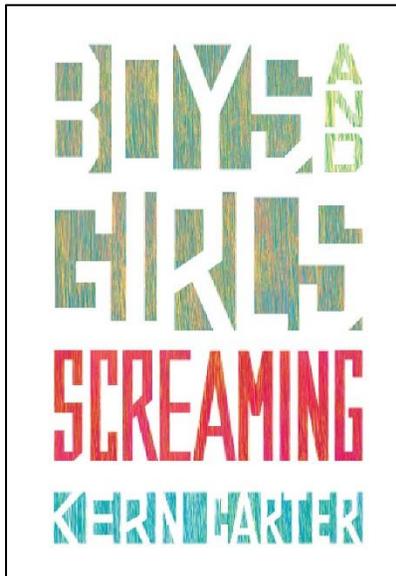


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***Boys and Girls Screaming* by Kern Carter Teacher's Guide**

Created by Martha Brack Martin with support from Kern Carter and the Cormorant Team



Boys and Girls Screaming introduces us to three affluent teens who are struggling to cope with life-changing, traumatic events that have rocked their “perfect” worlds. This book is especially great for use in book clubs and reading groups (e.g., literature circles). Teens will find much to discuss, from the pros and cons of privilege to the nature of relationships, the many faces of trauma and its effects, and the ways in which people cope and support each other. The messages in the novel support curricula addressing mental wellbeing and healthy living, as well as English.

Themes

Some key themes and “big ideas” in this book include:

- The ways people cope with trauma
- Family
- Identity
- Loss
- Privilege
- Resilience

The Plot

When Ever’s father passes away suddenly, she is devastated. Not long after that, her mom has a stroke and Ever’s anguish becomes almost too much for her to handle. That’s when she gets the idea to form a group she calls “Boys and Girls Screaming.” Along with her brother Jericho,

and her best friend Candace, Ever wants to bring together kids from their school who have suffered trauma so they can share their stories and begin to heal.

Although the other teens find solace in the group, Ever tumbles further into depression until she reaches a breaking point. As the group learns the true source of Ever's pain, they jump into action to help her find a way out.

The Setting

This story takes place in Oakville, Ontario in the present.

What Kind of Reader Will Love This Book? One who...

- Loves stories featuring teen drama and relationships
- Is fascinated by affluence and its trappings
- Wants to understand more about trauma and how people deal with it
- Likes contemporary stories told with realistic voices
- Enjoys stories told from alternating perspectives

Pre-Teaching Prep

Trigger Warning: This book deals with recreational drug use, underage drinking, addiction, parental abandonment, suicidal ideation, and mental health issues in both children and adults. Consider the life experiences of your students. To improve your own awareness and support your students, some resources are provided below.

Trauma and PTSD:

<https://cpa.ca/sections/traumaticstress/simplefacts/>

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/trauma>

<https://www.ventureacademy.ca/troubled-teen-blog/3-common-types-of-trauma-teens-experience/>

<https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=post-traumatic-stress-disorder-in-children-90-P02579>

<https://resilienteducator.com/classroom-resources/trauma-informed-teaching-tips/>

Suicide:

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/understanding-suicide-and-finding-help/>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/suicide-prevention/suicide-canada.html>

<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/suicide>

Teen Substance Abuse:

<https://www.teenchallenge.ca/get-help/canadian-drug-crisis>

Chapter Questions (for Independent Work or Group Discussion)

Pick and choose the questions that work for *your* students in *your* classroom. Use as many or as few as you like. All page number references are for the original paperback edition, 2022.

Before Reading:

Show the class the cover of the book. What do they notice? What do they wonder? Ask them to predict what they think the book is about based on the title.

Part 1: Candace (pages 3-22)

1. What do we learn about Candace's early childhood? Compare this to the upbringing of her "fake mom," Julia. Do you believe that trauma can influence more than one generation? Explain.
2. Candace recounts that "all I wanted to do was keep painting" (p. 4) when she was rescued by the building superintendent and Mrs. Heard. What does this tell us about Candace and her coping abilities?
3. When Candace and Ever meet in grade 1, Candace hands Ever the paintbrush "kept from my old life" (p. 10). What does Ever do with it? Why is this particularly significant?
4. Candace's new lifestyle is very different from her life with her "fake mom." Use three examples from the text to show this.
5. When Ever and Candace are in the hospital waiting room, Candace describes Ever's silence, saying "It was like watching her scream with no sound" (p. 19). How do you express your strongest feelings? How effective is your method? Explain.

Part 1: Jericho (pages 23-42)

6. Jericho shares a story about stealing and getting caught while at leadership camp. What do you think this incident shows about Jericho's character and how he sees himself?
7. How would you describe Jericho's relationship with Ever? How about his relationship with Candace? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
8. Do you think Ever really told Jericho to "go under" at the pool party? Why or why not?
9. When Jericho tries hard drugs for the first time, he narrates his experiences in detail. Why do you think the author chooses to include this scene?

Part 2: Jericho (pages 45-59)

10. How does Ever force her mother out of her self-pity?
11. What were the "three adjustments" Cy had to make in her life?

Part 2: Candace (pages 60-78)

12. Candace reflects that Ever "wasn't this broken when her dad was in the hospital, but I think pain was still new to her then" (p. 61). What are the clues that suggest Ever is "broken" by the tragedies she's faced? Have you ever felt "broken"? How did you deal with it?

13. Candace suggests Ever speak to someone about her feelings, yet reflects that she herself isn't ready to speak to a therapist. Have you ever suggested advice to someone that you weren't willing to take yourself? Why is it easier to give advice than to take it? Explain.
14. Candace's mom tells her to always protect her mind. Why do you think she feels this is important? Do you agree?
15. What do you think of Ever's idea to start the "Boys and Girls Screaming" group? Would you have shown up that first session if you were one of the kids invited? Why or why not?

Part 2: Jericho (pages 79-96)

16. The author uses this second meeting of BAGS to update us on Candace's relationship with her "fake mother," Julia. How did the other kids in the group respond to her story?
17. Do you believe that sharing your troubles can make them easier to handle? Why or why not? Discuss your ideas with the class.
18. Ever, Jericho, and Candace all quickly come up with people they think would benefit from the BAGS group.
 - a. How do you feel about the criteria they use?
 - b. Would you be able to identify peers from your school that would be candidates if you had a BAGS group?
 - c. How visible is trauma in today's teen world? Explain.

Part 2: Candace (pages 96-135)

19. Ever tries to explain her feelings about her personal trauma. Do you understand what she was trying to say? How do you feel about it?
20. James shares his story and his coping method, and before long the whole group is partying. Are you surprised by what happens next? Explain.
21. Would your family respond the same way as Cy does, if you were in Ever's shoes? Why do you suppose she reacts the way she does?
22. What do you suspect happened in Niagara Falls when Ever was younger? On what are you basing your theory?
23. Should Candace have read Ever's diary, in your opinion? Discuss your feelings with the class.
24. Candace goes from a highly charged situation with Ever right into another highly charged situation with Julia. Have you ever experienced a day when it seemed like everything was piling on top of you? How did you cope? Channel your thoughts into a poem or narrative about that day.
25. How do you feel about the way Julia's relationship with Candace is progressing? Discuss.
26. Do you think Ever should have told Jericho about what happened at Niagara Falls prior to sharing it with the BAGS group? Why or why not?

Part 2: Jericho (pages 136-139)

27. In your opinion, why does James decide to tell Cy about what Ever saw?

Part 2: Candace (pages 140-149)

28. Cy seems willing to answer the kids' questions, but then suddenly admits she can't and leaves. Now that you know a bit more, has your prediction about the family mystery changed?
29. Candace says, "It's like we're all in a movie without a script, just making shit up as we go" (p. 142). Some would say this is the definition of being a teenager. Others would say it's true for everybody, regardless of their age. What do you think? Share your ideas with your friends.
30. Candace has a hard time telling Julia about her privileged lifestyle, "Not because I had never recognized my privilege, but retelling it felt like showing off even though it was my real life" (p. 143). How hard is it to recognize your own privilege? How important is it? Explain.
31. Ever is offended when Julia comments that Candace's parents are not Black but are raising a Black daughter. Ever replies, "That's never been a problem" (p. 147). What does Julia mean when she says, "That's always a problem, dear?"

