



RIDING CHANCE DISCUSSION GUIDE

by Christine Kendall

(Ages 10 and up)

Book Summary

After the death of his mother and his father's withdrawal into grief thirteen year-old Troy goes from sneakers to riding boots. He's got nothing to rely on but his boy, Foster, and his natural charm. 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. Troy is captivated by a girl at the stables but it is a horse, Chance, who steals his heart and gets him to let his guard down, something he never does. 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 for himself.

Author Information

Christine Kendall grew up in a family of artists where she was surrounded by lots of creative energy. She studied children's literature at the Southampton Writers' Conference and was named a semifinalist in the 2014 River Styx Micro-Fiction Contest. Before becoming an author, Christine worked in the field of law firm talent management. She was honored to join the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc., to coordinate the fiftieth-anniversary commemoration of the

historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. *Riding Chance* is her first novel. She lives with her husband in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Questions to discuss

Key Ideas and Themes

1. Troy's attachment to Chance begins with fascination and grows into a mutually loving and respectful relationship between the young man and his horse. What kinds of experiences have you had with animals? Discuss the powerful bonds that can develop between humans and animals.
2. Foster never gets completely over his fear of horses. Is that a rational concern? What are some important things to keep in mind when working with horses?
3. Describe how Troy and Alisha differ in background and expectations. How are their challenges similar and how are they different?
4. Discuss how Troy handles Jerome's bullying. What strategies would you use in a similar situation?
5. Troy is humiliated by the stop and frisk incident and fears additional encounters with the police. 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 among them?
7. Fairmount Park is another character in the book. How would you describe Troy's relationship with the park? What, if any, experiences have you had in the natural world?
8. What do you think of Jerome and Lay-Lay's actions? Do you empathize with them? Why or why not?
9. 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

10. *Riding Chance* is written in the first person point of view. What are the pros and cons of the story being told through Troy's perspective?

11. Numerous recurring images appear throughout the book. Can you name at least two of them and their significance?

12. Discuss the use of humor in the story. What purpose does it serve?

13. A well structured novel enhances the reader's experience of a story. One or more scenes, sequences of continuous action, form a chapter and a series of chapters are what make up most novels. One way to analyze the structure of a novel is to state the important parts of each scene in one sentence. For instance, in scene #1 Troy meets with the social worker and learns he'll be placed in a prevention program. In scene #2, Foster researches horses and polo so he and Troy will look knowledgeable when they show up at the stables. Choose one or two contiguous chapters and analyze them scene by scene.

Additional Activities

14. Imagine that you are placed in a new environment like Troy is at the stables. Write a paragraph about how would you make the transition from outsider to member of the group?

15. The sport of polo has been played for thousands of years. Research the game and its history in the United States.