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# *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*

by

**Ann Brashares**

2001



**MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle**

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This is the fictional story of the intense and loving friendship among four teenage girls. They remain connected during their first summer apart through a connection with a pair of used jeans that seem to magically fit each of them perfectly, though their bodies are different. The pants are sent around the world during the summer to each of the girls. They each experience love, loss, and all the other elements of the teenage experience.

## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

Present day Suburban Washington, D.C., specifically Georgetown and Bethesda (including such places as Wallman's Pharmacy and the 7-Eleven); Baja, California; Oia, Greece; and Charleston, South Carolina

### LIST OF CHARACTERS

#### Major Characters

**The Pants** - Although an inanimate object, the pair of blue jeans that becomes so magical to the four girls can be called a character. Many of their choices and the events that impact them came about only because of the confidence that the Pants brought them.

**Carmen** - She is the narrator for the opening and closing chapters of the novel and one of the members of the Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants. She is overly sensitive about her dad's move to South Carolina and her Puerto Rican heritage. She is the one who purchases the Pants.

**Tibby** - She is the only one of the four girls to remain at home for the summer. She works at Wallman's Pharmacy and becomes friends with Bailey, a twelve year old with leukemia.

**Bridget** - She is the athletic one of the group and one of the prettiest. She goes to soccer camp where she loses her virginity and finds herself unable to deal with her choices.....

Additional characters are outlined in the complete study guide.

### CONFLICT

#### Protagonists

The Protagonists are Carmen, Tibby, Bridget, and Lena as well as the magical Traveling Pants, which impact them so positively. They are a group who are forever linked, first because they were.....

#### Antagonist

Many of the minor characters at one time or another are subtle antagonists, but their impact is not even worth mentioning when we think of the antagonist called one's inner self. The four girls find.....

#### Climax

The climax is different for each girl. For Carmen, it occurs when she makes the mature decision to attend her father's wedding. For Lena, it occurs when she finds the courage to apologize to .....

#### Outcome

Carmen is able to compromise with her father and his new family and by doing so, she truly becomes a family member. Lena and Kostos vocalize the feelings they have for each other and then, she heads to.....

### SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

This novel relates the story of four young girls, friends since their births, who make a pact on a pair of magical blue jeans to stay friends forever even though they are parting from each for the first time the summer after their sophomore year. They each have a variety of adventures both wearing the Pants and without them, and each one

learns valuable lessons about the pleasures and the sorrows of life. Like a bildungsroman, which is a tale relating a young man coming of age, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* reveals the life passages that young women experience as they come of age as well.

## THEMES

The most important theme of the novel is **friendship, loyalty and love for each other**. In spite of their youth, these four girls recognize the value of the relationship they have had with each other all their lives. The pact they make on the Traveling Pants may seem superficial and even a bit childish, but it is.....

Additional themes are outlined in the complete study guide.

## MOOD

This story is filled with sadness, despair, fear, and loneliness just as life is full of these emotions. However,.....

## Ann Brashares - BIOGRAPHY

Ann was born in Chevy Chase, Maryland and is the sister to three brothers. She went to a Quaker School called Sidwell Friends School. She now lives in New York City and proclaims that she is “a lover of both travel and pants.” She is married and has three children and still has a pair of jeans from the tenth grade. However, they are not magical and they don’t fit anymore! She has followed *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, her first novel, with three sequels relating the adventures of the Pants over the next three summers of the four girls.

She studied Philosophy at Barnard College, part of Columbia University in New York City. Expecting to continue studying philosophy in graduate school, Ann took a year off after college to work as an editor, hoping to save money for school. Loving her job, she never went to graduate school, and.....

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES

Note: We have inserted chapter numbers into this study guide for ease of use. They do not correspond to the actual text, which uses quotations as the title of each chapter.

## PROLOGUE “Not All Who Wander Are Lost.” - J. R. R. Tolkien

### Summary

The prologue is a narrative by Carmen, the Puerto Rican girl who first found the blue jeans in a thrift shop. She tells the reader all about the pants from the perspective of their magic. They came to the girls through what Carmen calls a painful life transition and that is what becomes *The Way of the Pants*. Carmen only bought them, because she was tagging along with her friend Lena and her mother, and Mrs. Kaligaris hated second hand shops. They were only \$3.49 including tax, and she didn’t even try them on. She really wasn’t serious about owning them, because “her butt had specific requirements for pants.” When she got home, she put the pants in the back of her closet and forgot about them.

On the afternoon before the girls were all going their separate ways for the summer, the pants came out again. Carmen was going to South Carolina to hang out with her dad; Lena was spending two months in Greece with her grandparents; Bridget was flying off to soccer camp in Baja, California; and Tibby was staying home. This would be the first summer this very close group of friends would be apart, and it seemed to give them all a shaky, strange feeling. Their lives had been marked by the summers they had spent together, when their lives joined completely. They had started out together even before they were born. Their mothers had met in a class of aerobics for pregnant women, and the four girls were born within a few weeks of each other at the end of the summer. The mothers were called the September Group, and they began hanging out after class. This lasted until the girls were about three when the mothers began to drift apart, and the friendship began to be about their daughters rather than them. So the girls became the Septembers, and even though they were all different types, they became committed to each other.

Why? Because they loved each other, and they were nice to each other, and that was rare. Carmen's mother told her it wouldn't stay that way, but the girls believed it would. The pants became their talisman upon which they made a promise to always stick together, and when they went out into the world with all its challenges, they promised to find a way to make it work.

## Notes

The purpose of the Prologue is to introduce the reader to the Septembers – four young girls who have been friends since they were in their mother's wombs and who now must face their first summer apart. It prepares the reader for their character types and their commitment to each other. It sets up the "magic" of the traveling pants and how each of them wears them and learns something very valuable about what Carmen calls "painful life transitions."

## CHAPTER 1 - "Luck Never Gives: It Only Lends" - Ancient Chinese Proverb

### Summary

The pants came out at Carmen's house where all the girls had met the afternoon before they were all to leave. Tibby was the most upset about everyone going their separate ways. They all tried to help her adjust to the idea by giving pep talks and even lecturing her not to wallow in her sorrow. Tibby saw the pants on top of Carmen's clothes and told her to give them to her as a sign of unconditional love. Carmen had been planning to throw them away anyway and saw it as a way to comfort Tibby whose only "adventure" for the summer would be a job at Wallman's Drugstore. So, Tibby was the first to try on the pants which the others thought will never fit her, because her build was so different than Carmen's. Lo and behold, the pants fit her like a glove and made her finally look like a girl after wearing oversized clothes all the time. Tibby, however, was unsure and insisted that the other girls try on the pants as well. They looked fabulous on Lena also, which wasn't difficult given that Lena was a very attractive, nicely built young lady. Tibby thought the pants were transforming. Then, Bridget tried them on and again, the pants were perfect. Finally, even though they thought it would be impossible for them to look good on Carmen's bigger behind, she, too, tried them on. The other girls were speechless at how good she looked and labeled her a supermodel. Carmen held her breath and looked in the mirror again and pronounced what they were all thinking: "These are magic pants!"

Bridget then proposed that this discovery warranted a trip to Gilda's. Gilda's was the now empty and abandoned gym where their mothers had met in the aerobics class, and sometimes they gathered food and blankets and other accessories and spent time there together. They had broken into the place at least once a year for the last three years, and it had become their special spot to be together and help each other resolve their problems. They would follow the picture of their four moms, pregnant and posing on the indented floorboards back in the 80's, by sitting in approximately the same spots. They lit some candles and placed the pants on a blanket in the middle of their circle. Bridget then ceremonially pronounced that the Pants belonged to all of them and that they would travel to all these places the four of them were going as a way to keep them together when they were apart. They all took the "Vow of the Traveling Pants" which meant they promised to take the love between them wherever they went. Then, they wrote down the rules for wearing them and when each one would receive them. They also agreed to inscribe on the pants the memories of the summer to help them share their time apart once they were back together.

It was decided that Lena would have the pants first, followed by Tibby. After that would be Carmen and finally Bridget. They would keep the pants no more than a week unless they felt the need to have them a little longer. They wrote up the final rules and they were officially a Sisterhood.

## Notes

The solemnity of their official organization called The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants might seem silly to others who have never engaged in such promises, but for the four girls, it is as serious as it gets. The pants for some strange reason fit them all perfectly and accentuate the best qualities of each of their bodies. They give

them all a boost in self-esteem and help them face their first summer apart. The pants transform each of them in some positive way and so offer hope for what the summer will bring.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**The Pants** - They are just blue jeans, but because they seem to fit all four girls so well and make all four of them look so great, they become magical objects for all four. They represent the Sisterhood and they.....

**Carmen** - As the narrator and the purchaser of the Pants, she is the one who gets the journey started for all four of them. However, she is also the one with the least self-confidence. She is more deeply wounded by her father moving away to South Carolina and finding a new family than she will allow herself to.....

**Tibby** - She is somewhat shy around boys and so cannot act on her crush on Tucker Rowe. She feels like a built-in baby-sitter for her parents' new family of Nicky and Catherine. She hates it that she is the only one of the group who has to stay home and work in a loser place like Wallman's. She decides to.....

**Bridget** - Bridget, also known as Bee, is the most vibrant one of the group. She is pretty, flirtatious, athletically talented, and the one who falls the farthest when she makes the mistake of pursuing a boy who is too old for her. She allows herself to choose a relationship, while good and sweet in its own way, is much.....

**Lena** - An extremely beautiful girl, Lena is conscious of her beauty only in that it attracts untrustworthy boys who don't see what's beneath the beauty. As a result, she finds it hard to give her heart .....

**Bailey Graffman** - She is a twelve year old girl who is dying of leukemia. Because no treatment works for her anymore, her parents have decided to give her a few months to just be a kid. She meets Tibby when she collapses in Wallman's Pharmacy and uses her extraordinary ability to see the truth about.....

### PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The story is narrated by Carmen in the Prologue and the Epilogue. As the narrator in these chapters, she introduces and summarizes the plot, the idea of the Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, and .....

