

READING GROUP
GUIDE



HC: 9781682635964 · e-book: 9781682635971

Things I'll Never Say
by Cassandra Newbould

“A forceful exploration of the complexities of love and loss.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

ABOUT THE BOOK

A beautifully raw coming-of-age story examining what it means to crush on your two best friends at the same time.

Ten years ago, the Scar Squad promised each other nothing would tear them apart. Even when Casey Jones Caruso lost her twin brother Sammy to an overdose and their foursome became a threesome, the squad picked each other up. But when Casey’s feeling for the remaining members—Francesca and Benjamin—develop into romantic attraction, she worries the truth will dissolve them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the central theme of the novel? Discuss other more minor themes. How are the minor themes related to the central theme?
- What is the relationship between theme and conflict in a story? What is the central conflict in this novel? Debate whether the conflict is totally resolved.
- How are the letters that Casey Jones writes to her dead brother, Sammy, an effective way of revealing her emotional state? What do the poems contribute to the plot and theme? Explain the title of the book.
- Casey’s therapist encourages her to write her feelings in a journal. Explain why the therapist tells her to burn the journals when they are complete.
- Read the poem “Opioid Crisis.” How does the poem speak to issues related to opioid addiction among teens?
- Debate whether Casey knew that Sammy was in a crisis. Casey wonders if Sammy overdosed on purpose or if it was an accident. Would the answer change the grief that she is experiencing? How is Casey about to be in a drug crisis herself?
- Casey often refers to the promises that she and Sammy made to each other. Why does Casey say that Sammy broke his promise to her? Explain how she internalizes this broken promise on graduation day.
- Describe the Scar Squad. What is the pact they made with one another? Is it a realistic promise? How does Sammy’s death change the Scar Squad? What other things threaten their existence?
- The squad renews their pact at the end of the novel. Discuss what might happen now that Ben is off to Harvard.

- At what point does Casey realize that she is bisexual? How do her parents react? Discuss how Casey responds after Ben kisses her for the first time. Why is she so afraid to tell him that she also has feelings for Frankie? What is Ben's reaction when she finally tells him?
- Casey is grieving Sammy's death. Consider the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. How does Casey experience each stage?
- Explain what Frankie means when she says that for the first year after Sammy's death, Casey died too. How does Nonno's death affect Casey? Explain how Casey and her dad become united in grief.
- What advice might Casey offer to teens who are plunged deep into an opioid crisis? Discuss what she might tell them about Sammy. How is there hope at the end of the novel?

ABOUT THE CREATOR



Cassandra Newbould is the editor of and a contributor to the YA intersectional, fat, feminist anthology *Every Body Shines* and the author of the contemporary YA epistolary *Things I'll Never Say*. As host and creator of the *Fat Like Me* podcast, Cassandra has discussed the need for more intersectional body diversity in kid lit. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with her family. When she's not writing, you can find her at a poker table reminding the other players to never underestimate the power of a determined girl and her cards.