

YOU CAN'T UNSTRIKE THE MATCH . . .

**WHERE
THERE'S
SMOKE**

E. B. VICKERS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

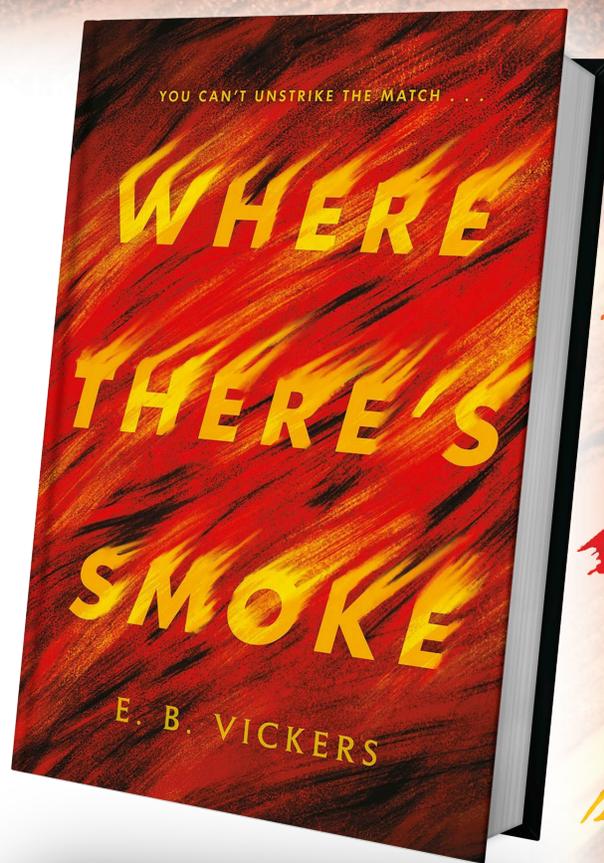
Based on the novel by E.B. Vickers

PRE-READING QUESTIONS:

1. Based on the Stephen King epigraph and the first poem "in the beginning," what kind of a story do you anticipate *Where There's Smoke* might be?
2. What is a monster? What is a ghost? Consider options from mythology, folklore, fairy tales, etc.
3. Do you agree with the idea that monsters and ghosts live inside us? If so, what monsters live inside you? What ghosts? And what does it look like when they win?

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES:

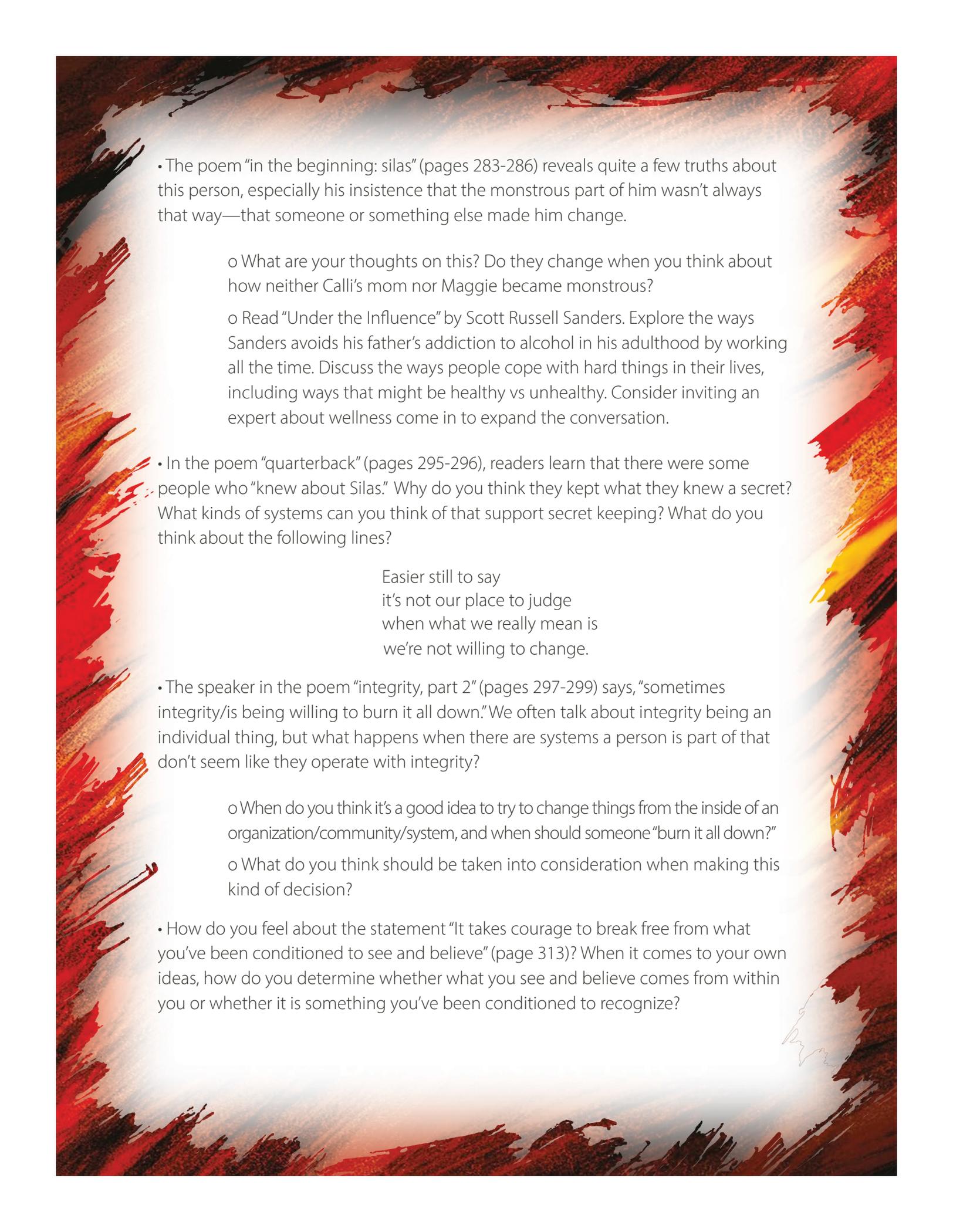
- There are several moments in the first chapter when Calli says she hears her dad's voice. Do you think she is actually hearing it? What cultural ideas about the afterlife do we sometimes embody or embrace as a society?
- In the first chapter, Calli hears/feels her dead father's insight. What do you make of someone who is set to pursue a health science career engaging with religion and/or ghosts? Is the author setting up a ghost story? What qualifies as a ghost story?
- Free Writing Prompt: Are the ideas of secrets and privacy the same? Write about what you consider to be the similarities and the differences.
- In "ingredients, part 2" (page 22), we read a second poem that refers to a monster. How does this compare with the kinds of monsters we might originally have considered? When we think about monsters in modern society, what kind of person/creature gets that designation?
- We get a closer look at grief in chapter 8 (pages 71-75). For a long time, experts



