting the key characters in *Fallout*.

Choose one of the following relationships to research: father/daughter, father/son, mother/son, mother/daughter. What are the characteristics of a healthy relationship between the two? What relationship difficulties might a young teen have if one of these relationships is damaged? Prepare a class presentation based on your findings.

Organize a book read at your school between parents/guardians and their children around a book with strong relationship themes between parents/guardians and teens. Mothers and sons might read a YA novel about a mother/son relationship (ex., *Bucking the Sarge* by Christopher Paul Curtis); a father and daughter might read a YA novel about a father/daughter relationship (ex., *Story of a Girl* by Sara Zaar). Adopted children and their adoptive parents might read *Whale Talk* by Chris Crutcher.

Read a nonfiction account or a biography about a child growing up in a foster home (ex., *Three Little Words: A Memoir* by Ashley Rhodes-Courter) and share your reactions to the reading with the class.

Fallout guide written by Pam B. Cole, Professor of English Education & Literacy, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA.