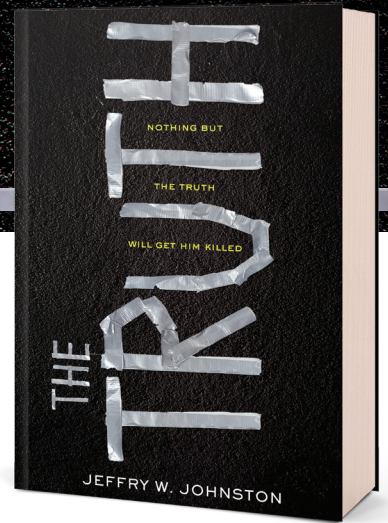


THE TRUTH

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Nothing but the truth will get him killed.

When Chris wakes up in a dark basement tied to a chair, he knows that he's trapped—and why. Eight nights ago a burglar broke into Chris's home. Eight nights ago Chris did what he had to do to protect his family. And eight nights ago a thirteen-year-old runaway bled to death on his kitchen floor.

Now Derek wants the truth about what happened that night. He wants proof his little brother didn't deserve to die. For every lie Chris tells, he will lose a finger. But telling the truth is far more dangerous...

"Such a fast-paced read! What really happened that night? The truth will leave you gasping."

—April Henry, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Girl, Stolen* and *The Girl Who Was Supposed to Die*



About the Author

Jeffrey W. Johnston has published about thirty-five short stories and more than two hundred articles. His first young adult novel, *Fragments*, was an Edgar Award nominee for Best Young Adult Mystery and a Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers selection by YALSA. He lives in the Philadelphia area with his wife and their teenage son. Visit him at jeffrywjohnston.com.



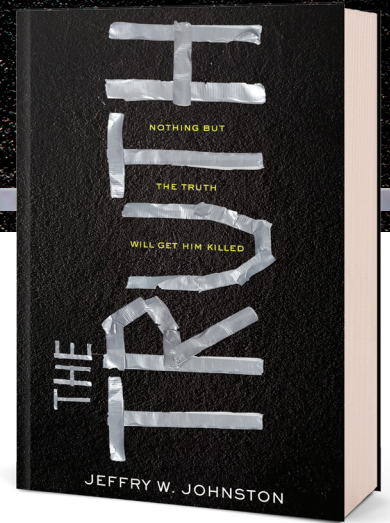
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1. In talking about his time in juvenile detention, Derek tells Chris about a counselor who spoke to him about the importance of forgiveness. As Derek explains, "Not about people forgiving me for what I did. And, believe me, I've done stuff. He talked about forgiving those who hurt me. My father and mother mostly. He said that's why I'm so angry all the time. He said if I was going to move forward, I had to forgive them."

What do you think the counselor means when he tells Derek that he needs to forgive those who hurt him in order to move forward? By the end of the novel, who else, ultimately, do you think Derek needs to forgive?

2. Early on, Derek encourages Chris to talk about what his life has been like since the night Caleb was killed, rather than go into details about that night. Why do you think that is? What do you think Derek is looking for by questioning Chris?
3. What do you think was happening first to Derek and then to his brother, Caleb, before Derek left home? What other ways do you think Derek could have dealt with the situation? If you became aware of such a thing happening to a friend of yours, what do you think you could do to help?
4. After his father was killed, Chris made a conscious decision to take over the role of father for his seven-year-old brother, even though Chris himself was only thirteen. Taking on such a responsibility ended up greatly affecting his teen years, causing him to miss out on many of the experiences other teenagers have. Do you think Chris made the right decision? What other choices did he or his family have?

Later in the novel, Chris's mother seems to have some regrets about allowing her teen son to take on such responsibility. As you read the novel, how did Chris's mother allowing her son to take on the role of surrogate father at such a young age affect your opinion of her?

5. Chris and Derek were each trying to protect their brothers and chose different ways to do so. How did the way in which each one was raised affect how they approached protecting their younger brothers?



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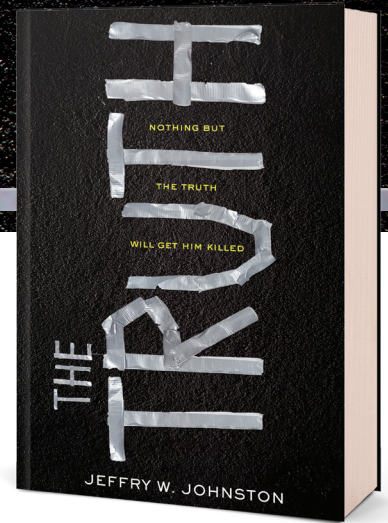
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6. By the end of the novel, the entire truth has been revealed, including the choice Chris made the night Caleb was killed. Do you think Chris made the right choice that night? How do you see the choice Chris makes at the end of the novel affecting his life and relationship with his brother in the future?
7. While “The Truth” refers in large part to the secret Chris fights to keep from Derek while he is being interrogated, there are many “truths” talked about during the course of the story. Can you name what other “truths” come up in this novel? How important do you think it is to always know the truth? Might there be times when the truth should not be spoken?
8. Baseball is clearly an important part of Devon’s life and is integral to the family’s life as well. How did Devon and Chase’s father’s love of baseball affect his relationship with each of his sons? How has it affected the relationship between the two brothers?
9. At one point in the novel, Derek accuses Chris of choosing to always be there for his brother so he could hide from other people and avoid taking risks. What examples are there in the novel where this might be true? How did Derek questioning Chris’s motives affect your opinion of Chris? How often should we question our own motives when doing something because we think it is “right” or “good”? Is there ever a time when it is not right to do “good”?
10. Chris says he gave up school choir because he needed to be there for Devon. But how much do you think Chris’s father’s opinion about choir affected his decision? Sometimes we have to make sacrifices for the greater good, but sometimes we need to stand up for ourselves. Should Chris have stood up for himself and stuck with choir? What might have been the consequences if he had? In your opinion, when is standing up for what you need better than doing what is supposedly best for the greater good?



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