

JANE ST ANTHONY

*Whatever*

**NORMAL**

**IS**



# A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *WHATEVER NORMAL IS*

by Jane St. Anthony

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“Jane St. Anthony keenly captures the essence of coming of age: that irreversible moment of discovery that the world is much greater and deeper than you have imagined—and that other people’s lives are as big as your own.”

—JANE O’REILLY, author of *The Secret of Goldenrod*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane St. Anthony is author of *The Summer Sherman Loved Me*, *Grace Above All*, and *Isabelle Day Refuses to Die of a Broken Heart*, which was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award and won the Midwest Booksellers Choice Award for Young Adult and Middle Grade. She lives in Minneapolis and works with young writers.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

After three years of high school, Margaret still isn’t any closer to what she wants: to sing and dance on Broadway, to be a model like Twiggy, to be madly in love with someone other than Paul McCartney. It’s not much to ask, but with her friends Grace and Isabelle she’s willing to adjust her goals for the summer to a job, a car, and a boyfriend.

When Grace gets a job downtown at the Emerald Cafe, where Teddy, a dreamy college kid, tends the meat buffet, it looks like she, at least, is almost halfway there—until Teddy asks for Margaret’s phone number. “Normal” might not be all it’s cracked up to be (high school graduation, marriage, and

housewifery, really?), but as Teddy complicates the girls' friendship, it slowly becomes apparent that "normal" might mean something different, and infinitely trickier, to him. As the old friends, with adulthood looming, navigate the newly confusing territory of love and sexuality and identity, everything they thought they knew is suddenly, frighteningly thrown into question—and they discover that between the dream of stardom and the certainty of housekeeping there's a vast unsuspected world of peril and possibility.

With all the tenderness, heartache, and humor of her earlier novels about Margaret, Grace, and Isabelle, in *Whatever Normal Is* Jane St. Anthony takes the friends, and her readers, to a place beyond normal—to a future as satisfying as it is promising.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Margaret, Grace, and Isabelle are high school juniors when Grace decides that they could be happier by achieving three goals: a job, a car, and a boyfriend. Is this realistic? If you had to choose three new goals, what would they be?
2. Margaret and Grace have lived in their respective houses since infancy. Isabelle and her mother moved into the duplex where they live when Isabelle began eighth grade. Is that stability—especially for Margaret and Grace—typical of today? Have you ever lost a friend because she or he moved? Or because you did?
3. What do you think of Grace's reaction when she finds out that Teddy is interested in Margaret? Should Margaret have told Grace immediately about Teddy's phone call?
4. Margaret imagines herself singing on Broadway—as well as other dreams that she hasn't pursued. Are there things that you would love to do but are reluctant to try—for fear of failing?
5. Isabelle is besotted with Little Teddy, her puppy, from the moment she lays eyes on him. Have you ever had a pet that brightens your life? Or one who did the opposite?

6. Margaret wants to play by the rules but sometimes skirts them. Grace is outspoken and a bit of a hot head. Isabelle attempts to be a peacemaker. If you had to choose one of the girls as a friend, which one would it be?
7. Margaret and Isabelle wear school uniforms in high school. Would you choose to wear a uniform or not? Why?
8. Isabelle's landlady, Miss Flora, adores Isabelle and her friends. Do you know anyone who unconditionally loves and supports a child or teenager—but isn't related? How did that relationship develop?
9. Margaret's parents worry about who Teddy is—before they meet him. Should they have trusted Margaret to make her own decisions about who she spends her time with? Or not?
10. Is Teddy being dishonest with Margaret when he attempts to have a “normal” boyfriend-girlfriend relationship with her?
11. The story is set in a time when many middle-class families had one car. The three girls walk, bike or take the bus to their destinations. Do you think they are limited in their activities because of this?
12. What does Teddy mean when he tells Margaret, “You're perfect”?
13. Given their differences, do the three girls have a bond that will last into adulthood?
14. How do you feel about Teddy at the book's end? Did he “use” Margaret? Will he and Margaret remain friends?
15. Is it possible to define “normal” in a relationship? Is “normal” something that is established? Or fluid?

**ALSO BY  
JANE  
ST. ANTHONY:**