Part 2: Jericho (pages 150-153)

32. In order to get Ever's help with the search for Reyna, Jericho is willing to reach out to Candace, even though he blew her off for a month. What does this say about their relationship? Do you think he would have reached out to her anyway? Explain your thoughts.

Part 2: Candace (pages 154-164)

33. Why is Ever able to reach James when no one else seems able to do so?
34. Ever says "parents do shit sometimes that we can't understand" (p. 160). How does this statement apply to many of the parent-child relationships in the novel? Use evidence in the text and your own ideas to prove your answer.
35. Have the adults in your life done "shit" that you couldn't understand? How did you handle it?
36. What do you think of the plan to meet Reyna? Share your thoughts with the class.

Part 2: Jericho (pages 165-170)

37. When Jericho remembers his trip with his father to Kingston, his grief is palpable.
 - a. Discuss the different ways the characters in the book grieve.
 - b. Have you ever found yourself grieving? Did anything make it more manageable? If you are willing, share your experience with a friend or the class.

Part 2: Candace (pages 171-180)

38. How do you feel about the way the kids' plan manipulated Julia and Reyna?
39. Do you understand Ever's feelings after the big reveal? What advice would you give her?

Part 2: Ever (pages 181-193)

40. This is the first chapter where we see the story through Ever's perspective. Why do you think the author chooses to make Ever the narrator now?

41. How are Ever and Jericho dealing with the family secret? How do you know?
42. On page 186 Ever reflects on the value of the BAGS group, saying, “we might not know how to solve all the problems, but we sure knew how to bring them to the surface. And isn’t that the most important step? Or the hardest step?” Would you agree with Ever that bringing problems to the surface is more important than solving them? Explain.

Culminating Activities

Give students the opportunity to make connections to the world and themselves, as well as to other texts, and to choose their own way of demonstrating them. Here are some other activities to consider at the end of the novel:

If I Had a Million Dollars:

Candace and her mother live in a small apartment when the story begins. When she goes to live with the Heards, however, Candace experiences a very different lifestyle. Her adoptive parents are extremely wealthy, as are the parents of Ever and Jericho.

Why do you think the author chooses to give Candace such an affluent new homelife? How does this setting help to advance the plot and the author’s message? Discuss.

Be Social

Social media is a huge part of life today. We know the kids in the story text frequently, and Ever is an influencer on Instagram (“@EverAfter”).

Choose a character from the story. Think about the type of social media that character would be most likely to use. Who would follow that character? What would their profile look like?

Design an imaginary account for your character of choice. Then create some content (a series of posts, a story, etc.) that corresponds to events in the book. Be creative and have fun with this but remember to stay in character!

What Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Stronger

The characters in this novel have all experienced substantial trauma. They each have their own way of dealing with it – or avoiding it – but by the end of the book, they are on their way to better mental health.

There’s a saying that “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” but do you share that belief? Think about your own life. Has this philosophy proven to be true in your own experiences or those of your friends and acquaintances? Discuss this with the class.

Music Therapy

Jericho often relies on music to help him cope with his stress. Music therapy is an actual treatment and has proven to be effective (<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/December-2016/The-Impact-of-Music-Therapy-on-Mental-Health>).

Do you find music therapeutic in your own life? What kinds of songs, artists, or styles do you go to when you need to decompress?

Create a playlist for a character in the book. Select 5-10 songs and explain why you chose each one for the character. You can attach each one to a specific scene in the book in which that character is featured or simply select songs that address specific aspects of the character's personality.

Art Therapy

Art therapy is another recognized approach to help people process their trauma or improve their mental health in general. You can read about it here:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-art-therapy-2795755>

There are many different arts that fall under the arts therapy umbrella. After researching them in the article above, select one that interests you personally. Explore your technique of choice, alone or with others in the class. (Though you don't have a professional arts therapist working with you, you can at least get some idea of how the therapy works.) You may even want to explore more than one technique.

