

An intense focus on menstruation, brassieres, and “mammary development,” you say? Well, welcome to the world of the preteen, dear readers, and while tweens might switch up the vocab a bit today, many eleven- and twelve-year olds still find their bodies’ physical changes to be a source of delight and angst, a tension that Blume so capably and compassionately captures in her groundbreaking novel. As twelve-year-old Margaret and her friends navigate the beginnings of puberty, contemplating bust-improving exercises and the workings of sanitary napkins, those experiences occupy a fleeting but profoundly significant moment in the girls’ development as they teeter between childhood and teenagerdom, aware of an oncoming upheaval with the (well-founded) fear they are wildly unprepared for it.

There is plenty of talk about periods and bras, as the original *Bulletin* review points out, and some of it is clearly dated, but there are layers of anxiety that plenty of preteens will relate to, whether or not they’re buying pads. Because, of course, the physical self is tangled with the emotional self: Margaret’s pleas to God about growing breasts and getting her period are coupled with pleas to “be like everyone else” and “be normal.” Then and now, “normal” is a loaded term, but the struggle to achieve it, however it is defined, is a familiar (if often futile) one, and Margaret’s narration makes that turmoil particularly recognizable. Blume is a no-frills writer, and the direct, simple prose easily allows young readers to wrestle with and project their own emotions on Margaret; while this limits Margaret’s full character development, it provides multiple entry points for the audience. It’s an accessibility that clearly made plenty of adults uncomfortable as the book faced challenged after challenge in school and public libraries, but the book’s authenticity made a friend of Margaret for generations of girls.

- *Kate Quealy-Gainer, Assistant Editor*