

## Discussion Questions for *Just Kids*

by *Patti Smith*

*We did not put names after the questions except for the one from Sarah (#3), as the rest all came from our wonderful facilitator, Deb Baker*

1. Part of Smith's structure is to draw continual parallels between Mapplethorpe and herself. What may have been her intention with this?
2. Readers quickly determine Smith's fluency in Arts & Letters. What is the effect of her consistent references to classic literature and established art and artists?
3. Related to the above, **Sarah Barnett** felt that the constant mentioning of other people slowed the narrative down, and kept the reader at a distance. Do we need all the names? What advice would you give memoirists who want to include a large cast of characters who don't have key roles but are still important?
4. In selecting her title, Smith recounts a time when she and Mapplethorpe were observed by an elderly mainstream tourist couple in Central Park. The husband, taken with their appearances, urges his wife to photograph "the artists" to which the wife responds, "Come on, they're just kids." Why do you think Smith choose this as her title?
5. In most of the book Smith uses a poetic and lyrical narrative style, almost elegiac, particularly when referencing Mapplethorpe. When she writes about his sexual exploration, however, she uses more straightforward, unembellished language. What was her purpose in doing this?
6. I found myself transported back to the '60s through Smith's depiction of the couple's simple routines, their curious creativity, and their utter lack of consumerism. Do you feel that her portrayal of the '60s is accurate and did any details ring especially true?
7. Smith's description of her poverty conjures an image of a cloak of invisibility that provided her with protection. How does this "cloak" allow her access to the seemingly seedy side of the city?
8. Both the Allerton and Chelsea Hotels play significant roles in *Just Kids*. How did Smith characterize these buildings into entities greater than merely places to live?