

# Discussion Questions

## *Just Kids by Patti Smith*



MADISON  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

Source: Madison Public Library [www.madisonpubliclibrary.org](http://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org)

1. How old were you when Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe were just getting started in New York? Did it bring back memories of your own early twenties? Were you aware of the NYC scene at the time?
2. One reviewer called the era 'over-mythologized.' Were Smith and Mapplethorpe's living conditions eye-opening to you? What about their lack of money and food?
3. In part Smith seems to attribute her fame to happy accidents, and in part to who she or Robert knew. To what degree do you agree?
4. Before reading the book were you aware that Smith and Mapplethorpe were a couple romantically and sexually? Mapplethorpe became very famous before his death in 1989, and is regarded as a major gay artist. Were you surprised by his relationship with Smith? Do you think he was 'figuring out' his sexuality at that time, or was Patti a unique exception? Did her androgynous look play any part in their mutual attraction?
5. Mapplethorpe's Catholic upbringing brought him some degree of internal conflict. How did his Catholicism and perhaps his Catholic guilt play about in his relationship with Smith?
6. Some readers might feel Mapplethorpe 'took' too much from Smith emotionally—that he leaned on her, perhaps even 'used' her at times—and that the relationship was unequal. Smith doesn't seem to feel that way herself in this memoir. Why do you think she doesn't?
7. Amongst readers and reviewers there seems to be a difference of opinion regarding Smith's name-dropping. Some find her mentions of famous artists of the day pointless. Some admire that she kept the name-dropping to a minimum given the social scene she was a part of. Did you recognize most of the artists she mentions? Would you have liked Smith to delve into more detail about those scene-makers?
8. The style of this book is quite different from most memoirs penned by famous people. Were you surprised at what is covered/not covered? The *New York Times* called it a 'bohemian Hansel & Gretel.' Does that quote capture the tone as well as the content? How would you describe the book?