North Vancouver City Library

Normal People by Sally Rooney

CITY LIBRARY BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE

About the book

Connell Waldron is one of the most popular boys in his small-town high school--he is a star of the football team, an excellent student, and never wanting for attention from girls. The one thing he doesn't have is money. Marianne Sheridan, a classmate of Connell's, has the opposite problem. Marianne is plain-looking, odd, and stubborn, and while her family is well-off, she has no friends to speak of. There is, however, a deep and undeniable connection between the two teenagers, one that develops into a secret relationship.

Throughout their young adult years, Marianne and Connell circle each other, falling in and out of romance but never straying far from where they started. And as Marianne experiments with an increasingly dangerous string of boyfriends, Connell must decide how far he is willing to go to save his oldest friend.

About the author

Sally Rooney is the author of the novels *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People*. She was the winner of the Sunday Times/Peters Fraser + Dunlop Young Writer of the Year Award in 2017. She was nominated for an Emmy for her work on the television adaptation of Normal People, which was broadcast on CBC Gem in 2020.

Discussion questions

1. Did you feel critical of the way that Connell treated Marianne when they were at secondary school together? Did you sympathize with his feelings of self-consciousness? Does his character become less concerned by the thoughts of others as he grows older?

2. Why do you think Connell is sometimes unnerved by the intense and intimate connection he has with Marianne?

3. How does Marianne's family influence her opinion of herself and affect her relationships with other people? How does Connell's upbringing compare and contrast to Marianne's?

4. How does the shift in power dynamic at Trinity College change Connell and Marianne's relationship? How do class dynamics affect them?

5. Near the midpoint of the novel, Connell and Marianne have a serious miscommunication over moving in together. Do you think their relationship would have turned out differently if they were able to communicate better? Why or why not?

6. How do Connell and Marianne change over the course of the novel? How does their relationship evolve throughout the novel?

7. Love is a theme throughout the novel. Do you think there's something special about first love? Is there anything special about Connell and Marianne's connection? What would it be?

8. Marianne sees herself as intrinsically damaged, unlovable and incapable of being a "normal" person. After reading the novel, do you think that Connell and Marianne are any more or less "normal" than other people? What does it mean to be a "normal" person? Do they exist?

9. What did you think of the ending of the novel? Marianne says "He brought her goodness like a gift and now it belongs to her. Meanwhile his life opens out before him in all directions at once. They've done a lot of good for each other. Really, she thinks, really. People can really change one another" (p. 273). Do you think Marianne's statement about her and Connell's relationship is true?

10. Did you enjoy *Normal People*? Would you read another novel by Sally Rooney? Would you watch the TV adaptation (from 2020, starring Daisy Edgar-Jones and Paul Mescal)? If you have, how does it compare?