

GLOSSARY

Albert Camus: Mid-century French author. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), he reflects upon the image of *Sisyphus* forever pushing a boulder up a mountain as a punishment for deceitfulness and asks whether suicide is a justifiable response to the absurdity of existence.

Colette: Early 20th-century French novelist and performer who flaunted her Lesbian affairs. Colette's posthumously published autobiography *Earthly Paradise* (1975) openly engages her sexuality.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: American modernist writer known for the hard-partying, jazz-age life he shared with his volatile wife Zelda, and for his novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) about a character whose conspicuous grandeur masks deception and fraud.

Icarus: In Greek myth, a master-craftsman Daedalus and his son Icarus were imprisoned in a labyrinth Daedalus had built. Daedalus fashioned wings from wax to escape, but Icarus, not heeding his father's warning, flew too close to the sun and fell from the sky.

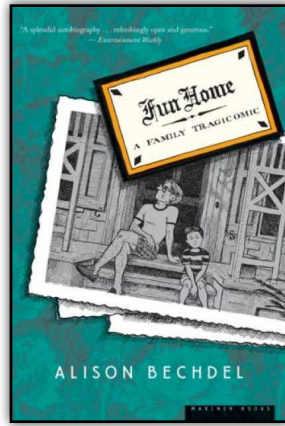
James Joyce: Irish modernist writer and author of *Ulysses* (1922), which relates a day in the life of Leopold Bloom, a hapless father figure to Stephen Daedalus. *Ulysses* is a modern retelling of Homer's epic *Odyssey*, the story of a hero's homecoming to his wife and son.

Kate Millet: American second-wave feminist, activist, and writer. Her autobiography *Flying* (1974) explores sexual identity amidst the sexual politics of her time.

Leo Tolstoy: Russian writer whose novel *Anna Karenina* (1873-77) tells a tale of adultery, censure, and suicide. The novel begins: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

Marcel Proust: French modernist writer who wrote *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27), which is noted for its themes of spontaneously evoked and intricately rendered recollection.

Oscar Wilde: Irish writer of the late Victorian era known for his witty plays. Now a gay icon, he was imprisoned for charges related to his sexuality. In his play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), he coins the term "bunburying" to describe false identities created to escape societal prescriptions.



About the book

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic, Alison Bechdel's award-winning graphic memoir, casts the common issues that all young people face—dealing with parents, forging identity, moving away from home—in the context of her very uncommon life. Bechdel's father, fastidious and private, is an English teacher, an undertaker, and a closeted gay man; her mother, censorious and controlling, is an actor, a musician, and an educator whose hopes and dreams appear closeted as well. Set in small-town Pennsylvania during 70s and 80s amidst emerging conversations about gender and sexuality, the book focuses on Bechdel's family life as she comes to terms with her own sexual identity in the wake of her father's mysterious death.

What happens when we repress important truths about ourselves and about those around us? How does where we come from enable and constrain who we might become? How does culture shape identity? Bechdel invites us to explore these questions through the finely orchestrated images and words of her story and in the shape our own lives—our own stories—take.

Identifying with Fun Home

- ◆ How do you think your relationship with your parents will or has already changed in college? What effect might these changes have on your individual growth?
- ◆ How is Charleston different from where you grew up? In what ways do you think this will affect you in your transition to college?
- ◆ People have always felt compelled to tell their stories, though these stories have most often unfolded in the more private realm of the letter or diary. With the rise of social media, however, we are all prolific autobiographers. What story does your Facebook page or your Twitter feed tell about you?
- ◆ *Fun Home* takes place in the 1970s when cultural norms shaped how certain issues—such as gender roles and sexual identity—were approached. How has today's society and its shifting cultural norms shaped who you are as a young adult?



Engaging Fun Home

- ◆ Over the past few decades, the **graphic novel** has become a genre frequently taught in high schools and colleges. How do you read a graphic novel differently than you would a regular piece of prose? And how does Bechdel work with different levels of word and image to create meaning?
- ◆ **Coming-of-age stories** are often told chronologically: a series of plot elements unfold through cause and effect, leading from the rising action to the climax. Does *Fun Home* share this organizational principle? If not, how is it organized and why do you think Bechdel chose to organize it as such?
- ◆ As the glossary indicates, *Fun Home* frequently refers to other texts, from personal diaries and letters, to excerpts from Fitzgerald and Greek myth. Bechdel, like her father, often frames her identity through other texts. What purpose do these texts serve in Bechdel's memoir? Do they lead closer to the truth or further from it? What forms of media—music, movies, books—would you use to frame your identity?
- ◆ How does the historical backdrop of Bechdel's memoir impact the story she tells? What historical moments would you include as counterpoints to your own coming-of-age story?
- ◆ What Bechdel calls "erotic truth" is crucial to *Fun Home*. What enables Bechdel to embrace her sexual identity while her father represses his? Does it have to do with their differing temperaments, family roles, geographical movement, or gender? What does Bechdel suggest we risk by denying our erotic truth?

About the author

For much of Alison Bechdel's thirty-year career she has skulked on the cultural margins, writing, drawing, and self-syndicating the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*. That generational chronicle ran in over fifty LGBT publications. Bechdel gained wider recognition for her groundbreaking graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. *Fun Home* was a National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist, and was named Best Book of 2006 by *Time*, which called the tightly architected investigation into her closeted bisexual father's suicide "a masterpiece about two people who live in the same house but different worlds, and their mysterious debts to each other." Bechdel recently released a second memoir, *Are You My Mother: A Comic Drama* (2012). [bio adapted from dykestowatchoutfor.com/about]