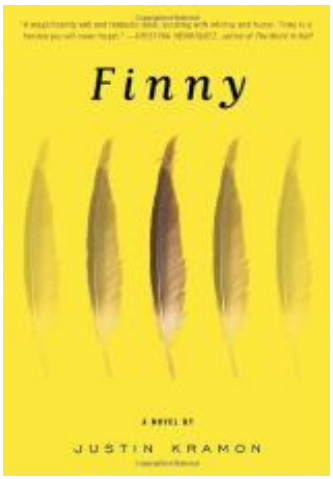
Finny

by Justin Kramon



About the Book

Justin Kramon?s debut novel, **Finny**, is a sweeping, enchanting voyage, an insightful story about a young woman?s complicated path to adulthood.

We meet Finny Short as an observant, defiant 14-year-old who can?t make sense of her family?s unusual habits: Her mother offers guidance appropriate for a 40-year-old socialite; her father quotes Nietzsche over pancakes. Finny figures she?s stuck with this lonely lot until she meets Earl Henckel, a boy who comes from an even stranger place than she does. Unhappy with Finny?s budding romance with Earl, her parents ship her off to Thorndon boarding school. But mischief follows Finny as she befriends New York heiress Judith Turngate, a girl whose charm belies a disquieting reckless streak.

Finny?s relationships with Earl and Judith open her up to dizzying possibilities of love and loss and propel her into a remarkable adventure spanning twenty years and two continents. Justin Kramon has given us a wickedly funny odyssey with a moving and original love story at its core. **Finny** introduces us to an unforgettable heroine, a charmingly intricate world, and an uncommonly entertaining and gifted young novelist.

Discussion Guide

1. We live with Finny for more than two decades in the book, seeing her at some of her best and worst moments. In what ways would you say Finny changes over the course of the book? In what ways does she stay the same? Do you think she ?grows up? in the course of the novel?

2. Who are your favorite characters in the novel? What did you like about them? What particular scenes or moments in the book made you feel an attachment to them? What traits did you admire or disapprove of in them?

3. Judith is a complicated and controversial figure in the novel. Immediately, when Finny meets her at the Thorndon boarding school, Finny acknowledges her beauty, and also that Judith was ?more like a grown woman than a girl.? Throughout the novel, Finny is aware of Judith?s physicality: her hair, her clothing, her breasts. As you read, what conclusions did you reach about Judith and her beauty? Do you like Judith as a person? Do you feel sympathetic to her? In what ways would you say Finny was correct about Judith being old for her age? In what ways would you say Finny was mistaken? What changes occur in Judith?s character over the course of the novel?

4. The theme of families plays a large role in the book. We see Finny?s difficult relationship with her family in the opening of the book, and the way she creates a kind of substitute family for herself, pieced together from the various people she meets: Mr. Henckel, Poplan, Judith. Would you say that Finny?s feelings about her biological family change over the course of the book? Do you think she becomes more or less understanding of them? Also, do you think her feelings about family in general change? How so? How are her views on family influenced by her experiences with others? Her mother? Sylvan? Earl and Mona? Any other characters?

5. Another big theme in the book is romantic love. Early in the book, thinking of her love for Earl, Finny comes upon the realization that ?this feeling, this endless, inconsolable longing, would forever be a part of her life, a part of what it meant to truly love...in the end she could never say whether it was good or bad.? How would you say that the ideas in this passage play out over the course of the book? Is Finny?s love for Earl a ?good? thing? Or is it more complicated? What do you think the novel?s view of romantic love is? Compare this passage to the passages on love at the end of the novel.

6. Finny often feels misunderstood in the book. She has trouble explaining herself to her parents, but also to her high school principal, Mrs. Barksdale, and to the man who cuts her hair in Paris, and to the men she dates after she moves to Boston. Why do you think she so often feels this frustration about misunderstanding? What do you think the importance of misunderstanding is in the novel? Are there also experiences of feeling understood?

7. Would you say that the book is told from the point of view of an old or young person? Is the language at the beginning of the book different from the language toward the end of the book? Similar? In what ways?

8. How would you characterize the tone of the book? Light? Heavy? How would you say that the tone of the language affects the more emotional scenes in the novel?

9. Do you think the book takes an optimistic or pessimistic view of people?

10. How would you characterize the humor in the book? Is it light-hearted? Dark? What does the humor call attention to? For example, you might look at the scene in the funeral home, when the Haberdashers are exchanging sneezes. Why would the author choose to put a comic scene in the middle of such a tragic period in Finny?s life? Are there other comic scenes that support or contradict your thoughts about this scene?

11. In the first chapter of Book 3, ?Finny Gets a Glimpse into the Lives of Her Friends,? we learn of a number of changes in the lives of all the major characters. Examine how the lives of Carter, Judith, Sylvan, and Finny change over the 15 years that separate Book 2 and Book 3. How would you characterize these changes? What are the attitudes the different characters take toward the ways their lives have gone?

12. Finny?s date with Brad Miller ends in a way she couldn't have expected, and Finny is troubled by her own part in what happened: ?She felt a rush of shame for how she?d acted. Like a horny teenager, she thought. So frivolous. It wasn?t that Finny objected to sex, even casual sex; it was just the fact of getting it in this childish way, all the drinking and pawing at each other, the bribe of a fancy meal.? Why do you think Finny reacts this way? Do you think she?s right? How does it compare to other sex scenes in the book --- with Earl, for instance, or when Finny and Earl chase the thief into the ?Maison des Faintasies? in Paris? Do you think the book takes a certain view of sex?

13. Compare Finny to other books you know about ?growing up.? How is it similar or different? How is a book about a young woman?s coming of age different than a book about a man?s?

14. What do you think about a man writing a book entirely from the point of view of a woman? Is it possible for a writer to make this shift? Does Kramon capture the feeling of being a woman? Does he miss things? What do you think, in general, of fiction writers writing about people who aren?t like them, or events outside of their experience?

Author Bio

Justin Kramon is the author of the novels FINNY (Random House, 2010) and THE PRESERVATIONIST (Pegasus, 2013). A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he has published stories in *Glimmer Train*, *Story Quarterly*, *Boulevard* , *Fence*, *TriQuarterly*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and others. He has received honors from the Michener-Copernicus Society of America, BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES, the Hawthornden International Writers' Fellowship, and the Bogliasco Foundation. His website is www.justinkramon.com.

Critical Praise

"Justin Kramon?s moving and engrossing, **Finny**, is as refreshing as it is unusual: Dickensian in its span and generosity, contemporary in its exuberance and furtive humor, timeless in its assessment of family and friendship, innocence and love, this is a debut novel of exceptional achievement and considerable rewards."

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Publication Date: July 13, 2010
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0812980239
ISBN-13: 9780812980233