

**Forever**  
Judy Blume  
Bradbury Press, 1975

**Reviews**

- [All Things Considered, NPR](#) (4 August 2010): “At its core, it's about female teenagers who make responsible birth control choices -- who, when they're ready, have sex on their own terms, instead of for the gaze or approval of men. What's so shocking about that? I may have come for the scandal, but I stayed for the feminist lesson.”
- [Booklist](#) (15 October 1975): “Blume vitalizes all those sex-education books in her lively, graphic story of a senior-year love affair based primarily on physical attraction. Once Katherine Danziger and Michael Wagner meet at a party, they have eyes only for each other, and their romance progresses rapidly from kissing to heavy petting to lying together and finally to frequent sexual intercourse after Kath gets the Pill from a Planned Parenthood officer. Although Kath’s parents are supportive of her, they worry she will get herself into exactly the situation she is in. The pair are separated after graduation when the Danzigers force Kath to take a summer job at a New Hampshire camp and Michael is sent to his uncle in North Carolina. At first, they write each other daily, but then Kath becomes attracted to another counselor and feels guilty and emotionally confused. Michael’s unexpected arrival at the camp brings matters to a head. Characters—including adults and friends of the protagonists—are well developed, dialogue is natural, and the story is convincing; however, the explicit sex scenes will limit this to the mature reader.”
- [Common Sense Media](#) (October 1975, Starred review): “This classic from the '70s may seem tame compared with some of today's young adult literature, but readers will still appreciate Judy Blume's honest depiction of young love. Some of the language is dated, but Katherine and Michael are both believable characters. While there are depictions of sex, there's a lot more here, too. Not only do Katherine and Michael have a real relationship, but Katherine is thoughtful about her decision to have sex.

Katherine has some open conversations, including one in which her mother tells her: "Sex is a commitment ... once you're there you can't go back to holding hands." Blume opens newer editions of the book reminding readers that things have changed since she wrote *Forever*: "Today, sexual responsibility also means preventing sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS which can kill you." Whatever your family's values, you can use *Forever* to start many conversations with your kids, from your own beliefs about premarital sex to your thoughts about book censorship.”

- [The Edge, University of Southampton](#) (8 March 2016): “What is important here is that we don’t have a typical girl meets boy, girl falls in love, ‘some tragedy strikes but it all works out in the end’ structure. Blume is known for the eloquent yet somewhat brash style of writing where cocks and periods are talked about with flourish, dignity and honesty. When you have your grandma telling you one day you’ll ‘meet a nice boy and settle down’ this book gave me hope for more. That my life didn’t need to be dictated by a romance, that a woman could have more than that. Rather odd for a story about virginity right? Well, not

really. This novel outlines that first love isn't always forever love, that it's ok not to find 'the one' at 16 and that you can be a full person without someone else. For me, this is the feminist novel all teenage girls need placed on their bookshelf. Rather than fluffy stories about prince charmings and perfect deflowering stories, they need the reality that it might not be perfect the first time, it's probably going to be awkward but guess what? It doesn't define you.

- [Kirkus](#) (1 October 1975): "Increasingly Judy Blume's books center on single topics and the topic here, as pronounced in the first sentence, is getting laid. Cath and Michael fall in love when both are high school seniors, and Blume leads up to 'It' date by date and almost inch by inch (hand over sweater, hand under skirt...) and then, after the breakthrough, describes each session until the kinks in timing and such are straightened out. (There's also a word-for-word transcript of her Planned Parenthood interview and a letter from Grandma, who's heard she is "going steady," advising birth control.) For Cath though forever lasts only until her parents send her off to a summer camp job and she finds herself unwillingly attracted to the tennis counselor she's assisting; Michael takes it without much grace but Cath will never regret one single thing because it was all very special. "I think it's just that I'm not ready for forever."

As usual with this immensely popular author, *Forever...* has a lot of easy, empathic verity and very little heft. Cath, like Blume's other heroines, is deliberately ordinary, which means here (despite friends, nice family, etc.) that outside of the love affair she's pretty much a blank. In fact this could be a real magnet for all those girls who took to *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* just a few years ago and haven't changed all that much since. Another way of looking at *Forever...* is as an updated *Seventeenth Summer*."

- [National Post](#) (8 August 2018): "Blume is among the most challenged authors of the 21st century and *Forever* is one of the most frequently banned books in the U.S., thanks to its detailed descriptions of sex and Katherine's use of birth control. There is no shame in Blume's story of desire and sexuality, and a lot of information on making sex safe. With all of these factors combined, it's hard to imagine a better read for an adolescent girl. The very qualities that make her [Blume's] books controversial are what set them apart. She speaks plainly without judgment, condescension, embellishment or sentimentality. In approaching weighty subjects, she helps young adults navigate the world."
- [Pelham Public Library Blog](#) (28 September 2006): "*Forever* by Judy Blume, a favorite for girls and young teens, has frequently been the target of censors. This story about the sexual awakening of a teenage girl has been challenged since its publication (1975) because it "does not promote abstinence and monogamous relationships." It was challenged by Midvalley Junior-Senior Scranton, Pennsylvania high school library (1982), Orlando, Florida schools (1982) and Akron, Ohio school district libraries (1983) for using "four-letter words" and for talking about masturbation, birth control and disobedience to parents."
- [Toppsta](#) (1 January 2015, Starred review): "Do you remember the first time? *Forever* is still the bravest, freshest, fruitiest and most honest account of first love, first sex and first heartbreak ever written for teens. It was a book ahead of its time - and remains, after forty years in print, a teenage bestseller from the award-winning Judy Blume."

