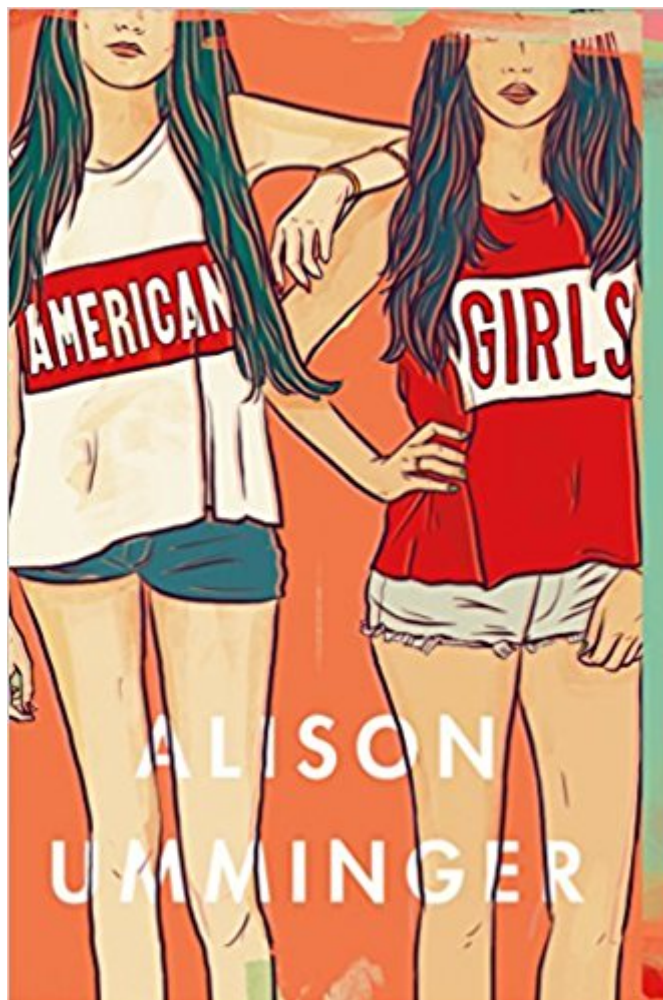


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# American Girls: A Novel



## Synopsis

Everyone is talking about *American Girls*! An ALA Booklist Top 10 First Novel A Kirkus Best Book of the Year A Barnes & Noble Best YA Book of the Year A Chicago Public Library Best of the Best of 2016 A Los Angeles Public Library Best Book of the Year 2016 A Bustle Best YA Book of the Year Anna is a fifteen-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, violence, and which people society deems worthy of caring about, which ones it doesn't, in a way not often seen in YA fiction. "Messy, honest, and unflinchingly real. I can't get this book out of my head. I don't want to get this book out of my head." —Becky Albertalli, author of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* "An extraordinary book that shines a light on parts of the American experience we often overlook. Rich, complex, emotionally nuanced, wise, and layered." —Jeff Zentner, author of *The Serpent King* "Funny, sad, often surprising, and just damned authentic." —Emily M. Danforth, author of *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* "A razor-sharp commentary on our culture, observed with keen wit from the perspective of one honest and complex American girl." —Kirkus, starred review "Bittersweet and true, Anna's journey to self-discovery is one that should be widely read." —ALA Booklist, starred review "Reveals richly complicated relationships among mothers, daughters, and sisters." —Publishers Weekly, starred review

## Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Flatiron Books; Reprint edition (June 20, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1250133823

ISBN-13: 978-1250133823

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 46 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #118,708 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Performing Arts > Film](#) #18 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Family > Alternative Family](#) #31 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Runaways](#)

## Customer Reviews

Gr 8 Up **A** meandering look at a murderous time in America's history and how the behavior of the young girls who carried out those atrocious crimes compares to the emotional viciousness of teenage girls of today. Umminger's novel offers a glimpse into the life of Anna as she in turn explores the lives of serial killers, the infamous Manson Girls. Anna is 14 and feels like a castaway in her own life; her mom has started a new life with a new family she doesn't fit in with, her dad has a new girlfriend as well, and her best friend may not be the greatest influence. Running away to stay with her glamorous sister in California seems like her best escape route, but life in L.A. brings problems and dangers of its own. To earn her plane fare back, Anna agrees to do film research on Charles Manson's female followers, who committed a series of murders in 1969, and learns that the line between good and evil is often less defined than it may at first seem. This is an introspective account of how deeply the invisible scars of familial emotional abuse can run and how easily they can wreak havoc on the lives of everyone close by. **VERDICT** Recommended for fans of realistic fiction who have a morbidly curious streak running through them but who may not be quite ready for the truly "hard" stuff yet. **Emily Grace Le May**, Mt. Pleasant Library - Providence Community Library, RI --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

An ALA Booklist Top 10 First Novel A Kirkus Best Book of the Year A Barnes & Noble Best YA Book of the Year A Chicago Public Library Best of the Best of 2016 A Bustle Best YA Book of the Year "Two new novels explore the story of the Manson murders by shoving the ringleader to the side and putting the girls (and girlhood itself) at the center of the narrative: The much-discussed *The Girls* by Emma Cline, and the less-analyzed, though no less worthy, *American Girls* by Alison Umminger. Cline and Umminger take a crime that seems impossible to understand, and show the girls behind it being fueled by feelings that are all too familiar." **The Atlantic** "Messy, honest, and unflinchingly real. I can't get this book out of my head. I don't want to get this book out

of my head." —Becky Albertalli, author of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* "I read *American Girls* in parallel with Emma Cline's *The Girls* and it provided a masterful one-two punch. An extraordinary book, with empathy and heart to spare." —Jeff Zentner, author of *The Serpent King* "Alison Umminger doesn't pull any punches in her debut: Funny, sad, often surprising, and just damned authentic. I know I won't be the only one who didn't want Anna's glittery-dark Hollywood summer to end." —Emily M. Danforth, author of *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* "A razor-sharp commentary on our culture, observed with keen wit from the perspective of one honest and complex American girl. An insightful, original take on the coming-of-age story." —Kirkus, starred review "Bittersweet and true, Anna's journey to self-discovery is one that should be widely read." —ALA Booklist, starred review "Reveals richly complicated relationships among mothers, daughters, and sisters." —Publishers Weekly, starred review

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 and 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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