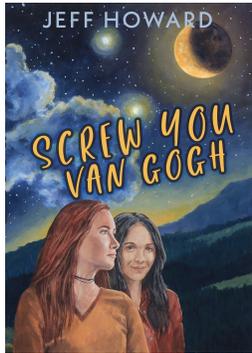


TEN DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR BOOK CLUBS



1. Many readers of this story are teenagers. (Or you were a teenager once, too!) What are some of the things Cassidy does in the first few chapters that are typical of teenaged girls?
2. The character Stacy Towers is meant to be a complex woman. She appears to be a wandering victim of her poor decisions, yet, really, she's a resilient, cheerful, loving mother. Does this add up? Would you like her as a person?
3. The two poems written by Tommi and Cassidy in chapter 15 were included in the book to develop these characters and get an intimate look into their inner thoughts and emotions. What did you learn about these girls from their poetry?
4. The life of Vincent Van Gogh threads throughout this story. Like many of the characters, have we fixated on Van Gogh's alleged self-mutilation and death by suicide rather than his art and genius? Is there anything to the theory that there's a fine line between genius and madness?
5. It may be a reasonable assumption that Michael Burns became a father-figure for Cassidy. How likely is it that an adolescent girl who has no adult male in her life would allow herself to trust him? Or does she ever really trust him completely?
6. The author Jeff Howard uses **literary devices** to develop plot, create characters, and make the story more interesting. One of his favorites is *foreshadowing* as used at the first part of chapter 17. Can you find this example of foreshadowing? What is being foreshadowed?
7. As a reader you have been able to witness the evolution of Cassidy Towers from an insecure, distraught young girl to a thoughtful, caring young woman. Many characters influenced her evolution including Tommi, her mom Stacy, and Mr. Burns. Do you feel she could have made this change without them?
8. During the final confrontation in the barn, Randy Bounds lets out his years of anger and frustration only to hesitate when Tommi confronts him. What is going through Randy's mind to make him hesitate? Do you have any sympathy for him at all?
9. A number of the teen-aged characters in this story are vulnerable: Cassidy has panic attacks and can't find herself, Patrick is moody and can be withdrawn, and Tommi is seriously struggling with depression. Anyone of them could have given up on life. Was the ending a surprise to you?
10. Like Tommi, many people who die from suicide appear to be confident, self-assured people. What are your feelings about that? What can we learn as a community or group about understanding each other, even looking out for each other?