- [Washington Post](#) (19 April 2021): “Then there’s *Forever ...* — compelling *and* a veritable information manual. This was once the quintessential romantic first-sex book, but today — after #MeToo — the boyfriend, Michael, would never pass muster. He makes moves on Katherine without her verbal consent, cajoles her to undress in front of him even after she says no, touches her breasts after promising not to, calls her a tease. He’s never mean, clearly adores her and is often respectful of real ambivalence on her part. But he’s assertive and persuasive, as boys were socialized to be then. And she’s not only not offended, but excited — if nervous — about submitting next time, even if (happily!) she also says a firm “No!” to things she really doesn’t want, telling him point-blank, “I’m not ready.”

At the end of *Forever ...* — as Katherine unloads Michael for a new love (Theo, a 21-year-old tennis instructor who also would never fly in the #MeToo era) — I concluded that Blume’s books absolutely still should be read, despite some ingredients that aren’t wholly comfortable in 2021. Not just for the handy intel about bodies and sex, or the sometimes admirable depictions of girls telling boys to un-paw them and learning empathy, but also so today’s teens can see how yesterday’s teens grew up — and to open conversations about what’s improved, what hasn’t and what we might do about it.”

#### Awards

- [Margaret E. Edwards Award](#), 1996

#### Lists

- [100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-1999](#) by American Library Association
- [100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 2000-2009](#) by American Library Association
- [100 Novels that Shaped Our World](#) by BBC News (5 November 2019)
- [Your Favorites: 100 Best Ever Teen Novels](#) by NPR (7 August 2012)

## Response to challenges

- [Common Sense Media](#): **What parents need to know:**

“Parents need to know that this book is often challenged and even banned because of its depictions of teen sex. But it remains one of the best ways of discussing this very sensitive subject with your very sensitive teens. It deals frankly and responsibly with tough questions. Katherine has sex with her boyfriend, talks frankly about his penis, visits Planned Parenthood to get birth control pills, and discusses sex with her mother, grandmother, and best friend. She also deals with other adult issues: Michael's best friend tries to hang himself; another character, who has had many sexual partners, gets pregnant and has a baby; and Katherine's grandfather dies. There's some drinking, and some characters smoke marijuana. Readers who are mature enough for the content will find a very realistic portrayal of first love -- and a thoughtful protagonist who considers carefully before deciding to enter a sexual relationship. There are plenty of opportunities for parents to use this book to talk about their own values about sex, birth control, teen pregnancy, and more.”

  - **Educational Value:** “Through Katherine's experience, teen readers will get a good sense of what to expect during an OB/GYN visit. Author Judy Blume also writes an opening note to readers explaining that when she wrote the book, "sexual responsibility meant preventing unwanted pregnancy. Today, sexual responsibility also means preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including a potentially fatal one -- HIV/AIDS.”
  - **Violence & Scariness:** “Michael's best friend tries to hang himself.”
  - **Positive Messages:** “In a world where there is so much sexual posing on TV and in movies, this book offers an excellent way to thoughtfully explore the sensitive issue of talking about sex with your teen.”
  - **Sex, Romance, & Nudity:** “This is a book that explores teen sexuality, so it's appropriate that there's lots of sex in it. Katherine has sex with Michael. Katherine visits Planned Parenthood to get birth control pills -- and also has discussions about sex with her mother, grandmother, and best friend. Another character, who has had many sexual partners, gets pregnant and has a baby.”
  - **Drinking, Drugs & Smoking:** “Michael gets drunk with Katherine's best friend. Some characters smoke marijuana and Katherine admits to trying it once.”
  - **Positive Role Models:** “Whether or not to have sex is a decision that needs to be made thoughtfully, and the characters in the book approach their decisions with deliberation. Not only do Katherine and Michael have a real relationship, but Katherine thinks carefully about her choice to have sex.”
  - **Language:** “The characters swear, including "f--k.””
- Recommended reading age:
  - [Common Sense Media](#): 13 years and up (experts), 14 years and up (parents and kids)
  - [Amazon](#): 14 years and up
- On [Salon.com](#), Judy Blume offers the following advice to parents who are nervous about allowing their children to read a controversial book. "The best thing to do is read with

your kids. Talk with your kids about everything. Then you won't have to be afraid of what they're reading."