referred to stages of grief (denial, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance) and believed that movement through those stages indicated how well someone was overcoming grief (Kubler-Ross Model). Now it's widely accepted that crossing between these experiences isn't something that happens in a specific order or only once AND that many people experience grief often, even over small things. Consider how we might react when we find out something we wanted to watch is no longer available, when our favorite cereal is discontinued, etc.

- o What have you grieved in the last week or two? How did you cope with that loss?
 - o Write about something bigger you have grieved, be it a loved one, pet, relationship, failure, etc. How did you cope with that loss?
 - o Write a poem about grief. Decide on a speaker (it doesn't have to be you) and the weight or cost of what has been lost.
 - o With student permission, display poems in the classroom. (Anonymous sharing encouraged.)
- Read "survival guide" (pages 76-78) aloud.
 - o What do you think the speaker of this poem is talking about? What are the textual clues that support your theory? (List all ideas on the board.) Discuss why people come to different conclusions.
 - o What kinds of things would you put into your own survival guide? What mistakes do you know how to avoid? What mistakes have you already learned from? What kind of coping skills do you lean into when you need to survive?
 - Think, Pair, Share
 - o Page 141: In recent chapters, we have been presented with several characters who feel a bit like the barn: part clean and sterilized, part ramshackle and messy. Using clues from the text, try to piece together a complete picture of Dylan, Bishop Carver, Officer Keller, and Officer Hunt.
 - Read chapter 24 aloud (pages 254-261).
 - o Why do you think so many people dismiss problematic or destructive behavior in someone they know, even when they have witnessed them engaging in such behavior?
 - o Ask students to consider who, in the celebrity world, they no longer support based on past behaviors and/or accusations. Are there others for whom they've been willing to forgive or look past problematic behaviors? What makes the difference? Are there certain "sins" we are more willing to forgive than others? Are we more or less likely to condemn someone who is part of our culture or community versus someone we see as "other"?

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• The poem “in the beginning: silas” (pages 283-286) reveals quite a few truths about this person, especially his insistence that the monstrous part of him wasn’t always that way—that someone or something else made him change.

o What are your thoughts on this? Do they change when you think about how neither Calli’s mom nor Maggie became monstrous?

o Read “Under the Influence” by Scott Russell Sanders. Explore the ways Sanders avoids his father’s addiction to alcohol in his adulthood by working all the time. Discuss the ways people cope with hard things in their lives, including ways that might be healthy vs unhealthy. Consider inviting an expert about wellness come in to expand the conversation.

• In the poem “quarterback” (pages 295-296), readers learn that there were some people who “knew about Silas.” Why do you think they kept what they knew a secret? What kinds of systems can you think of that support secret keeping? What do you think about the following lines?

Easier still to say
it’s not our place to judge
when what we really mean is
we’re not willing to change.

