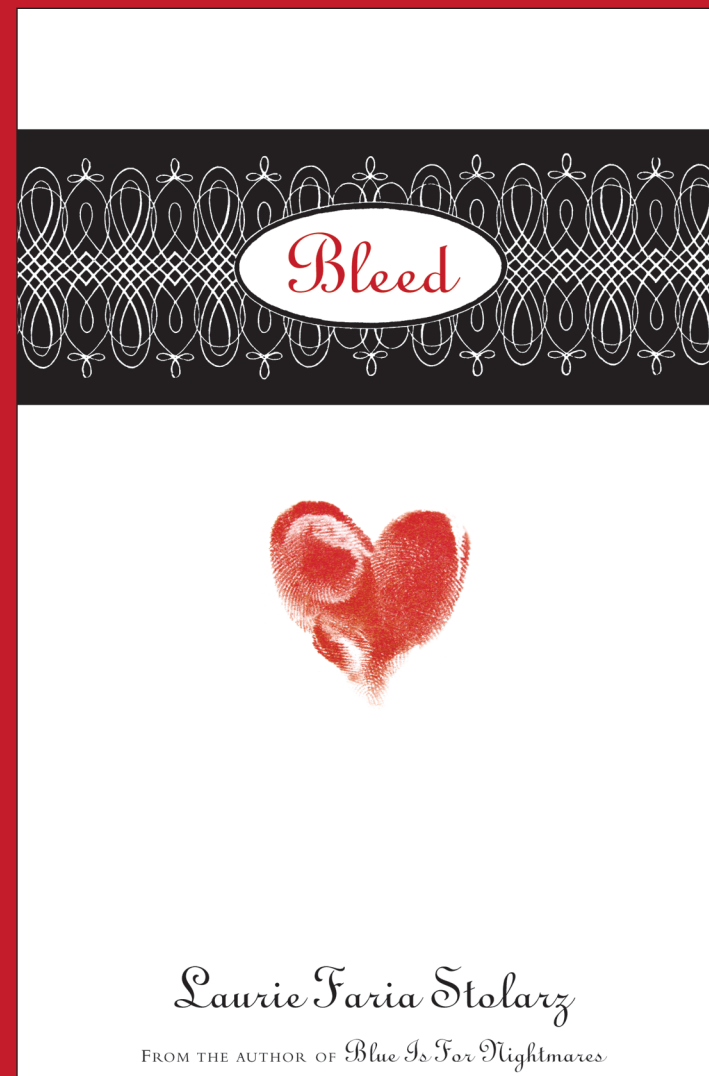


This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of the novel *Reaching for Sun*. Visit her Web site at tracievaughnzimmer.com to find many other guides to YA literature.



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DISCUSSION GUIDE
HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

About the Book

Over the course of a single day, the lives of ten teenagers will intersect in powerful and unexpected ways. Among them are: Nicole, whose decision to betray her best friend will shock everyone, most of all herself; Kelly, who meets the convicted felon she's been writing to for years; and Maria, whose definition of a true friend is someone who will cut her. Derik discovers that his usual good looks and charm won't help him get the girl he really wants, while Joy, a fifteen-year-old waitress, hoping for true intimacy, narrowly escapes a very dark fate. Seamlessly woven together, this collection of interconnected short stories paints an authentic portrait of today's teen experience that is at once funny, moving, and haunting.

About the Guide

This guide includes discussion questions and projects intended to extend the use of the novel into classrooms, book clubs, and literature circles. It should promote discussion on the themes of the novel, including friendship, family life, teen sexuality, betrayal, violence, and abuse.

Pre-reading

Do you think teens spend more time thinking about friendship or romance? Why? Which is more important in the long term? How often do teens betray one another? Do you think this is more often or less than in adult relationships?



Discussion Guide

Nicole Bouchard

1. Why do you think Nicole lets things unfold the way they do with Sean? At how many different points could she have stopped the events? How much is Sean to blame? Do girls carry more of the blame in these situations? Why, or why not?
2. What do you think will happen when Kelly comes home from California? Does Sean and Nicole's relationship have a chance at survival?
3. In ten years, do you think Nicole will regret the way she lost her virginity to Sean? Can there be a good first experience? Do you think men or women are more likely to have a bad first experience? Why?

Maria Krito

1. Why do you think Maria keeps a memento from each friend who cuts her? Are these people her true friends? What does she come to realize about her friends?
2. What transaction takes place between Maria and her "Uncle Luke"? Do you think this is a common event? What makes you think so or not? Is Maria wrong to submit? Why?
3. What is Maria's relationship with Sadie? Who do you think has the worse home life, Sadie or Maria? Why?

Kelly Pickerel

1. Why do you think Kelly gets involved with Robby Mardonia? What does she convince herself about him? Why does she keep this relationship a secret? Do you think two people can actually fall in love with just letters (or e-mail)?
2. Convicted murderers (and death-row inmates) often receive lots of fan mail from women. Why do you think this is so? What does it say about our society, or does it speak only of the women who write?
3. Describe Robby and Kelly's first meeting. Why is it not what she expected? Is it what Robby hopes for? Why or why not?

Derik LaPointe

1. Describe the encounter between Derik and Mearl. How is it different for him from his usual interactions with girls?
2. In the end, who do you think is most affected by their meeting? Will it change Derik in any fundamental way? What did he learn about himself, if anything? What did Mearl learn?
3. How is Derik's description of their meeting different from Mearl's? What does that tell us about each of them?

