



The Quiet You Carry

By Nikki Barthelmess

Discussion Guide for Teachers & Librarians

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Guide Overview

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Sexual abuse, mental illness, suicide, and other similar topics, unfortunately, touch the lives of teens all around the country in every single demographic. Barthelmess's book provides students, teachers, and community leaders with an authentic way to engage in discussion on these important topics. We hope that this guide will:

- Begin a conversation with teachers, teens, and community leaders that focuses on prevention;
- Remind people that even our families may not violate us;
- Lead to the realization that all actions, including those "actions" of not doing anything, have a ripple effect with consequences.
- Get us talking about how our communities can help young people who are being abused;
- Increase our focus on the value and the limitations of being Quiet;
- Encourage students to seek out help when something feels wrong;
- Increase the empathy ratio in our neighborhoods and on our school campuses.

We hope that *The Quiet You Carry* will be a catalyst for improving life for all the Victorias not only in our schools, but in our communities as well.



Getting Help for Students

The Quiet You Carry is a novel that deals with very intimate and painful topics, including parental sexual abuse, rape, suicide—topics we would hope your students will never face. However, many young people will encounter these issues and more. Maybe you know one of these students? Make sure your schools have a procedure for handling reports of abuse, assault, self-harm, etc. Make sure your students understand the importance of reporting all instances of bullying, harassment, assault, etc. Having students practice reporting make-believe incidents will make it easier for them to speak up if faced with an issue.

Familiarize yourself with organizations that advocate for and assist people undergoing such issues. Here are just a few. Placing contact information for these organizations regularly on handouts to students is highly recommended.

For people living with mental illness or considering suicide:

- The National Institute for Mental Health collects resources about mental illness, a range of related topics, and the latest mental health research. www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml
- For people in a crisis situation, call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433).

For victims of sexual assault:

- Information from the Rape, Abuse, Incest, National Network (RAINN) is available at www.rainn.org/. You may also call RAINN at 1-800-656-HOPE to be connected with a rape crisis center in your area.

If you are looking for information about Foster Care in the U.S.:

- Children's Bureau
 - <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/focus-areas/foster-care>
- Children's Rights Fact Sheet:
 - <https://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/foster-care/>

Let's help lift the burden of Quiet in our schools.



Discussion Questions

First Things First

The Title

The title of this novel is "*The Quiet You Carry*." Reflect on the range of possibilities implied in this title. Quiet is often something greatly valued. It can be something feared. Quiet can be a symptom of problems, "*The children are too quiet!*" Quiet sometimes implies boredom and so much more.

- This title uses Quiet as a noun, something you can carry. Speculate on where one would carry this Quiet and why. Is the Quiet alive? Inanimate? Supernatural?
- A great title sets the tone for the entire book. How does the title set the tone for *The Quiet You Carry*?

Before

The Prologue

- After the title, the very first words we read are: "*Dad's door slams.*" A bit later we learn that the main character, Victoria, is telling this story. Yet our first word is "*Dad's.*" And the first action is passive. Dad is not slamming the door, but the door is slamming. What is Barthelmess setting up with a door that does not belong to Victoria being slammed, presumably by Victoria's father? Why did it not begin: "*Dad slams the door?*"
- Just as the first sentence begins with a passive voice, there are all sorts of hints from Victoria concerning the reason she is left in a dark hallway with a stranger. Look through the prologue and pull out the sentences and words that suggest what has happened, predict what Victoria will be carrying throughout the novel. As you read through, you may find yourself revising or clarifying what happened.



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- This prologue includes Victoria, her father, her stepsister, her stepmother, Police Officer McDonnell, and Fran from Child Protective Services (CPS). Victoria is being taken from her home against her will by CPS. Depending on the state you live in, the scenario in this prologue could look different. With the help of your librarian, research the laws and procedures for CPS to take custody of a minor in your area. Page | 5
- At the end of the prologue, Victoria is in a daze, hoping that the foster home Fran has mentioned is just part of a bad dream. What do you know about foster homes? How do foster homes function in your area? How does a person obtain permission to house foster children in your neighborhood? What licensing requirements does your state demand?

The Novel

Chapters 1-22

- The early chapters (beginning 2 weeks after the prologue) follow Victoria through Silver Valley High School as she meets her teachers and classmates, including Christina. The very first topic of class discussion is whether any of *"the lovely ladies have asked a young man to the Valentine's Day dance."* (p. 18). This evolves into a discussion of whether or not Sadie Hawkins is sexist. Given the fact that the details from the prologue are not crystal clear, how is Barthelmess guiding the tone by including elements like a teacher nicknamed Santa, Sadie Hawkins, and *Ms Magazine* immediately after the prologue?
- It is very clear that this school is different from Victoria's old school in Reno. Victoria does not think of Reno as a big city school. How do we see the school culture at Silver Valley High influencing the action of the book? What do you think are the major differences between Victoria's school in Reno and Silver Valley High?