When you are finished, write a reflection about your experiences. Then share the creations you have made with the class as a whole. You may even decide to present the class creations to the school in a display or as part of an assembly.

Exploring the Same Themes in Different Texts

After reading *Boys and Girls Screaming*, consider reading *I'm Good and Other Lies* by Bev Katz Rosenbaum (9781770866324), *Firefly* by Philippa Dowding (9781770865983), *White Lies* by Sara De Waard (9781770866492), or *The King of Jam Sandwiches* by Eric Walters (9781459825567). How are some of the same themes repeated in these stories? How are they handled differently?

Create a presentation comparing the themes in your choice of books. Use your presentation software of choice or go "old school" and create a visual presentation using your art skills.

Take Action

The BAGS group was formed to fill a need that Ever recognized in herself and her peers. Do you see the same kind of need in your school community? Is there some *other* group in your school or local community that could benefit from support in some way?

Think about what your school or local community lacks in terms of ways to support all or some of its members. Then think about how you could initiate or create a way to address this need. Make a plan that considers what steps will be required and who needs to give approval, then make a presentation to sell your idea.

Interview with the Author

Martha: Hi Kern! It's great to meet you!

Kern: Hi Martha, great to meet you, too!

Martha: What made you decide to write this book? Tell me about your motivation.

Kern: I know this is a simple question, but it's difficult for me to answer. There wasn't a single incident or thought that pushed me to write *Boys and Girls Screaming*. It's been a culmination of events and observations, along with the fact that I just really love writing and was itching to write another story. The simplest answer to this question is that I wanted to write a story that vividly reflected and captured this generation. I'm someone who is super connected and curious about pop culture, and when I listen to young people express themselves through social media, I hear a lot of screaming. And not screaming in the most literal sense. I mean they are showing their vulnerability, expressing their emotions, and venting their frustrations in direct and indirect ways. So even though I haven't seen too many videos with young people actually screaming, I'm listening and reading in between the lines and can almost hear their cry for help. I wanted to tell a story that makes these kids feel heard while also giving adults a raw glimpse into their minds.

Martha: Did you stick closely to your initial vision for this book, or did you find yourself making significant changes?

Kern: Martha, you have no idea LOL. I went through several versions of this novel. In total, I'd say I deleted about 80% of the original story. I kept the main characters, but the story changed drastically from first to final draft.

Martha: What is your writing process like? Are you an "outliner" or do you prefer writing and seeing where the story takes you?

Kern: Definitely NOT an outliner. However, I do think through the main character in my head. I think a lot about who they are and what obstacles they're facing. But that's about it. Once the main character is clear in my mind, I start writing.

Martha: This is the third book you've written. Do you start with characters? Plot? Something else? What tips do you have for prospective young writers?

Kern: I start with characters, always. Actually, I'm someone who is very title driven. Meaning the title of the story dictates a lot of how the plot unfolds. For example, I knew that *Boys and*



Photo by Filena Arcia

Girls Screaming would be the title for this book while I was writing my last book. I loved how those words sounded together and what it could potentially mean.

Martha: I heard that you very intentionally wrote Candace's adoptive parents as white. Can you talk a little about that choice?

Kern: Yes! I love this question because it's such a huge part of the novel but not the part that's put front and center. It almost feels subtle that Candace's adoptive parents are white, but it would have a huge impact on her upbringing. What I want the reader to think about is what really defines a parent. Is it blood? Is it presence? Is it being a provider? Is it love? This question of parenting is one of those themes that plays out in the background but slowly comes to light as the novel progresses. And especially with the way the novel ends, the question of what defines a parent is central to this story.

Martha: So what about making them wealthy?

Kern: Another theme I wanted to explore was wealth and the effect it has on children. With Candace specifically, there's a bit of contrast from her former life, but she was only five years old when her "fake mother" abandoned her. She essentially grew up wealthy. Again, I was thinking about the reader and about popular culture and our obsession with wealth and wealthy people. Most of the characters in this novel fall under that category, yet they all suffer through trauma. Is there a difference, though? Does their access to resources make it easier to deal with or heal from trauma? Or do they experience trauma any differently than non-wealthy folks? Candace's fake mother never had access to the help she needed till she came back into Candace's life. Would their relationship have been different had she gotten that access earlier?

