

READING GROUP GUIDE

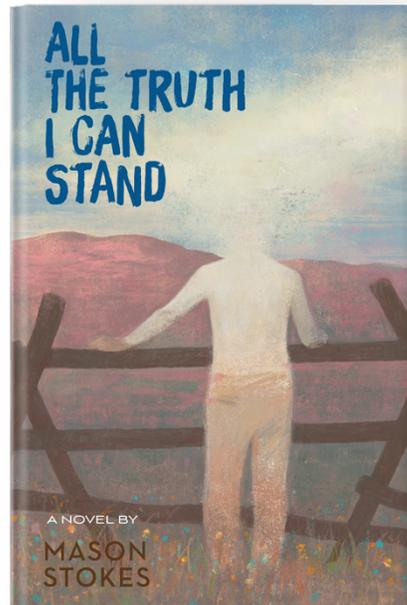
ALL THE TRUTH I CAN STAND

Written by Mason Stokes

\$18.99 US / \$24.99 CAN
ISBN 9781662680885 HC
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Ages: 14 and up
Grades: 9 and up

Guide written by Mason Stokes



ABOUT THE BOOK

A gay teenager in 1990s Wyoming must contend with the violent loss of a loved one in this historical YA novel that draws from the tragic murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998.

Juniper, Wyoming, high school student Ash is still reeling from his mother's death and ostracization by his friends when his father signs him up to join the crew for a college production of *Oklahoma!* Ash is slowly drawn out of his shell by student reporter Jenna and the star of the show, Shane, with whom a romance slowly blooms. Shane is talented, sensitive, and magnetic, but also deeply troubled. When Shane is found brutally beaten and unconscious, Jenna and Ash are shattered. And after Shane dies, they watch his death become a rallying point for gay rights advocates, and they wonder what the full story is and if they truly knew Shane at all.

ALL THE TRUTH I CAN STAND is a heartbreaking exploration of grief and legacy and details the good and the bad that can come to pass when an imperfect person is made into a symbol.

ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS


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PRAISE FOR *ALL THE TRUTH I CAN STAND*

★ “Keen prose meditates on the nature of violence fueled by bigotry and its effects, making for a layered and provocative telling that will encourage readers to critically examine their own behaviors and perceptions.” —***Publishers Weekly***, starred review

“Even though the prologue signals that tragedy lies ahead, the novel doesn’t feel predictable—instead, it carries an eerie sense of dread. Ash’s closeness to Shane carefully brings Shane’s story into vivid focus without conveying a feeling that Ash is speaking for him... A tender fictionalization that sheds light on human complexity.”—***Kirkus Reviews***

“Stokes has done an excellent job of incorporating real life into his fictional narrative.” —***Booklist***

“Stokes sticks close to the facts of the real-life murder of Matthew Shepard, whose tragic death and complicated life are explored through Shane as a proxy, and the book ultimately asks the reader how perfect a victim must be to become a martyr and what we lose of a person’s true self when we cast them as a saint.”

—***Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books***

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The novel’s epigraph makes a claim about history. How does this quote apply to the story that follows?
- *Oklahoma!* functions as a story-within-the-story. What echoes do you notice between *Oklahoma!* and the plot of the novel? What’s the effect of having this text-within-a-text?
- Prior to the events of the novel, Ash and Jenna have both lost someone they loved. How do these losses shape their responses to Shane’s murder?

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- Early in the novel, Jenna tells Ash that Shane made up a story about being raped while on vacation with his family. What did you think of Shane when you learned this, and how did this knowledge influence your experience of the rest of the novel?
- Despite being two years younger than Shane and less experienced, Ash is the one who initiates their first kiss and pushes for a more physical relationship. What do you think gave him the courage and confidence to make the first move?
- The story is set in the late 1990s. Were there elements that felt alien to you, given the time difference? What effect did the historical setting have on you as a reader? Could you imagine some of the novel's events happening in the present day?
- Ash is critical of the people who attend the vigil for Shane at the hospital. Is there a different way to understand these peoples' motivations? Would you have attended such a vigil, even if you didn't know the victim?
- Stokes describes the novel as "speculative historical fiction." What do you think of this category? Is it fair to speculate about events in the past and include that speculation in an historical novel?
- Watching the members of the Westboro Baptist Church protest Shane's memorial, Ash begins to feel his grief turn to anger. Later, he says he welcomed this change. Why? How are grief and anger different? What does each make possible?
- Chapter Twenty-Two lays out the arguments as to whether Jenna should publish what she and Ash have learned about Shane. Whose side were you on? Did Jenna ultimately make the right decision?
- The final scene of the novel takes place at the fence where Shane was left to die. Why was it important for Ash and Jenna to visit this place?