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- Is there any significance to the fact that we see Victoria at school before we see her in the foster home that Fran hinted was in her future? In fact, the first we hear of Connie and her foster home is the list of all the trouble foster students get into: shoplifting, drugs, and prostitution. How does this influence how we initially feel about Mr. Gordon, Connie, Christina, Alex, and Silver Valley High?
- Think about the first impressions you leave with the people you meet. Is the way you think you present yourself the same way other people would describe you? Write a paragraph, from the point of view of one of your friends, describing you to the world. Have you ever left someone with a bad first impression? Is there any fast and effective way to correct a poor impression? Discuss this with your readers in a group. Keep a list of the ideas that seem to hold the most promise.
- Authors select the settings in which we view the main characters. Already we have seen Victoria with CPS, we have seen her in classroom that is discussing feminism, and we have seen her alone on a bench eating lunch. As you read this book, where else do we see Victoria? Put on your author's cap and speculate on why Barthelmess chose to show Victoria in, say, the County Jail? Perhaps even more difficult is the task of thinking about where we do not see Victoria. Are there any places that would have provided interesting information about Victoria's personality that are not depicted? Where else would you have liked to see her?
- Like many people, Victoria assumes that the truth of her life will affect how others treat her. Frequently she mentions her goal of just being normal. She fears that if people know what her father did to her, they will not be able to treat her normally. Her evidence for this feeling is shown in the scene where she meets Taylor at church (and later when Taylor is describing this scene to her friends). She thinks that the church ladies will pity her but not have any actual compassion for her. When she believes Taylor has figured out that she is a foster child, she thinks her life has descended to its worst level ever (p. 76). But does Victoria really have the evidence she thinks she has? What does she get right and what does she completely misunderstand? Reread those scenes again closely. If you were Christina, Kale, or even Taylor, what would you say to Victoria?



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- If you made a graph of Victoria's friendships with Kale and Christina that had a "normal" line, a below normal (poor relationship), and an above normal (really good relationship), what would Kale's and Christina's lines look like as we move from chapter to chapter? Is the fact that Kale becomes a boyfriend and Christina becomes a best friend influence these lines? When these relationships suffer, is there any common denominator? What would happen if you did a similar graph for Victoria's relationship with Jamie? What about Victoria and Connie? What about Victoria and Tiffany or Victoria and Sarah?
- As we move through this book, all the relationships develop and change. Think about Victoria's first impressions of Connie, Mindy, Mr. Nelson, Alex, Jamie, Annie, or even Kale and Christina. Write a synopsis of how these characters change throughout the novel, especially in terms of how they interact with Victoria or how Victoria views them. Are there any hints that foreshadow character changes?
- Consider everything that happens at Victoria's school—classroom interactions, lunch time conversations, volleyball games, teacher and staff relationships, descriptions of the lunchroom (or areas of the campus). How is Silver Valley High the same as schools you know? How is it different?
- One huge part of the Quiet Victoria carries is the sexual abuse she suffered. This Quiet becomes even heavier when Victoria realizes that Sarah is at risk. Victoria assumes that she cannot tell anyone of her plan to go see Sarah. Her conversations with Connie lead her to believe that Connie would tell her to stay away and trust the system. Reread these conversations with Connie and reread the section in which Christina tells Victoria that she has told her mother the plan. Did Victoria interpret the situation accurately? What did she understand correctly? What did she miss?



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After Epilogue

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- We saw Victoria's involvement with Child Protective services from the very beginning and all the way through to the *After* section in which Mindy and Victoria have one final awkward conversation and meeting. How would Victoria evaluate the services of Fran and Mindy and their organization? Would Victoria's evaluation be fair? Explain. What tangible or even implied actions did CPS do for Victoria and her family? How did they fall short?
- Look back through the text at the sections that feature Tiffany. If you were Victoria, would you be visiting Tiffany? Does Tiffany's apology and explanation to Victoria seem plausible?
- The last two words of this book are "*Me, too.*" Why do you think the author made this choice?



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Thanks for Reading

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Writing reviews is a great way for students to practice summarizing and interpreting their reading. It also helps the book reach more people!

After finishing this guide, in 120 words or less write an annotation of this novel or go to Goodreads, Barnes and Noble, Amazon, or your independent bookseller's website and post your review there.

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