

YOU WERE HERE

CORI MCCARTHY

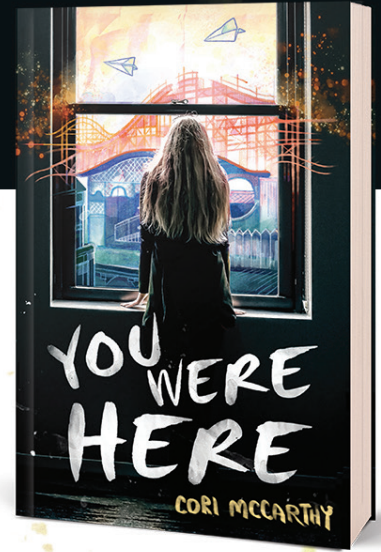
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Jaycee is about to accomplish what her older brother Jake couldn't: live past graduation.

Jaycee is dealing with her brother's death the only way she can—by re-creating Jake's daredevil stunts. The ones that got him killed. She's not crazy, okay? She just doesn't have a whole lot of respect for staying alive.

Jaycee doesn't expect to have help on her insane quest to remember Jake. But she's joined by a group of unlikely friends that challenge her to do the unthinkable—reveal the parts of herself that she buried with her brother.

Cori McCarthy's gripping narrative defies expectation, moving seamlessly from prose to graphic novel panels and word art poetry. From the petrifying ruins of an insane asylum to the skeletal remains of the world's largest amusement park, *You Were Here* takes you on an unforgettable journey of friendship, heartbreak, and inevitable change.



“Wrenchingly BEAUTIFUL.”

—Jo Knowles, award-winning author of *See You at Harry's* and *Read Between the Lines*

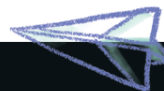
“McCarthy deftly intertwines the characters' stories, filling them with AUTHENTIC PAIN AND HEARTACHE as well as soaring moments of grace and humor.”

—Maggie Lehrman, author of *The Cost of All Things*



Photo credit: Amy Rose Capetta

CORI MCCARTHY studied poetry and screenwriting before earning an MFA in writing for children and young adults. She lives in Michigan and is also the author of *Breaking Sky* and *The Color of Rain*. Find out more about Cori at www.CoriMcCarthy.com.



QUESTIONS FROM THE AUTHOR

You Were Here is what I like to call a sneaky grief novel. When I started writing, I wanted to tell a story about experiencing death but not the garden variety “grandma died and it was wicked sad” kind of story. I dug into my past and remembered how hard it was to process the death of my friend, Matt, in eighth grade. The months after Matt’s death were hard, but I didn’t start to grasp his absence until years later. It felt like my classmates had forgotten him, and I longed to find a way to talk about Matt and remember him beyond his death.

1. In *You Were Here*, how do Jaycee, Natalie, and Mik find unique ways to acknowledge Jake’s life?
2. How do these coping techniques help them vent their grief so that they don’t turn into angry, embittered messes like Tyler?

When I first started this story, I only heard Jaycee’s voice in my head, but then Natalie and Zach started talking to me, and I knew that this wasn’t one girl’s experience, but a collective story. When it came to Bishop and Mik, I also knew they had their own unique voices to add, which led me to embrace the mixed format.

3. How do you feel like the art revealed Bishop’s heartbroken journey?
4. How is his first piece of word art in the journal different from his last, grand picture on the tower entrance of the old amusement park?
5. Similarly, how does Mik’s graphic novel sections reflect Mik’s personality and his selective mutism?
6. How do the panels demonstrate the evolution of his interest in Jaycee?

One of my favorite parts of researching this story was picking the urban exploring settings. I went to college at Ohio University and spent most of my time trying to get a close look at The Ridges. Both Randall Park Mall and Geauga Lake were places that I spent time in during my youth—of course they were open and in good shape back then.

7. Take a look at the epigraph and discuss the relationship between the ruin of a building and the ruin of a person. How do the settings in the book mirror the group dynamics in the story?
8. Compare and contrast the emotional tones of the murky Moonville Tunnel and the chilled, subterranean Gates of Hell.
9. Now compare and contrast the abandoned, still spookiness of the TB Ward with the purposefully vandalized chaotic remains of Randall Park Mall.

Make sure you look up images and videos of all the locations on the Internet to help with your discussion!