Martha: Speaking of Candace's fake mother... When Julia comes to dinner at Candace's house, she speaks very emphatically about race – specifically about how she presumes Candace has been raised. That whole scene blows up very quickly. Lots of high emotions. Was that an easy or challenging scene for you to write?

Kern: It was easy but emotional. I knew exactly what I wanted to write, but I found myself feeling so bad for Julia. She was trying, but in that moment, the disconnect between her former life and the life she was trying to become a part of was too far apart. She couldn't reconcile a world where race wasn't front and center. In her mind, leaving was her only option, despite knowing the consequences.

Martha: In her years with Julia, Candace had been exposed to things that would make a child grow up very quickly. Yet Ever came off to me as the stronger and more mature one in the earlier chapters. Did I misinterpret that? Did you consciously make her strong at the start, so we could see the depths of her struggle later in the story?

Kern: I love that you caught so many of the nuances of this story. Makes me feel like it was worth it to write this novel with so many layers.

Martha: Oh, it definitely was! So much in one book!

Kern: OK, so from one perspective, yes, it would make sense that Candace's experience with her fake mother made her strong, and in many ways it did. But what it really did was make her self-sufficient, which isn't the same as being strong. The truth is, when Candace meets Ever, she's broken. She's a child that's largely been left to her own devices, and as a toddler, that lack of nurturing and attention could negatively impact her emotional maturity. I wanted to contrast that with the confidence of Ever, who comes from a strong, nuclear family. Ever already knows who she is by the time she meets Candace in first grade. Candace's strength increases gradually, and her maturity is clear, but those first interactions with Ever are when she is most vulnerable.

Martha: You did something interesting with the way the book is presented. Within the "Jericho" or "Candace" pages, you sometimes include small numbers, presumably suggesting chapters. What was your intention there? Can you explain?

Kern: Good question. The first part of the book is told in past tense. It's Jericho and Candace each getting three "chapters" to set up the rest of the novel. The second part of the novel is told in present tense. Everything is happening in the moment, and so I alternate between Candace and Jericho more frequently. The reason I include their names at the beginning of each "chapter" is to make it simple for the reader. I don't want them guessing, even for a moment, at who is speaking. This also plays well because when the reader sees Ever's name at the end, it's like a cool surprise.

Martha: I understand team sports were big in your family. Both you and your brother were major athletes. I found it interesting that the main characters in the story weren't really engaged in anything that would have given them a purpose – like sports or school. Was this intentional? Were you trying to show that kids without a team or a hobby are more likely to get lost?

Kern: I wanted the characters to have interests outside of sports (at least traditional sports because Candace does ride horses). It would've complicated the story if any of the characters played a team sport.

Martha: Well now that the book is out there, what do you hope to inspire in your readers as they turn the last page?

Kern: I want readers to know that friendship and community are invaluable parts of life. I want young people reading this to know that good friends are worth more than anything and that their connection to those friends is enough to keep them emotionally fulfilled. I want adults reading this to reflect on their childhood. Would a group like *Boys and Girls Screaming* have helped them growing up? I also hope adults gain a bit more insight into the thoughts of young people and understand how they are affected by the world and their environment.

About Kern Carter

Kern Carter was born in Trinidad and raised in Toronto, Canada. He is a full-time writer and founder of CRY Creative Group, whose mission is to build and inspire a community of emerging writers connected by the power of vulnerability and creativity. Kern is the author of the recently published YA novel *Boys and Girls Screaming* (DCB/Cormorant Books), the forthcoming MG novel *Is There a Boy Like Me* (Scholastic/2024), and upcoming YA novel *And Then There Was Us* (Tundra/Penguin Randomhouse/2024). He has previously self-published two titles.

Related Weblinks and Resources for Further Learning

<https://www.beyondthepenpodcast.com/teens-helping-teens-heal/>

<https://www.kerncarter.com/>

<https://writersaresuperstars.substack.com/>

<https://medium.com/cry-mag>