Sadie Dubinski

1. What is Sadie's obsession? How do you think she got this way? What is it like to be Sadie? How do you think she is treated at school?
2. Do you think Sadie will always have a problem with food? What seems to be the only quality that Sadie's mother admires in her daughters? Do you think this is common in our society? Why?
3. Should a mother ever discuss weight issues with her son or daughter? How could it be done in a supportive manner?

Robby Mardonia

1. Joy says in Robby's story, "I thought there was more to the relationship than there really was. It's weird how we do that, you know, just fill in the blanks with our own answer key." (p.137) Do you think this is a common mistake in teen relationships? Why or why not?
2. Why is there a memorial in the woods? Why do people create memorials? Do you believe Robby's story? Can murder ever be accidental?
3. Predict what you think Robby will become in the next five years. Do you think he will try to find Kelly?

Mearl Aremian

1. What is Mearl searching for? How does she try to find it? Do you think most of her behavior is just a well-scripted act?
2. What is Mearl's backstory? How do you think it has affected her current situation? Do you believe in palm and aura reading?
3. How do Maria and Mearl meet? Do you think they can become true friends? Why or why not?

Ginger Dubinsky

1. Ginger believes the rumor about Kelly and Mr. Vargas: do you? Are there rumors about teachers and their students on every campus? What percentage of these stories do you think have any merit?
2. Why does Ginger want to bring Kelly down? How does she orchestrate her plan? Do you think she is obsessed with Kelly? Would you want revenge, too?
3. Does Sean's guilt help Ginger uncover the truth? How? Can some people cheat and lie without any qualms? How can you tell whether your boyfriend or girlfriend is capable of lying?

Joy Ryder

1. How does Danny Winslow treat Joy at school? How common is this type of behavior in school? Why do you think boys often get away with acting this way? What causes this kind of violence against girls?
2. Joy is left to fend for herself against Danny and his nastiness. Do teens ever stick up for each other? When? What should Joy do?
3. In the end, what will happen between Joy and Danny? Will he continue to harass her at school? Will she reveal his secrets? What makes you think so or not?

Sean O'Connell

1. What does Sean learn about Nicole that he never admitted to himself before?
2. What do you think will happen when Kelly comes home? Will Sean and Nicole admit what happened between them in the garden? Should they?
3. How has Sean changed over the course of this one day?

All of the characters

1. Which character do you think changed the most? Why?
2. Do the stories in this collection represent typical teen lives? Why?
3. Which characters did you most identify with in the story? Why?

Projects

Language Arts

Write a letter from one character to another whose stories do not connect in the book. What could they learn from each other?

Music

Choose music that you think should be played during one of the chapters. Why did you pick this song? How does the rhythm and instrumentation add to the scene? Why these lyrics?

Art

Create a piece of art through the eyes of one of the characters in the novel, but don't reveal the character's identity! Then, create an art gallery and see if students can identify who the piece is meant to represent.

About the Author

Laurie Faria Stolarz is the author of the hugely popular young adult novels *Blue Is for Nightmares*, *White Is for Magic*, *Silver Is for Secrets*, and *Red Is for Remembrance*. Born and raised in Salem, Massachusetts, Stolarz attended Merrimack College and received an MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College in Boston. She is currently working on a companion novel to *Bleed*. Visit Laurie Faria Stolarz at www.lauriestolarz.com.

Author Interview

1. Why did you decide to write interconnecting short stories rather than a traditional novel? I really wanted to explore how the decisions we make everyday—even the smaller ones—can affect others in ways we may never even consider. The decision whether to pick up the phone or let the machine get it; the decision of walking to someone's house versus taking the bus; or of taking a walk by a cemetery rather than at the beach—how the outcome of those decisions can have a domino effect, affecting other

people's lives . . . even the lives of people we may not know.

- 2. Which YA authors have most influenced your writing?** Stephen King (not true YA, but I frequently read his work as a young adult), Robert Cormier, Francesca Lia Block, Ellen Wittlinger, Laurie Halse Anderson, Judy Blume, and Joyce Carol Oates. And, of course, I'm also influenced by the members of my writers group—fellow YA authors, Lara Zeises, Tea Benduhn, Kim Ablon Whitney, and Steven Goldman.
- 3. What advice would you give to teens who want to become writers?** I would recommend reading what you love. Ask yourself why you love it, why you feel it works. What technique does the writer use that works for you? What point of view? What do you like about the dialogue? The characters? Do the same for books that don't appeal to you. Become a better reader. By answering some of these questions, you'll become one. You'll be able to identify what works for you as a reader. Then, apply those elements to your writing. Also, join a writers group. I rely heavily on mine. They're there for inspiration as well as critiques. We support each other through every step of the process—from that first idea to the finished book. And lastly, always remember that perseverance is key. If you really want to become a young adult author, you can do it. Just be open to learning, to getting better in your craft, and keep moving forward despite any obstacles that come your way.
- 4. What do you hope teens take away from your work?** I hope that it gets them to read, that they can develop a genuine interest in my characters—an interest that compels them to keep turning pages until they reach the very end. I hope that they find my characters and subject matter relatable in some way—that they find honesty there, an honesty that encourages them to think and probe and consider. And I hope that my books can make them feel something, some emotion, whatever that emotion may be.
- 5. What can your fans look forward to next?** My next book is called *Project 17*. It's a companion book to *Bleed*, starring Derik LaPointe, one of the *Bleed* characters, (though there are several other points of view as well). The novel is about a group of teens who break into an abandoned asylum at night to film a movie. It's very scary and I'm really excited about it.