***Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda***

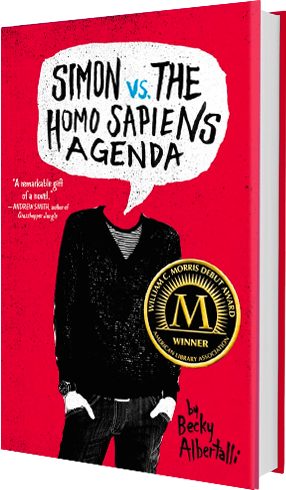
By Becky Albertalli

**Author's website:**

<https://beckyalbertalli.com/>

Interview that she promoted on her website(source of her face picture):

<http://www.fizzygrrl.com/fizzy-fangirling-interview-becky-albertalli/#.VplmWqbMxUQ>



**Biography:**

Becky Albertalli was born and raised in the suburbs of Atlanta called Sandy Springs. She went to college in Connecticut and majored in psychology, then later earned a doctorate in clinical psychology at a grad school in D.C. She started working as a clinical psychologist/therapist, specializing in working with teens. However, she left when her son was born in 2012 and she went on to write *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*.

She stresses that none of her characters or the situations in her book were taken from the lives of her clients, because it was against her ethics and therapist-client confidentiality.

**Summary of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*:**

Simon Spier is your basic highschooler; he's geeky, but cool and secretly gay--his first crush wasn't Emma Watson, it was Daniel Radcliffe. When "Blue", an anonymous junior at his highschool, started a blog, coming out as gay, Simon got into contact with him. They exchange emails in secret and develop a virtual and personal relationship. This happens in secret because Simon isn't comfortable with coming out just yet, not even his closest friends or family know. Then Martin, the class clown, discovers Simon's emails, and blackmails him because Martin is secretly crushing on Simon's friend Abby. Simon is forced to go along with the blackmail or risk being exposed by Martin. So Simon struggles with the dilemma of messing with the love lives of his closest friends in order to protect his secrets vs. letting his secrets come out, and possibly ending his relationship with "Blue".



**Text Complexity:**

New Dale-Chall Readability Index: Grades 7-8

Raw Score: 2.5825

Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 2.5825)

Final Score: 6.2

Lexile Score: HL640L

Age Range: 14 to 17

Atos Book Level: 4.4

Interest Level: Upper Grades (UG 9-12)

The text isn't very advanced and could be picked up easily by younger readers. But the age range is slightly higher because of the subject matter of the book. There are a few scenes in this book which contain alcohol and sex, but the majority of it is good for younger kids.

**Exeter Qualities:**

**3.** Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found much in the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists.

This is a very contemporary young adult book; it has teen romance, coming of age stories, internet relationships, and LGBTQ+ themes. Although the novel doesn't have a female protagonist, it has a non-heterosexual protagonist which is rare in the world of literary canon. The experience that most, if not all young adults would relate to would be the development of Simon and Blue's relationship over the internet. Sure, nobody really emails their crush nowadays, but the sentiment of opening oneself up through messaging on the internet is something many teenagers go through. Also, Simon hiding the secret that he's gay is something a lot of teenagers and adults might experience--how he wants to let people know and who he wants to let know. These two themes represent some of the biggest experiences of young adult readers.

**7.** Themes that allow the possibility of emotional and intellectual growth through engagement with personal issues.

Simon struggles with trusting his friends with his secret. In the beginning of the novel he talks about how he doesn't care if people know he's gay, but he's never made the first move to tell his friends or family. He doesn't tell his friends or family because his friends never talk about serious stuff, and his family always make a big deal out of everything. Simon learns to trust his friends with his serious conversation piece, and that his family is always going to make a big deal out of stuff because they care about him.

***Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story.***

This book would fit in chapters 4 and 6.

Chapter 4 because Simon struggles with real-life problems of coming out and talking it out with his family. A big life choice is revealing his sexual identity with his friends and family.

Chapter 6 because Simon struggles with his own identity, scared of making a change. This chapter also has a big focus on sexual identity and discrimination. Although Simon isn't directly discriminated against, it's the fear that he struggles with in some parts of the book.



**Quotes:**

**1.**

"HE LIKES TO IMAGINE ME fantasizing about sex.

That's something I probably shouldn't have read right before bed. I lie here in the pitch-darkness, reading that particular line on my phone again and again. I'm jittery and awake and completely in knots, all from an email. And I'm hard. So, that's kind of strange. It's really confusing. A good kind of confusing. Blue is normally so careful about what he writes.

He likes to imagine me fantasizing about sex!

I thought I was the only one who had those kinds of thoughts about us."(80).

**Significance:**

Throughout the novel, we only see Simon's perspective. He has secrets that not even his friends and family know. However, Blue has also those same secrets. This isn't a story about one gay highschooler's secret, it's a story about two. This quote reiterates the idea that everyone is a protagonist of their own story. Nobody is going to know exactly what others going through--and those other people are not going to know what everyone else is going through. Blue is falling in love with and opening himself up to Simon, which first confused Simon but both of them are growing as young adults, talking about sex and flirting with your crush.

