

I CAN MAKE *this* PROMISE

Christine Day

Discussion Guide



Booktalk

In her debut middle grade novel—inspired by her family’s history—Christine Day tells the story of a girl who uncovers her family’s secrets—and finds her own Native American identity.

All her life, Edie has known that her mom was adopted by a white couple. So, no matter how curious she might be about her Native American heritage, Edie is sure her family doesn’t have any answers.

Until the day when she and her friends discover a box hidden in the attic—a box full of letters signed “Love, Edith,” and photos of a woman who looks just like her.

Suddenly, Edie has a flurry of new questions about this woman who shares her name. Could she belong to the Native family that Edie never knew about? But if her mom and dad have kept this secret from her all her life, how can she trust them to tell her the truth now?

Questions for Group Discussion

1. After finding the box in the attic, Edie asks her parents, “Why am I Edith?” and “Where did my name come from?” (pg. 49) What is the story behind Edie’s name? By the end of the book, how does she feel about her name?
2. Why are our individual names important? How do our names connect us to the places and people we come from? What is the story behind your own name?
3. “The recognition dawns on me slowly. I do know this landscape. I do know this place.” (pg. 236) What are some significant locations throughout this story? What are the histories behind these places? How do these histories impact Edie’s journey? How do these settings connect Edie to the other characters?
4. Edie and her family live in ancestral Suquamish and Duwamish territories (Seattle, Washington). Who are the Native peoples of the area where you live? Did they sign any treaties? What happened to them in the past? What are they up to now?
5. “There are countless tribal nations throughout this land.” (pg. 187) How many federally recognized tribes currently exist within the United States of America? Does this number accurately represent the diversity of Native peoples? Why or why not?
6. In one of her letters, Edith Graham writes: “I must admit, I’m homesick. It’s lonely being the only Indian woman around.” (p. 143) Do other characters feel lonely throughout this book? Can you identify any patterns or similarities between their moments of loneliness?

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7. In contrast, where are the moments of joy and triumph? When do the characters feel hopeful? Can you identify any patterns or similarities between these moments of happiness?
8. Over the course of this novel, Edie's friendships change. Take a moment to reflect on her relationships with Amelia, Serenity, Libby, and Roger. What is the nature of Edie's relationship with each person? How are these characters significant to Edie's growth?
9. Who is Bruno? How does Bruno's journey change and evolve alongside Edie's? Are there any connections between his story and Edith Graham's? Are there connections between Bruno and Edie's mom?
10. How does Edie's identity as an artist change over the course of the book? What are her main sources of inspiration? Do you think her artwork is influenced by her identity as a biracial Native (Duwamish/Suquamish) girl?
11. What is the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978? Why is this piece of legislature so vital to tribal nations, families, and communities?
12. Take a moment to reflect on the prologue and epilogue: "Where are you from?" and "Where are you going?" What is the significance of these chapter titles? How do they relate to Edie's coming-of-age arc?
13. Why do you think the author chose the title: *I Can Make This Promise*? What is the main promise Edie makes in this story? How does she fulfill this promise in the book? How might she honor it in the future?
14. Make your own promise. Reflect on the people, places, memories, and experiences that are most important to you. What can you do to fulfill this promise right now? How might you honor your promise in the future?



Photo by Jessica Wood

About the Author

Christine Day (Upper Skagit) grew up in Seattle, nestled between the sea, the mountains, and the pages of her favorite books. She holds a master's degree from the University of Washington, where she created a thesis on Coast Salish weaving traditions. *I Can Make This Promise* is her first novel. Christine lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband.

