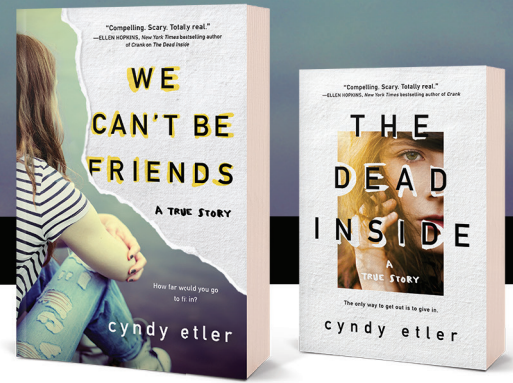


WE CAN'T BE FRIENDS

cyndy etler

D I S C U S S I O N G U I D E



In the follow-up to Cyndy Etler's chilling memoir, *The Dead Inside*, Etler details her turbulent readjustment to life at home and high school after spending sixteen months in Straight, Inc. Advertised as a rehab program for troubled teens, in reality, Straight subjected Cyndy and her fellow Straightlings to cultlike brainwashing and bizarre “treatment” methods. There was no privacy, no freedom, and no room for error. But when Cyndy is finally released, she discovers she's living by an entirely different set of rules than her peers. What new extremes will she go to in order to fit in?

Etler's gutsy present-tense narration of her feelings of insecurity and isolation is interwoven with the sublime moments of joy she experiences in music, in writing, and in her relationships; her prose dazzles with infectious verve. **A powerful story of a survivor whose irrepressible personality shines throughout even her darkest moments.**

—Kirkus Reviews



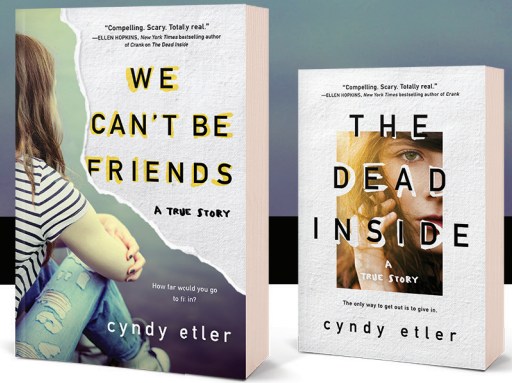
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A modern-day Cinderella, Cyndy Etler was homeless at fourteen, *summa cum laude* at thirty. In her current work as a teacher and teen life coach, Etler happily convinces teens that books work better than drugs. She lives with her husband and dogs in North Carolina. Find her at CyndyEtler.com.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE



1. Even though she's barely tried drugs, Cyndy says she's a drug addict. Later, she says she's a food addict. What do you believe is at the root of addiction? Is Cyndy truly an addict?
2. Cyndy's Dunkin' Donuts mug works like a security blanket. What need does the mug meet for her? How do the people in your life meet that need?
3. Cyndy won't have sex with the guys Deanna sets her up with, and Deanna disappears from Cyndy's life. What does Cyndy lose when Deanna drops her? Why do you think Deanna disappears?
4. Most people seem to want something from Cyndy. Why? Is that just how relationships work? Who are the people who don't want anything from Cyndy? Who are the people who don't want anything from you?
5. In *We Can't Be Friends*, Cyndy says "Music is my drug." Today, Cyndy says she "convinces kids that books work better than drugs." When people take drugs, what do they hope to experience? Can that experience be found in music or books? Why or why not?
6. Cyndy mentions a movie where the main character doesn't know why, he just knows he has to be scared all the time. Have you shared that sense of generalized anxiety? What do you think causes such a feeling?
7. Cyndy is desperate for a connection with Grant. Does she love him, or something he represents? Does Cyndy ever find the connection she seeks?
8. What is Cyndy trying to escape when she gets into Damien's sports car? What would you have done in her situation? When vulnerable people make desperate choices, bad things can happen. Who is to blame? Can you give an example?
9. Cyndy felt suicidal when she didn't get accepted to Smith College. Yet her long-term goal—to be "a real, true writer"—pulled her through decades of poverty and depression. What is the difference between these two goals? How can a person keep pushing toward a goal over the long term?
10. Cyndy credits her high school English teacher, Mrs. Skinner, with saving her from suicide. Has a teacher had a powerful effect on your life? What did he or she do for you? Did you ever tell them exactly how they changed you? Would you consider doing so now?