• The speaker in the poem “integrity, part 2” (pages 297-299) says, “sometimes integrity/is being willing to burn it all down.” We often talk about integrity being an individual thing, but what happens when there are systems a person is part of that don’t seem like they operate with integrity?

o When do you think it’s a good idea to try to change things from the inside of an organization/community/system, and when should someone “burn it all down?”

o What do you think should be taken into consideration when making this kind of decision?

• How do you feel about the statement “It takes courage to break free from what you’ve been conditioned to see and believe” (page 313)? When it comes to your own ideas, how do you determine whether what you see and believe comes from within you or whether it is something you’ve been conditioned to recognize?

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

- What do you think is the purpose of forgiveness? What have you been taught about forgiveness, and what have you learned through experience?

- o Watch “Why Forgiveness is Worth It,” a TED talk by Sarah Montana.

- o Have students research other ideas about forgiveness. Set up a debate about whether Calli and/or Ash should work toward forgiveness. Does this matter for these characters even if Silas is dead?

- o Have students create a flow chart or timeline of what might happen for Calli and/or Ash after the story ends in terms of forgiving Silas.

- Philosophers have been debating for centuries about what makes a person good. The TV show *The Good Place* and the book *How to Be Perfect*, both written by Michael Schur, provide ways to make moral philosophy accessible. Consider using some of the following resources and questions:

- o How good is good? How bad is bad?

- o Can one really good behavior eliminate a lifetime of bad? Can one really bad behavior cancel a lifetime of good?

- o Is Silas bad? Is Ash good? How does someone decide?

- o Additional resources:

- o Clip from *The Good Place*: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ut0ai4s4mjU

- o Ted Talk: “How Ethics Can Help You Make Better Decisions” by Michael Schur

- Consider the definition of dehumanize: to address or portray (someone) in a way that obscures or demeans that person’s humanity or individuality” (Merriam-Webster) as well as the idea that “Dehumanization has fueled innumerable acts of violence, human rights violations, war crimes, and genocides” (Brené Brown). With these ideas in mind, how do you feel about using the non-human term “monster” to describe Silas—or anyone else? Do you agree with the author’s usage of this term? (It may help to revisit “fairy tale” on page 122.)

- *Where There’s Smoke* gives readers insight into both the way Calli practices her spirituality as well as some of the religious traditions of the neighboring community. Invite students to do a study on a world religion and present their findings (see suggestions on next page.)



World Religions Presentation

Create a professional presentation in which you explain the origins of an established religion of your choice. Some religions you can choose from include, but are not limited to, the following:

Wicca

Druidism

Hinduism

Jainism

Buddhism

Sikhism

Taoism

Confucianism

Shinto

Zoroastrianism

Judaism

Catholicism

Greek Orthodox

Russian Orthodox

Islam

Baha'i

Rastafarianism

You have the following criteria to select from and must include at least ten, a minimum of one slide for each.

- Beginning: Who, When, Where, How
- Deity
- Rites of Passage
- Names of Sacred Texts
- Idea of Paradise, Heaven, Salvation
- Core Beliefs
- Religious Practices/Laws
- Rules for Moral Conduct
- Rituals
- Important Words/Terms
- Common Symbols
- Creation Myth/Familiar Stories
- Particular Dress and/or Accessories
- Hierarchy/Organization

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ABOUT THE BOOK:

In this fast-paced thriller, eighteen-year-old Calli finds herself alone after the loss of her father—until a bruised and broken girl shows up on her property, forcing her to face the present, rethink her future, and unearth the skeletons of her own past.

Life has never been easy in the small desert town of Harmony, but even on the day Calli Christopher buries her father, she knows she is surrounded by people who care about her. But after the funeral, when everyone has finally gone home, Calli discovers a girl on her property. A girl who's dirty and bruised and unable to speak. And petrified.

Calli keeps the girl secret—well, almost secret. She calls her Ash and begins to nurture her back to health. But word spreads in a small town, and soon a detective comes around asking questions about a missing girl from another town. But these only raise more questions—about Ash *and* about the people Calli knows well. Still, she must ask: is Ash *in* danger...or is she the danger?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

E.B. Vickers is the acclaimed author of the young adult novel *Fadeaway*, which appears on multiple state award lists, including a Top Ten on the Texas Tayshas Reading List. She is also the author of several middle-grade novels as well as picture books. She grew up in a small town in the Utah desert, where she spent her time reading, exploring, and asking questions. Several years and one PhD later, she found her way back to her hometown, where she now spends her time writing, teaching college chemistry, exploring with her family, and still asking questions.

PRAISE FOR WHERE THERE'S SMOKE

"A twisty thriller that delves into tough emotional topics."

—Kirkus Reviews

"The page-turning plot combines with appealing, authentic characters for a solid and satisfying read."

—Booklist

"Vickers adeptly creates tension in this thriller, breaking up chapters with interludes in poetic verse...Readers will enjoy this fast-paced thriller and its many plot twists...A recommended purchase for school libraries."

—School Library Journal

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