

Shouldn't there be an
unbreachable chasm between
love and hitting someone?

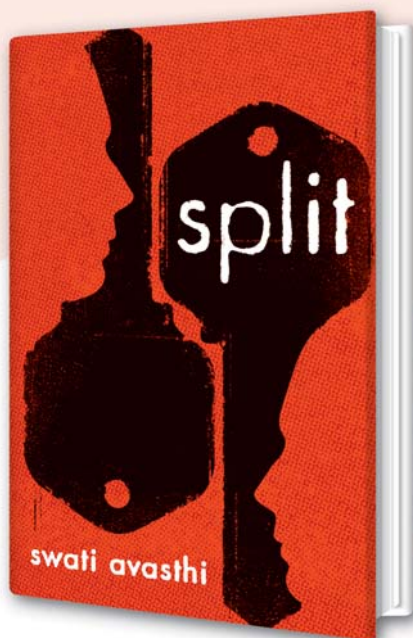
split

readers
guide

swati avasthi



about the book



Grades 9 up

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-86340-0

GLB: 978-0-375-96340-7

Listening Library CD: 978-0-307-57994-2

Jace's life is a roller-coaster ride marked by fear, guilt, anger, and violence.

After years of watching his mother and older brother, Christian, be the target of his dad's temper, Jace finally confronts his father in the way that he has learned from experience: with his fists. Kicked out of the house, Jace drives to Albuquerque in search of Christian, who escaped five years prior. Jace soon realizes that moving to a new city, making new friends, and reconnecting with his brother is just the beginning of the journey he must take to put the past behind him. Until he confronts his guilt about leaving his mother behind, his fears about who he could become, and the secret that gnaws at his conscience, Jace will never truly stop being brutalized by his father. Ultimately, the power of forgiveness, family, and love help Jace begin to heal and change the patterns that he is so afraid to repeat.



From the Book



I press my palm against the door, as if I can befriend it, get it on my side. I knock and wait. I know some people go all deer-in-the-headlights when they panic. Their lungs stop, their muscles freeze, even their brains silence. Me—my foot's on the gas and the map's flapping out the window. My imagination creates scenes in rapid succession:

He'll throw open the door and hug me until I can't breathe. He'll wrap an arm around my shoulder and say, "I've been looking out for you, even from here."

Or, maybe, I'll be overwhelmed by the sweet smell of pot, and his hair will be sticking up wildly, and he'll mug me for the \$3.84 I have left.

Or, maybe, my brother won't recognize me.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION



Discuss the prominent themes in the novel, such as deceit, betrayal, abandonment, blame, forgiveness, control, and healing. Reference passages from the book that present these themes. How are they relevant to domestic violence? Those who abuse others are driven by a need for power and control. How does Judge Witherspoon exert power and control over his family, beyond the obvious tactic of physical violence?



The book begins with the line, “Now I have to start lying.” What is *lying by omission*? Is withholding the truth actually lying? The keeping of secrets is a constant thread throughout the story. Discuss how secrets make toxic the lives of Jace and Christian. Christian describes his inability to be honest with Mirriam about his past as “the cold opposite of intimacy.” (p. 134) Discuss what he means by this phrase. What does Jace mean when he refers to Christian’s “guilt-inspired world”? (p. 138) Why does Jace cover for his father when he is given the opportunity to share the truth with Dakota? (p. 148) How is Jace’s confession on page 241 cathartic, and why was it necessary for Jace to move beyond his past? Why is Christian able to forgive Jace for not telling him about what happened with Lauren?



Throughout the book, Jace refers to himself as a “bastard.” In what other ways does Jace demonstrate his self-loathing? What patterns of Jace’s behavior are a direct result of both witnessing and being a victim of domestic violence? Is Jace a sympathetic character prior to the revelation of what happened with Lauren? How is he viewed after it is revealed what he is capable of? Jace hates himself for what he did to Lauren. What other issues fuel his self-hatred?



In chapter 16, Christian begins to open up with Jace. How is this a turning point for Christian, and how does it begin to set both brothers on a path of healing? How does Jace ultimately begin to break the patterns of behavior that lead to abuse? What does the “brain blister” that Jace refers to throughout the story represent?



Throughout *Split*, the author refers to a variety of novels and literary characters, such as Macbeth. Discuss and analyze the line from *Macbeth* that hounds Jace’s conscience: “I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er.” How does this line parallel Jace’s state of mind?



Throughout the book, Jace shares lessons of “fightology”: his own personal science of survival. Discuss these lessons in the context of one trying to exist in a home framed by domestic violence. What personal changes did Jace have to experience to develop what he calls “calmology”? Reread chapter 27. What role does forgiveness play in Jace’s transformation?



Reread chapter 30. How is accepting responsibility for what he did to Lauren a turning point for Jace? For Christian?

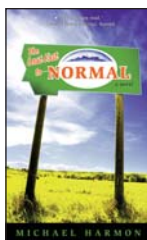
INTERNET RESOURCES

Child Welfare Information Gateway
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/domesticviolence.cfm

Jersey Battered Women's Service
www.jbws.org

Love Is Not Abuse
www.loveisnotabuse.com

RELATED TITLES



THE LAST EXIT TO NORMAL

Michael Harmon

Grades 9 up

Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-23994-9
Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-84098-2
GLB: 978-0-375-94098-9



LIKE A THORN

Written by Clara Vidal
Translated by Y. Maudet

Grades 9 up

Delacorte Press HC: 978-0-385-73564-3
GLB: 978-0-385-90552-7



RAGE

Julie Anne Peters

Grades 9 up

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-85209-1
GLB: 978-0-375-95209-8

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: Ann Marsden

Swati Avasthi teaches creative writing and is working toward her MFA at the University of Minnesota, where she received a grant to complete *Split*. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and their two children.

Prepared by Colleen Carroll, children's book author, curriculum writer-developer, and education consultant; Sleepy Hollow, New York.

Random House Children's Books • School and Library Marketing
1745 Broadway, Mail Drop 10-4 • New York, NY 10019 • BN1008 • 02/10