This quote also exhibits Exeter Quality 3: Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers. There are few literary works that have a focus on online messaging and development of a virtual relationship. However this scene shows an online emailing relationship developing between Blue and Simon. When it comes to dating for teenagers, it's pretty common to message or text every day, especially since nobody has the time or freedom to get into physical contact all the time. So these scenes can really parallel the modern day way of dating, hopefully helping teen readers feel more comfortable with their partner, crush, and friends. People are different, but this can show that sometimes, feelings can be mutual.

**2.**

"It is definitely annoying that straight(and white, for that matter) is the default, and that the only people who have to think about their identity are the ones who don't fit that mold. Straight people really should have to come out, and the more awkward it is, the better. Awkwardness should be a requirement. I guess this is sort of our version of the Homosexual Agenda?"(147).

**Significance:**

Blue is contrasting how straight people don't have to come out like LGBTQ+ people because straight is considered the norm. Coming out is something Simon struggles with a lot throughout the novel, even going as far as helping Martin so he doesn't let Simon's secret out. Simon's and Blue's extreme idea of everyone needing to come out is actually just a thought about people eliminating their own assumptions of other people. It's hard to come out because it's not the norm.

This quote also unintentionally touches on Simon's narrowmindedness; the first and recurring identity that he thinks Blue is, is Cal Price, the white theater kid with blue eyes. So when Blue speaks about straight and white being the default, he brings into question his identity. Is he a smart kid who knows and cares about race relations and perspectives, or is he actually not white? And therefore, he's not Cal Price. The important thing is that Simon doesn't know because he's so caught up in the idea that Cal Price is Blue. He's making the assumption of who Blue is and who Cal Price is.

**3.**

"And sure enough, moments later, Ms. Albright gathers everyone in a circle on the stage. 'So, I'm sorry you guys had to see that...It was beyond disrespectful and inappropriate, and I want you to know that I take this extremely seriously.' She pauses for a moment, and I look at her. And I realize that Ms. Albright is absolutely livid."(191-192).

**Significance:**

Bullying is a bad thing. However, one recurring theme throughout many teenagers' lives are that adults can't be trusted. In Simon's story, he doesn't trust his parents, let alone the teachers/counselors with his secret. And the teachers are only focused on the academic portion of students' lives, so why would they care right? The teenage life everyone has to go through, focuses on gaining critical thinking skills and perhaps rebelling against their parents and other adult figures. There's no doubt that this is important and necessary in order to grow as a person, that doesn't mean teenagers need to keep everything to themselves--sometimes other people can be a valuable aspect and source of help.

We also see how some minor characters view their teachers. Earlier in the chapter, a minor character states that their school's bullying policy is ineffective, mainly because it's almost never enforced, just like the dress code. So when a teacher(Ms. Albright) finally stands up against bullying, it shows the students that teachers do care. This is an important observation to make in everyday school life as well, where students aren't actively talking to the adults/teachers/counselors in their lives if something goes wrong. But it's always good to build the confidence of students to do so, especially if something is really bad.



**Teaching Ideas:**

**1.** Start a blog!

Have students post an informal response to a set of chapters or scenes in the novel. Or go even further, giving students different readings and have them post a response for those readings. Writing in an informal situation can allow teenagers to express themselves in ways that formal essays won't. It'll give people room to be as creative as they want, responding to the plot and characters with different perspectives. They won't have to worry about strict grading, so they'd focus on the creative writing aspect of this assignment instead of the pesky 5-paragraph argument essay with a bunch of quotes and examples.

**2.** Pen-Pal!

Have students pair up randomly and either with email or just plain typing/paper writing, have these two or three students write about the same topic. These topics can come from the book, what happens around school, or what's on the news. They'll be allowed to write creatively, expressing their opinions in an informal manner. But they'll still be able to speak directly with a few people to explore different perspectives of the same situation/topic.

**3.** Creative Writing!

Have students write their own stories with their own characters--but the main character has to have a secret. The students will write about how other people react to this secret and how their relationships will change because of it. This exercise is to help teens realize that assuming things, although maybe unintentionally, can be bad/ignorant.

**Why Should Teens Read this Novel?:**

**1.** Because many teens are LGBTQ+.

It's good to read a novel, and an experience that teens can relate to, especially since there are so many works that never include a big plot point about exploring different sexual identities. There's an uncomfortability with talking about one's sexual identity and books like this might prompt discussion and community building.

**2.** Because many teens aren't LGBTQ+.

People can read from the perspective of a gay highschooler and hopefully understand a little more about what other people are going through, instead of making their own assumptions.

**3.** Because many teens develop their relationships online.

The premise of Simon's and Blue's relationship is that they message each other anonymously online instead of talking in-person. So this is just another contemporary internet-age aspect of the novel that teens can relate to.

**4.** Because a huge theme of this novel is relationships with other people, from family to friends.

Whether or not teens can trust their closest family and friends with their secrets or whether or not teens feel comfortable enough to ask for help. This book has lessons from making assumptions to building healthy relationships.

**5.** Because it's a great read!

