
Cassie stood up from the table, anger rising in her voice, "Aunt Jackie, I can't—I won't let it go. I want to know what happened. This accident didn't take my mother's life, but it did take other things from her. She tried to get away from those feelings she was left with, but she didn't know who to trust. I won't live under that and I won't let this family live under that anymore."

About the Book

High school junior Cassie Nesler is a talented coder enjoying a seemingly idyllic life in San Diego, California, with her mother and step-father. An academically strong student, Cassie is an introvert with a deep interest in programming and technology. This young adult novel follows Cassie as her life abruptly changes at the tragic death of her mother. Re-locating to rural Arkansas to live with her Aunt Jackie, Cassie gets to know her rural roots and Arkansas family. Still grieving her mother's death, Cassie and her two new friends, Dylan and Sofia, are intrigued by the story of a car accident that claimed the life of two Doddville High School seniors some 20 years earlier that placed Cassie's mother under a cloud of suspicion. The three friends seek to unravel the mystery along the River Road with the hope that the truth will exonerate her mother and unburden Cassie's family. Combing through newspaper articles, accident reports, and her mother's journals and song lyrics, Cassie comes to understand her mother and her mother's life choices while gaining more knowledge about her own father. Through their efforts, the truth is uncovered, but the price paid might be too high for Cassie.



About the Author

S. C. Ashby is an emerging author in young adult literature. She has developed educational materials for NASA, written articles for education journals and has published poetry. As an educator, education researcher, and lifelong learner, she enjoys traveling to distant lands and photography. She divides her time between Arkansas and San Diego, California, with her supportive spouse and one rescued cat.

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Group Guide

1. The first two chapters provide more character information about Katelyn (Katie Lynn), Cassie's mother, than about Cassie. It also provides us with a glimpse of Cassie's family and her relationship with her mother. Are Cassie and her mother, Katelyn, much alike? In what ways are they alike and in what ways are they different?
2. How does Cassie's family dynamics described in the early chapters (specifically chapters 2, 3 and 4) impact Cassie and her interactions with her mother?
3. In Chapter 2 Cassie, the author abruptly shifts perspective to first person narrative just for that chapter. Why did the author choose to make such a shift for one chapter only?
4. The author describes the outdoor environment throughout the story. How does that influence your interpretation of a character's mood or state of mind?
5. Jackie seemed close to her older sister Katelyn, yet they were also distinctly different from each other. Do you think those differences make it easier for Cassie to feel at home in Doddville, Arkansas, or make it more difficult for Cassie to fit in?
6. Cassie gravitates toward two new friends at her Arkansas high school: Dylan and Sofia. Why do you think these three banded together?
7. Cassie and her Grandmother inhabit two different worlds, yet they bond over the gardening. How does the author use the garden to impart the Grandmother's life philosophy.
8. If you were to describe Cassie to one of your friends what three words or phrases would you use to describe her? Based upon your description, would you have attempted to become friends with Cassie or not?
9. Despite the interests of Cassie, Sofia and Dylan being so different, their different interests also provide a commonality that binds them together. What is it that their three distinct interests have in common?
10. Most people have a safe place that they can go to that allows them to heal from painful memories or hurtful experiences. Describe the safe place that Cassie uses to escape the harshness of her family and troubling memories.
11. Why do you think that Cassie's mother, Katelyn, and later her extended family chose not to initially share with Cassie the small town secret that drove Katelyn out to Tulsa and then to Las Vegas?
12. Cassie does not seem to know much about her biological father or have had much of a relationship with him at all. Through her mother's journals, her family's stories, and her mother's songs/poems, what about her father is revealed to Cassie as the story progresses?
13. Contrast Katelyn's disposition before the car accident along the river road to her disposition after the accident. How did the accident impact Katelyn's life? How did the accident impact Cassie's life?
14. As the story progresses, Cassie becomes increasingly adamant about uncovering the truth regarding her mother's car accident along the river road. Why is finally closing this case so important to Cassie?
15. Katelyn's songs and poems are autobiographical. How do these songs and poems reveal Katelyn's struggles as well as celebrate aspects of Katelyn's life? Do you have a favorite song lyric or poem from Katelyn's musings? Share the poem/lyric and explain why that particular piece resonates with you.

Group Guide (continued)

16. How have the actions of the Wild Boars impacted Cassie's family and the town? Why do you think the Wild Boars are not seen together much as adults? In high school, the Wild Boars centered around Sonny, but in the story's present day, the Wild Boars appear to center around one or two different individuals. Who are they and why do you think the power dynamic in the Wild Boars shifted?
17. Who do you believe the mysterious individual driving the black SUV is?
18. Cassie's Aunt Jackie has ensured that Cassie routinely attends counseling to assist with her grieving process and the transition to a different home location. How has the counseling sessions given clarity to Cassie?
19. Why does Cassie refuse to visit her mother's grave? What draws her there eventually? Is Cassie's understanding of her mother clearer or more muddled by the story's end? Give evidence from the story to explain your reasoning.
20. Which of the three friends would you probably have in your circle of friends: Cassie, Dylan and/or Sofia?

Poem and Lyric Analysis Guide

Directions: Select a poem or lyric and use the questions below to analyze the poem.

1. What is the meaning of the poem's/lyric's title or to what is the title referring? What is your interpretation of the title?
2. Re-read the poem. What is the poem's/lyric's tone? Does the tone change within the poem?
3. Who or what is the subject of the poem/lyric?
4. What is happening within the poem/lyric? What is the writer talking about?
5. What is the theme of the poem/lyrics?
6. Some poems or lyrics reveal to us how the poet or lyricist internally interprets an experience. The change experienced by the writer could be shown through a change in feelings, the use of language, or the use of description. Does this poem/lyric address an experience? If so, what is the experience and change that the writer is conveying?
7. Are there certain words or phrases used within the poem/lyric that resonates with you in a special or powerful way? Share your experience of the poem.
8. Why do you think that Cassie's mother, Katelyn, wrote this poem/lyric? Did she write it for herself or for someone else?



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