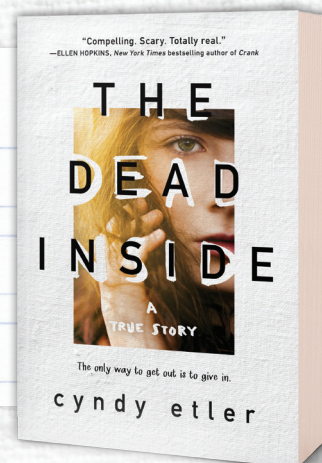


THE DEAD INSIDE: A TRUE STORY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

cyndy etler



For readers of *Girl Interrupted* and *Tweak*, Cyndy Etler's gripping memoir gives readers a glimpse into the harrowing reality of her sixteen months in the notorious "tough love" program the ACLU called "a concentration camp for throwaway kids."

All Cyndy wanted was to be loved and accepted. By age fourteen, she had escaped from her violent home, only to be reported as a runaway and sent to a "drug rehabilitation" facility that changed her world.

To the public, Straight Inc. was a place of recovery. But behind closed doors, the program used bizarre and intimidating methods to "treat" its patients. In her raw and fearless memoir, Cyndy Etler recounts her sixteen months in the living nightmare that Straight Inc. considered "healing."

"Compelling. Scary. Totally real."

—Ellen Hopkins, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Crank*

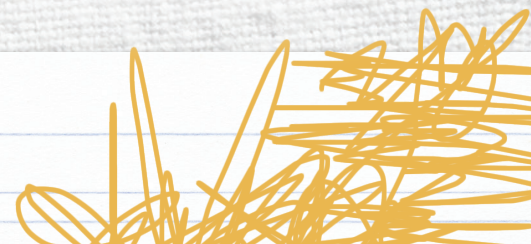


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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 teaches teens that books work better than drugs. She lives with her husband and dogs in North Carolina. Find her at CyndyEtler.com.



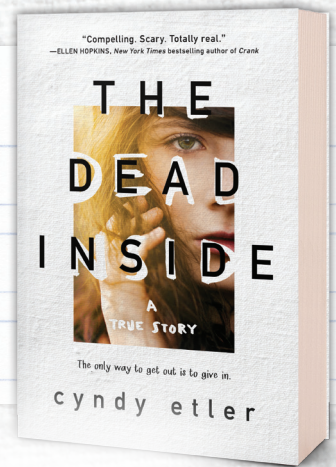
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1. Cyndy knows families who have taken kids in, but they don't invite her. She says, "I must be wicked annoying." Do you think that's the reason?
2. Cyndy gets to her boyfriend Steve's house and realizes she's never actually seen him before...and he grosses her out! But she fools around with him anyway. Why do you think she does this?
3. When Sandy's dad hugs Cyndy, she wonders how he's forgiven her, and if he knows what she did wrong. Did Cyndy do anything wrong? Was it bad enough to get her sent to Straight?
4. What does "The nail that sticks up must be hammered down" mean? Are nails allowed to stick up in your family/religious/social group? Why or why not?
5. Straightlings were eager to "report concerns" about other kids to a fifth-phaser. That was one of the only ways they could feel connected to another person. Is it common for people to bond by talking negatively about other people? If so, why?
6. In Hallmark cards and fairy tales, mothers are 100% unselfish and loving. Cyndy's mother would not be described that way. Are real-life mothers completely unselfish and loving? Is that realistic?
7. Amanda is singled out for extreme treatment because she fights back. What do you think happens to Amanda behind closed doors? Who are you more like: the rebellious Amanda or the eager-to-be-accepted Cyndy?
8. When Cyndy returns to her high school after Straight, she is strange, brainwashed, and so lonely, she wants to kill herself. Should social groups try to include isolated kids, no matter how strange they seem? What stopped Cyndy from committing suicide?
9. If you were Cyndy, what one thing would you have done differently? If you were a fairy godmother, what one thing would you give Cyndy?

