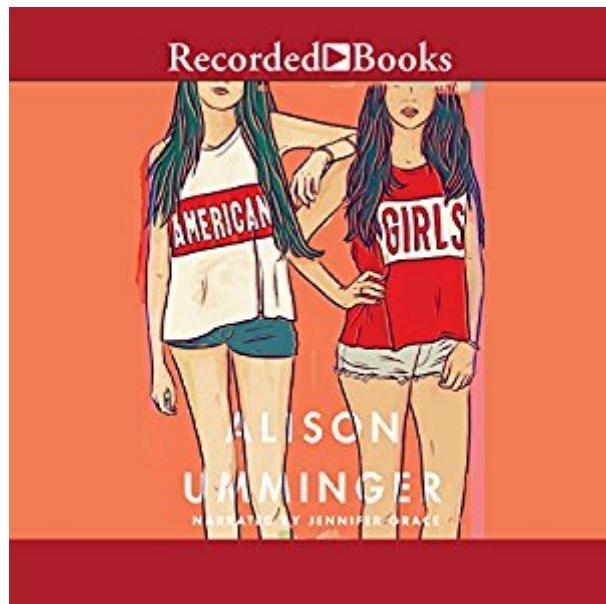


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# American Girls



## **Synopsis**

She was looking for a place to land. Anna is a 15-year-old girl slouching toward adulthood, and she's had it with her life at home. So Anna "borrows" her stepmom's credit card and runs away to Los Angeles, where her half sister takes her in. But LA isn't quite the glamorous escape Anna had imagined. As Anna spends her days on TV and movie sets, she engrosses herself in a project researching the murderous Manson girls - and although the violence in her own life isn't the kind that leaves physical scars, she begins to notice the parallels between herself and the lost girls of LA and of America, past and present. In Anna's singular voice, we glimpse not only a picture of life on the B-list in LA but also a clear-eyed reflection on being young, vulnerable, lost, and female in America - in short, on the B-list of life. Alison Umminger writes about girls, sex, violence, and which people society deems worthy of caring about and which ones it doesn't in a way not often seen in YA fiction.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I'm an old guy--75--retired professor of English, who actually remembers the Manson Helter-Skelter stuff when it was permeating the culture, but if you want to read this excellent book as a primer on Mansonism you will miss the point. I read it nonstop during an eight-hour car trip from having seen my family (including my daughter, of course), and the portrait of this Anna rang completely true to me. Well, true in the way Holden Caulfield rings true to me . . . Ms. Umminger's book is loaded with threads of family and American culture, and she is an author who knows how not to leave them lying

around loose. The characters are memorable, the family relationships instantly recognizable, and the prose . . . well, as my professional academic work was primarily in contemporary poetry, I must say the prose is nowhere "prosaic." Smart, often funny, but always just right. I said I read it nonstop, didn't I? . . .

American Girls is a book that leaves the reader wrestling with and thinking about several challenging ideas. Anna, the main character, is complex and sometimes not even likable, but it is fascinating to watch her grapple with questions of why the Manson girls and their looks get more attention than the victims and how to love the maddeningly imperfect people in your life. Umminger is constantly forcing Anna (and the reader) to look at the people she encounters, whether it's members of the Hollywood B-club, the Manson girls, her family, LA, or herself and somehow make sense of all their internal and external contradictions. The book is definitely edgy and dark at times - the nature of the subject matter is not always easy (everything from the Manson murders to her sister's dysfunction), but it's not sensationalized - it is there to be examined in all its tragedy and complexity. The author's writing style provided several opportunities to stop and just appreciate how she had turned a phrase, and there were times that I had to stop reading To work through my own thoughts and feelings mom an incredibly messy question about people or culture that Anna falls into almost stumblingly and is able to ask but not really answer. A book that will be appreciated best by older teens and adults who enjoy YA literature.

Having read some of the lower ratings here, these are my thoughts:Umminger assumes intelligence in her reader - that we make the connections that are deeper than a 15 year old mind could understand, that we know about Manson. This was not a book about Manson or the girls; it was about the effect of the murders - both how much and how little. It made the point that we live in a world so dark that even something so horrific had a minimal impact in the long run. That we don't live in a world much different than the one that facilitated that cult. It's a book about choices and their outcomes and how we live with or live up to the consequences. How we can see a little into our future or a parallel and stop ourselves from becoming something we can't live with.I loved Anna. Her voice was so genuinely a 15 year old. All the characters read very real, for better or worse. As I said on Twitter, it read like water - I just glided through the story and was completely pulled along.

It took some fits and starts, thanks to an overly busy summer, but I finally finished this fantastic first novel. It manages to be profoundly insightful about the macro (America, the 60s, L.A., pop culture)

and the micro (one teenage girl's life, standing in for our own lives in many ways) all at once. Plus, it's really funny and entertaining. I loved it.

This is such a fabulous exploration of a teenage adventure. The protagonist's voice is witty, self-aware, and just hilarious. Who hasn't wanted to run away from their crazy mom and steps and fly to LA? The ultimate teenage fantasy, but it's also a brilliant and insightful cultural critique about femininity, about criminality (the Mansons), and about Hollywood culture. Umminger is whip-smart, based on her characters, and I laughed out loud a lot more than I anticipated. Great fun, great read.

At times I felt like I could really believe and relate to Anna's voice as a teenage character, and at other times I felt she was more cynical, intelligent, and culturally aware than any other fifteen year old I have ever met. This was a smart book and was very well written. It tied together lots of ideas and threads neatly. I truly loved the last sentence, and I also appreciated that material for a book club is referenced as available online.

What a fantastic read! This book is a lovely combination of exploratory young adult fiction and deep Americana. Highly recommend.

While I believe this book was written for a YA audience, it is so sophisticated a moving that I believe all ages of readers can relate. There's a brilliance to Umminger's writing that swept me off my feet.

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