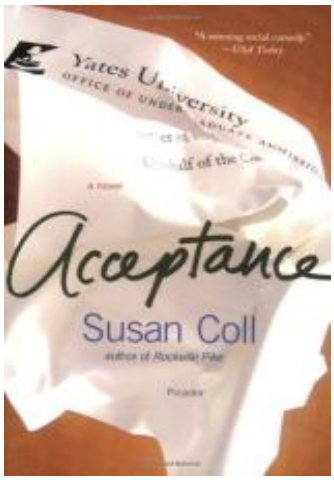
Acceptance

by Susan Coll



About the Book

Set in the neurotic world of a high-strung high school, **Acceptance** introduces us to such characters as AP Harry (a nickname derived from the unprecedented number of Advanced Placement courses he?s taken) and Maya Kaluantharana, whose mother wants to have her diagnosed with a learning disability so she can boost her already strong SAT scores by retaking the exam with special accommodations. Acclaimed novelist Susan Coll is at the height of her wry, perceptive powers as the college countdown ticks away for Harry, Maya, and the other students at Verona High, an elite public school in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

On the other side of the equation is Olivia Sheraton, an admissions staffer charged with recruiting prestige itself to Yates University, a dilapidated liberal-arts school enjoying a new surge in popularity thanks to a statistical error that landed it on *U.S. News & World Report*?s list of top colleges. Balancing political pressure from colleagues with a daily quest simply to find a remarkable applicant, Olivia discovers that the price of acceptance fluctuates wildly. And as they navigate the turbulence of writing personal essays and taking standardized tests, the seniors from Verona are about to learn a similar lesson.

By turns comic and compassionate, **Acceptance** delivers a provocative look at the climbers and clout brokers of higher education.

Discussion Guide

1. Grace is the first parent we meet in **Acceptance**. How does her household compare to the others in her neighborhood? Is Harry at a disadvantage by having been raised by a single parent?

2. Not all of Verona?s students are as academically driven as Harry. What separates the overachievers from the underachievers? Do either of these categories describe your experience in school?

3. What are the similarities between Harry?s and Taylor?s obsessions? As Harry becomes fixated on admission to Harvard and Taylor compulsively hoards mail, what insecurities are they soothing? What quirky obsessions would you admit to having?

4. How does Maya cope in the shadow of her high-achieving siblings? Why do her parents despise academic mediocrity? Can you picture Maya thriving as a college athlete?

5. How have attitudes toward college admissions changed since you were in high school? How did your school compare to Verona? What did your parents tell you about higher education?

6. In the seventh chapter (October), Harry runs into Lily Wong, who moved to an inner-city school district after a college counselor said she stood a better chance of getting into Harvard if she did ?something to counter the smart Asian kid stereotype.? Does this scenario capture any realities?

7. Discuss the relationship between money and education described throughout the novel. What did money buy for the wealthiest families? Should Lily?s inner-city school receive the same amount of funding (per student) as Verona?

8. In your opinion, what does an SAT score measure? Would you pay for your child to receive the daily ?test prep? recorded messages featured in the novel?

9. What makes the concept of college admissions competitiveness such a good target for spoofing? How is she able to blend humor with serious topics, and realism with the absurd? Which exaggerations were your favorites?

10. How is Maya?s outlook on success shaped by her summer in India? What had she believed about typical teenagers? Are the students depicted in the novel typical teenagers?

11. Nina insists that Taylor needs acceptance to a university where she will find a rich husband. Does a young woman?s key to success differ from a young man?s? How have college admissions standards changed since Nina was on the hunt for a spouse?

12. What is the effect of the sometimes elaborate background stories given for various characters, such as Basil Dickerson?s history at Enron, ?overseeing the trading of charity futures??

13. Discuss the satire of academia in **Acceptance**. After exercising so much power, why must Olivia remain an acting dean and compete in a recruitment search? Will she ever get to be truly in charge of anything? What are the honest answers to the applicants? questions about getting into a top-tier school?

14. Taylor decides not to follow the considerable advice she receives regarding her application essay, and her decision to be frank almost keeps her out of college. What would have happened if she had crafted a ?selling? essay for college admissions?

15. The Yashequana lawsuit recalls headlines about prestigious universities that now have to confront embarrassing aspects of their histories. How do the current goals of these universities compare to the principles on which they were founded?

16. What were your reactions to the novel?s ending? Which would have served Harry better: huge debt and a Harvard degree, or a free ride at the University of Maryland?

17. In the epilogue, Harry reads a statistic that implies it?s harder to get a job at Wal-Mart than to be admitted to Harvard. How does the competitive scenario described in Acceptance compare to life after college? To what degree do American universities resemble corporations?

Author Bio

Susan Coll is the author of the novels BEACH WEEK, ACCEPTANCE, ROCKVILLE PIKE and KARLMARX.COM. A television adaption of ACCEPTANCE, starring Joan Cusack, aired in 2009. Coll works at Politics & Prose bookstore and lives in Washington, D.C.

Susan Coll enjoys speaking to book groups, so go ahead and ask. Visit www.susancoll.com for more information.

Critical Praise

?Having just sent one kid off to college and with a second now preparing to apply, I had shivers of recognition again and again as I read **Acceptance**. Fortunately, each shiver came along with its corresponding several smiles and chuckles. Susan Coll has written a dead-on satire that?s also full of heart, which is a rare achievement.?

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Publication Date: March 4, 2008
Paperback: 320 pages
Publisher: Picador
ISBN-10: 0312426968
ISBN-13: 9780312426965