### THEME ANALYSIS

The theme of **friendship, loyalty and love for each other** reflects that in spite of their youth, these four girls recognize the value of the relationship they have had with each other all their lives. The pact they make on the Traveling Pants may seem superficial and even a bit childish, but it is elemental in how they express their feelings for each other. Carmen comes home feeling betrayed by her father and turns immediately to Tibby for comfort and advice. Tibby's friendship with Bailey reinforces the feelings she has for the Sisterhood, because her death shows Tibby how important the small pleasures she gave to others while alive can.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide.

### AUTHOR'S STYLE

The author's style is a combination of humor mixed in with serious commentary and poignancy. She presents key passages in the lives of four young girls in order to show the reader how we all came of age through the decisions we made, both good and bad. She presents it with youthful language and.....

### GENRE

This novel can probably best be classified as a coming-of-age novel for young adults. It contains many comedic aspects, as well as tragic aspects, but it is not really either. It may also.....

## **RISING ACTION**

The rising action begins when Carmen, Tibby, Bridget, and Lena all swear an oath on the Traveling Pants to wear them with confidence and to never lose sight of the value of friendship. It continues as.....

## **FALLING ACTION**

The falling action involves their return to Gilda's, the empty gym where they mothers had first met when they were all pregnant. There they bring back the Pants and all of them write their.....

## **POINT OF VIEW**

The point of view is first person in the Prologue and the Epilogue as Carmen introduces the reader to the events that are about to take place, speaking in flashback, and then summarizes what happened to.....

## **OTHER ELEMENTS**

### **FORESHADOWING**

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

- 1.) Carmen wrote Tibby a letter about how badly she felt that she was taking a trip that was so exciting and new, while Tibby was home in her same haunts. It foreshadows that her expectations won't meet the reality she will face.
- 2.) Carmen began to receive clues that perhaps things weren't as she expected with her. First, he had traded in his Saab for a station wagon, an odd vehicle for a single man, and then, he was reluctant to talk about his place. Finally, he pulled up in front of a large Victorian house in a suburban neighborhood and told her that it was home. He told her that he hadn't mentioned he'd moved, because he.....

### **IRONY**

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

- 1.) Her hope for good luck on this trip prompted Lena to take out the Traveling Pants and put them on. Ironically, most of the trip will be filled with bad luck.
- 2.) Bailey, a young girl of about ten was lying unconscious on the floor of Wallman's, ironically having crushed Tibby's deodorant display in the process, a display that had taken her hours to.....

## **IMPORTANT QUOTES - QUOTATIONS AND ANALYSIS**

The following quotations are important at various points in the story: (Delacorte Press, 2001)

- 1.) "I could tell the pants hadn't come into our lives because of tragedy. They'd just witnessed one of those regular but painful life transitions. That, it turns out, is The Way of the Pants." (pg. 2; Carmen tells this to the reader in the Prologue to explain how the Sisterhood was formed.)
- 2.) "Not All Who Wander Are Lost." (pg. 1; quoted by J. R. R. Tolkien, it is the first quote to introduce a chapter.)
- 3.) "Today is the tomorrow we worried about yesterday." (pg. 26; this is an anonymous quote to introduce the second chapter.)
- 4.) "Can you make yourself love? Can you make yourself be loved?" (pg. 38; this was said by Lena, the one who was most afraid to let herself love someone else.).....

## **SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS**

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols and metaphors**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. Metaphors are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. There are many symbols and metaphors used by the author such as:

1. The September group was the name the girls' mothers gave themselves when they went to Gilda's and all of them were pregnant. It comes to symbolize who the girls think they are even after their mothers no longer are close friends.
2. The Traveling Pants become a talisman, or a symbol, of the magic of their friendship and how having the love and support of each other evolves from them. Each of them wears them and learns something very valuable about what Carmen calls "painful life transitions."
3. Tucker Rowe symbolizes "the" boy that every girl desires.....

## **IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY**

**Title:** *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*

**Author:** Ann Brashares

**Date Published:** 2001

**Meaning of the Title:** It refers to the friendship of four girls that is more deeply forged by a pair of jeans that seem to fit them all in a magical way.

**Genre:** Young Adult: Inspirational; Coming-of-age.

**Setting:** Suburban Washington, D.C., specifically Georgetown and Bethesda (including such places as Wallman's Pharmacy and the 7-Eleven); Baja, California; Oia, Greece; and Charleston, South Carolina

**Protagonists:** Tibby, Carmen, Lena, and Bridget.....

## **STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ**

1. The Pants seem almost magical, because
  - a. they were so cheap.
  - b. they fit each girl in an amazing way.
  - c. they were flaired and faded.
2. Carmen is traveling to
  - a. South Carolina
  - b. Greece
  - c. Baja, California.....

## **ANSWER KEY**

1.) b 2.) a 3.) a 4.) a 5.) c 6.) a 7.) b 8.) c 9.) c 10.) c 11.) b 12.) b 13.) a 14.) c 15.) b

## **ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS**

1. Why do you think the author chose Carmen as the character to speak the Prologue and Epilogue?
2. Explain why the Pants became an integral part of their Sisterhood. Would they have still been friends at the end of the summer if the Pants had never been discovered?.....

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