

Discussion Guide

Choke

by Diana Lopez

About the Book

If she could—if her parents would let her—eighth-grader Windy would change everything about herself. She'd get highlights in her hair and a new wardrobe; she'd wear makeup. But nothing ever changes. The mean girls at school are still mean, and Windy's best friend, Elena, is still more interested in making up words than talking about boys.

And then one day, Windy gets the change she's been looking for. New girl Nina—impossibly cool, confident, and not afraid of anyone—starts hanging out with Windy! Nina even wants to be “breath sisters.” Windy isn't sure what that means exactly, but she knows she wants to find out. It sounds even better than a BFF.

Windy is right, at first. Being a breath sister gains her a whole new set of friends—girls she feels closer to and cooler with than anyone else. But her inclusion comes at a dangerous price. Windy wants to change everything about her life...but is she really willing to give up everything in the process?

Discussion Questions

- One of the major themes in *Choke* is a desire for acceptance. Contrast the different ways that Windy, her father, Elena, and Liz seek acceptance. Also consider how seeking acceptance can be both a good and a bad thing.
- *Choke* has several recurring images: cats, weather, scarves, ice skating, Top Five lists. What role do these images play? In what ways are they symbolic?
- Windy has several mentors, people who try to guide her in the right direction. In what ways do Windy's parents and her friends, Elena and Mrs. Vargas, guide her? Why does she sometimes resist their advice?
- Nina is an interesting character because she is both nice and mean. Why does she have so much power over the other girls? How does she use this power for good and for bad? What is your overall opinion of Nina? Do you like/dislike her? Explain why.
- The novel explores the choking game. Why are young people attracted to this dangerous activity? What are the risks and what consequences does Nina experience?

Personal Responses to the Book

- Windy’s father’s beliefs about how he should look come from the newscasts he sees on TV. Do find yourself wanting to look or act like characters on TV? What role does the media play in forming your viewpoints about what you consider acceptable or not acceptable?
- Windy feels pulled in two directions as she tries to be friends with both Elena and Nina. Write about a time you felt caught between two people and about how you handled this situation. You can write about friends or family members.
- Windy experiences peer pressure when Nina encourages her to play the choking game, but peer pressure can also be a positive force as when Elena encourages Windy to be good. Discuss a time when peer pressure tempted you to do something wrong. Or, discuss a time when peer pressure encouraged you to do something good.

Suggestions for Creative Writing

- What do you think happens after *Choke* ends? Write a short story that serves as a sequel.
- Windy writes many Top Five lists. Try writing your own. You can rewrite one of the Top Five lists in the book or come up with your own.
- Elena loves word-morphing. Create a glossary of your own word-morphs. Consider using meanings from common prefixes, suffixes, and root words.

About the Author

Diana López is the author of *Confetti Girl*. She was a middle school teacher for more than a decade, and saw firsthand the disturbing “choking game” trend. Currently, Diana teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Houston in Victoria, Texas. For more information about Diana and her books, visit her online at www.dianalopezbooks.com.

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