

Reader's Guide  
For  
*My So-Called Family*  
by  
Courtney Sheinmel  
A Debut Middle Grade Novel

About the Book

*What does it mean to be related to someone anyway?*

Leah Hoffman-Ross just moved to Riverdale, New York, and she wants her new friends to think she's a typical thirteen-year-old. But Leah has a secret: she doesn't have a father, she has a donor. Before Leah was born, her mother went to Lyon's Reproductive Services and picked Donor 730. Now Leah has a stepfather and a little brother, and her mom thinks they should be all the family that Leah needs. But when she finds a link on the Internet to the Lyon's Sibling Registry, Leah knows she has to see if she has any half-siblings. And when she discovers that one of the other kids from Donor 730 is a girl her age, Leah will do anything to meet her—even if she has to hide it from everybody else. *My So-Called Family* follows Leah as she negotiates life at a new school, grapples with being different, and discovers what it means to be a family.

About the Author

Courtney Sheinmel grew up in California and New York and has always loved to write. She graduated with honors from Barnard College, part of Columbia University, and attended Fordham University School of Law. A volunteer for the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation since she was thirteen years old, Courtney helped found the organization's Young Professionals Committee. *My So-Called Family* is her first book. She is also the author of *Sincerely*, *Sophie/Sincerely*, *Katie*, which will be published by Simon & Schuster in 2009. Courtney lives, works and writes in New York City.

Discussion Questions

1. Leah says she doesn't have a father. Do you agree with her? Do you think her donor is her father, or is Simon?
2. Leah says that moving to New York is a chance to be normal. Did she really have that chance? Have you ever wanted to move somewhere new for a similar reason?
3. Leah's siblings (Charlie, Samantha, etc.) are actually her half-siblings. Do you think this is how Leah thinks of them? What are the different ways to be a sibling? What do you think makes someone a sister or brother?
4. Avery tells Leah that she runs away. Can you think of some more examples when Leah runs away instead of dealing with her problems? Do you think that is why Leah wanted to move to New York?

5. How does Leah's relationship with her mother change? What do you think happens to Leah and her mother after the book ends?

Activity

In the book, Charlie has to interview his family members and make a family tree. His sister, Leah, says things like that would be easier for Charlie. But as Leah learns by the end of the book, families come in all shapes and sizes. Design your own family tree, and include your extended family. Who would you put on it? Godparents, friends who feel like family? What are the things that make your family unique and special? Interview your classmates to see who the people on their extended family tree would be and why.