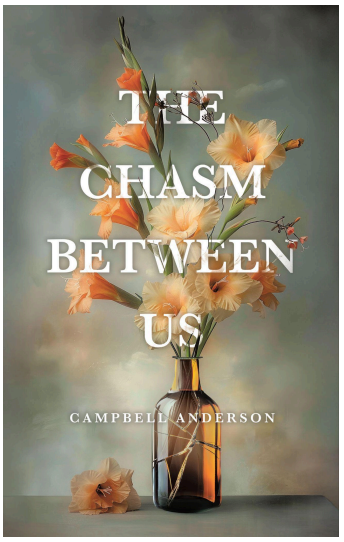
The Chasm Between Us: Theme & Discussion Guide



For Facilitators:

Grief is a key theme in *The Chasm Between Us*. Protagonist Sam Cardiff is no stranger to loss after losing his grandfather, and then his ex-girlfriend, and now his cat. One loss after another. Each produces a similar feeling of shame in Sam, as he feels he is responsible for their deaths.

This theme goes hand in hand with **mental health** which is a foundation for much of the novel. As a result of his shame, Sam degrades himself with self-loathing thoughts and views himself as unworthy of real love. Being with Gracie causes a breakthrough in his mental health, at least for a time. In the second half of the novel, support from Sam's family, his best friend Ryan, and a therapist named Jack help bring Sam back to a stable mental state.

Trauma is an important sidenote in the contemporary romance novel as some of the things Sam has seen and experienced during his adolescent years still haunt him in the book's present setting. Some of the readers may find the scenes distressing, which they should be warned of in advance, such as graphic descriptions of self-inflicted harm.

Content warning: contains mentions of self-harm and mental illness.

Belonging and hope pair together to make another set of themes in *The Chasm Between Us*. Despite Sam's struggles with mental illness and trauma, he is able to move forward in life and set his eyes on the future. He acknowledges his experiences have influenced how he views himself and others around him. Sam finds the courage to let go of past mistakes and hurts, and be optimistic about his future, although anxieties still get to him sometimes.

Sam realises he had an unhealthy view of himself and how he nursed his grief with alcohol. He is brave to accept help and be transparent with his therapist. By the end of the book, Sam is in a better place emotionally and mentally. Not everything is perfect, but they're a lot better than they were.

Relationships are a significant aspect of *The Chasm Between Us*. A few of the main ones are between Sam and his family, between Sam and Gracie, between Sam and Ryan, and between Sam and himself. The last one is split into two halves: Sam's good voice and bad voice, the latter of which manifests itself as a visual and auditory hallucination of a demon named Dev. The beastly demon only wants the worst outcome for Sam, while the echoes of those who support Sam are the ones encouraging him toward a right relationship with himself and his past.

Towards the end of the novel, Sam becomes curious about **Christianity** and starts going to church with Ryan. This is after going through the deepest depths of his mental health struggles, a start towards recovery, victory over Dev, and exposure to the Christian values and morals Gracie demonstrated. *The Chasm Between Us* isn't explicitly a Christian romance, though it carries elements of the subgenre.

Post-Completion Discussion Questions

Grief and Trauma:

What does loss and grief feel like to you?

Is grief typically managed better alone or with the support of trusted family and friends?

How does Sam's trauma shape his experience of grief?

Why can Sam relate to and comfort Gracie, and is there something useful about shared grief?

Discuss the unhealthy ways Sam manages his grief compared to the better coping strategies he eventually discovers. Give references from the novel to support your answer.

Do you think Sam is an accurate representation of a young person trying to move forward from the past?

How does shame and a self-loathing view of oneself distort how we remember the past and look to the future?

What does Sam's experience of grief teach him about life and being human?

Hope and Recovery:

What does hope feel like to you?

Do you think hope is accurately portrayed in *The Chasm Between Us*?

What factors allow Sam to heal throughout *The Chasm Between Us*?

Discuss Sam's legalistic belief that he has to prove himself worthy of love from family and friends, and how that changes throughout the novel.

Is recovery typically a linear process or does it have non-linear ups and downs?

Do you believe a person can live a full and happy life after severe trauma?

How does the epilogue echo hope for Sam and readers?

Love and Relationships:

What are some moments that portray love in *The Chasm Between Us*?

What scenes do you feel spoke to the theme of connection, and why?

Describe how Sam behaves while connecting with Gracie compared to with Ryan. Give references from the novel to support your answer.

How do Sam's past experiences of romantic relationships influence his expectations or feelings about dating Gracie?

Do you believe hurdles in a relationship make bonds stronger during and after overcoming them?

Does Sam coming to love Gracie make it easier for him to accept love in return?

Supernatural:

Do you think Dev was a hallucination or a real demon?

What do you make of the final interaction between Sam and Gracie in the dream state?

How does Sam's schizophrenia present complexities to discern the supernatural from his hallucinations?

Do you think Sam's encounter with Grandpa Terry while fighting Dev was supernatural or a response created by his brain under pressure?

Sam:

How does Sam at the beginning of the novel compare with Sam at the end of the novel, and what changes do you notice in him as the narrative progresses?

How does Sam think of himself in accordance with his past, and how does he appear to others? Give references from Sam's journey to support your answer.

How does Gracie and Dev each have their impacts on Sam's life?

What really drives Sam's ambitions and goals, and what gets in the way?

Do you think Sam is a relatable or realistic character? Why or why not?

What does Sam think of Gracie the closer he gets to her?

How does Sam view letting go of the past and how does he feel looking towards the future?

Gracie:

In what ways does Gracie support Sam?

In what ways can Gracie relate to Sam's struggles?

Why do you think Gracie has forgiven Marco for his sexual assault against her?

What do you think Gracie sees in Sam that allows her to trust him?

How does Gracie behave before Sam pushed her over the edge emotionally, compared to afterwards?

How does Gracie encourage Sam that life is worth living to the fullest?

Ryan:

What kind of friend is Ryan towards Sam, and what makes him significant in Sam's life?

What is Ryan's worldview, and how does this influence his behaviour and decisions throughout the novel?

What does Ryan's character reveal about human connection and support during times of distress?

Why does Ryan lose his temper with Sam, and what leads him to reconcile with Sam?

How does Ryan process grief differently from Sam grieves, and what does this say about the individual nature of grief?

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