



RIDING CHANCE DISCUSSION GUIDE

by Christine Kendall

Book Summary

After thirteen year-old Troy's mother dies and his father withdraws into grief, he's got nothing to rely on except his long-time friend, Foster. Or so he thinks. A minor scrape with the law lands the two friends in a mentoring program where they work with horses and discover a sport totally new to them—polo. Immediately, Troy is captivated by a girl at the stables but it is a horse, Chance, who steals his heart and eventually allows him to feel safe enough to be himself. But Chance can't protect him from the jealousy of another polo player, aggressive policing in his big city neighborhood, or the shifting tides of his friendship with Foster. Troy must summon the courage to determine his identity on his own. (Ages 10 and up)

Questions to discuss

Key Ideas and Themes

1. Troy's connection with Chance begins with a fascination and grows into a mutually loving and respectful relationship between the young man and his horse. Discuss the powerful bonds that can develop between humans and animals. Have you experienced a bond with an animal? Explain.
2. Foster never gets completely over his fear of horses. Is Foster's fear rational? What are some important things to keep in mind when working with horses?
3. Troy and Alisha differ in background and expectations. How are their challenges similar? How are they different?
4. How does Troy handle Jerome's bullying? Do you agree or disagree with the way Troy responds to the situation. What strategies would you use if you were Troy?
5. Troy is humiliated by the stop and frisk incident and fears additional encounters with the police. Why do you think he feels this way? What is at stake for him?
6. Discuss the role of the adult characters in *Riding Chance*. Who are the positive role models and how do they help Troy and Foster develop? How does Mr. Glover stand out?
7. Although a setting, Fairmount Park acts as another character in the book. How would you describe Troy's relationship with the park? Have you had a similar experience with the natural world? Explain.
8. What do you think of Jerome and Lay-Lay's actions? Do you empathize with them? Why or why not?
9. Describe Troy and Foster's friendship. How do their personalities differ?
10. Trust is a major issue for Troy. What does he learn about managing vulnerability? What does Winston mean when he tells Troy he has heart?

Craft and Structure

11. *Riding Chance* is written in the first person point of view. What are the pros and cons of the story being told from Troy's perspective?
12. Numerous recurring images appear throughout the book. Name at least two. What is their significance?

13. Discuss the use of humor in the story. What purpose does it serve?
14. A well-structured novel enhances the reader's experience with a story. One or more scenes or sequences of continuous action form a chapter. A series of chapters make up most novels. One way to analyze the structure of a novel is to briefly summarize the important parts of each scene. For example, during the first scene, Troy meets with a social worker and learns he'll be placed in a prevention program. Choose one or two consecutive chapters and analyze the action scene by scene.

Additional Activities

15. Imagine that you are placed in a new environment like Troy is at the stables. Write a paragraph about how you would make the transition from outsider to a member of the group.
16. As Troy's relationship with Chance develops, his success inspires his entire family to be more physically active. This is an example of synergy. Discuss examples of synergy from your own life or from current events.
17. The sport of polo has been played for thousands of years. Research the game and its history in the United States. Write a one-paragraph summary of your findings.
18. Philadelphia has several neighborhoods with small streets like the one Winston lives on in Society Hill. Research the origin of these streets and describe what it was like to live and work on them during earlier times.

Author Information

Christine Kendall grew up surrounded by a family of artists filled with ample creative energy. Before being bitten by the writing bug she enjoyed a career in law firm talent management. She has attended numerous writing conferences including Bread Loaf and the Southampton Writers' Conference where she studied children's literature. Her short fiction has appeared in *Niche Literary Magazine* and is forthcoming from the *Kweli Journal*. *Riding Chance* is her first novel. Christine lives with her husband in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.