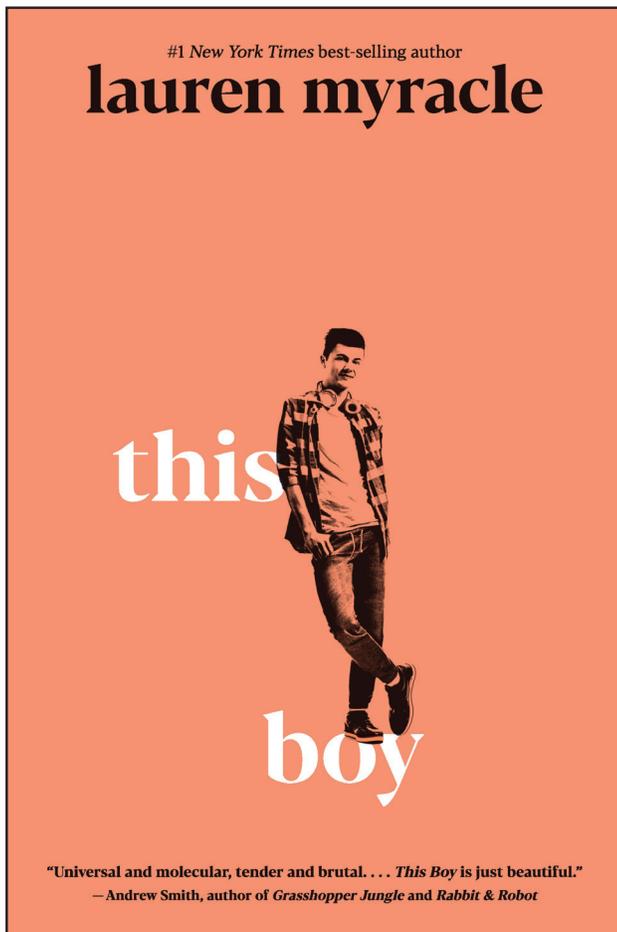


# this boy

## by lauren miracle



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Also available as an e-book and in audio

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Paul Walden is not an alpha lobster, the hypermasculine crustacean king who intimidates the other male lobsters, beds all the lady lobsters, and “wins” at life. At least not according to the ego-bursting feedback he’s given in his freshman seminar. But Paul finds a funny, faithful friend in Roby Smalls, and maybe—oh god, please—he’s beginning to catch the interest of smart, beautiful Natalia Gutierrez. Cruising through high school as a sauced-out, rap-loving beta lobster suits Paul fine, and if life ever gets him down? Smoke a little weed, crunch a few pills . . . it’s all good.

But in the treacherous currents of teenage culture, it’s easy to get pulled under. With perfect frankness, Lauren Myracle lays bare the life of one boy as he navigates friendship, love, loss, and addiction. It’s life at its most ordinary and most unforgettable.

Lauren Myracle brings her signature frank, funny, and insightful writing to this novel of a teenage boy’s coming-of-age.

### Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Paul and how he changes during the story's four years. What are the most important events of those years, and how does he respond to those events? What are some of the mistakes that he makes? What does he learn along the way?
2. Why do you think the author chose to spread the book over four years? What are the advantages of a long time span for this story? What difference would it make if the book covered only senior year? Discuss the title and the opening quote: "There is a monster at the end of this book."
3. Paul's relationship with his mother is central to his life. What is his mother like? How does Paul feel about her? How does their relationship change? Discuss the role of Paul's father in his life, past and present, and how Paul feels about him.
4. How does Paul meet Roby? What is significant about their first meeting, which Paul describes in the opening pages? How does that scene foreshadow the rest of the story and set the tone for it?
5. Summarize the scene in the classroom when Stevie reports on lobsters. What does he say about male lobsters? How does he apply it to teenage boys? How do Roby and Gertrude respond? Why doesn't Paul stick up for Roby?
6. The lobster discussion brings up the topic of males and sex, which continues throughout the novel. What is Paul's attitude toward girls and sex? What about pornography? Does his attitude change? How is he influenced by his mother?
7. Describe Roby and his friendship with Paul. What do they do together? Why do they like each other? Discuss their similarities and differences. How do they influence each other?
8. Natalia becomes increasingly important to Paul and Roby during their sophomore year. What is she like? Why does Roby already know her? How does he feel about her? How does Paul feel about her during sophomore year?
9. At the beginning of junior year, Paul and Natalia become romantically involved. How does it start? Describe their growing intimacy, including the role sex plays in their relationship. Natalia says to Paul, "Odds are your relationship with Roby's going to last longer than your relationship with me" (page 142). Why does she say that? How does Paul react?
10. After Paul and Natalia start their romance, why does Paul delay telling Roby about it? How does the romance come between them? How does Roby handle it when Paul finally tells him? What does that show about Roby and about their friendship?
11. Even once Paul has apologized and Roby has accepted the apology, the relationship between Paul and Natalia affects Paul's friendship with Roby. Describe what happens the night of the party in chapter twenty-five. Where is Natalia? What would she like Paul to be doing? Why does he choose to stay with Roby? Discuss what makes the situation a "champagne problem"—or at least a "Pabst Blue Ribbon problem" (page 185).
12. Paul is more drawn to drugs than Roby or Natalia is. What are some of the drugs he tries? What does he continue to use? What does he like about using drugs? What role does Monty have in Paul's drug use? Where else does Paul get drugs?
13. Describe Paul's reaction to Roby's death and why he says "the seesaw fell out of balance" (page 215). How does he use drugs to deal with Roby's death? What effect does the drug use have on his relationships with his mother and Natalia? How does the loss of Roby affect his drug use?



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14. Discuss this passage from Paul's thoughts after Roby's death: "When I was with him, I knew who I was. I was Roby's best friend, and he was mine, and we loved each other and had fun together and were heroes together. Who was I without him?" (page 220).
15. Later, Paul remembers an incident freshman year and thinks, "If Roby were here, we could laugh about that night. After that, we could laugh about me and the mess I've made of my life. Although if Roby were here, would I be in this mess? I wouldn't, there's no way I would, and that said so much about Roby—and so much about me" (page 224). What does it say about each of them?
16. How does Paul's mother try to help him quit using drugs? What is the plan? Why doesn't it work? How do Paul's grandparents intervene? What is the process of withdrawal like for Paul? Why does he persist the second time, even though it's so difficult?
17. Throughout high school, Paul has mood swings. After the trip to Sliding Rock, he falls into one of his "melancholy moods," which he describes on page 64. Discuss his description of a melancholy mood. Later, on a trip to visit his grandparents, he "slipped into loneliness" (page 129). What is that like? Do you think he gets melancholy more often than most people? How important are these feelings in his life?
18. In the last chapter, when he's talking to Natalia, Paul jokingly says he might buy a diamond watch, adding, "Boy's gotta have his swag" (page 269). Where else in the book does he show an interest in what he calls swag? How are fashion and looking good important to him? What does the joke show about him at this point?
19. At the very end of the book, Paul sits outside wearing his Bathing Ape bucket hat. What is the significance of the hat? Why is it important to him to hear his mother sing? How do the last few paragraphs of the novel make you feel about Paul and his future?



Photo by Randy Bartels

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Myracle is the best-selling author of many novels for middle-grade and young adult readers, including the Internet Girls series (*ttyl*; *ttfn*; *l8r*, *g8r*; and *yolo*), the Winnie Years series, the Wishing Day trilogy, and others. She lives with her family in Fort Collins, Colorado.

These questions were prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who now gives professional development workshops for educators about new books for young people. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.

