

Discussion Guide for **PURGE** by Sarah Darer Littman



Scholastic Press ISBN 0-545-05235-1

Summary

Janie Ryman hates throwing up. So why does she binge eat and then stick her fingers down her throat several times a day? That's what the doctors at Golden Slopes hope to help her discover. But first Janie must survive everyday conflicts between the Barfers and the Starvers, attempts by the head psychiatrist to fish painful memories out of her emotional waters, and shifts in friendships and alliances among the kids in the ward.

In order to get better, Janie must talk about things she's admitted to no one – not even herself. Laced with danger, insight, and humor, *PURGE* is one girl's remarkable and daring journey to make herself well again.

Discussion Questions

1. *"Sometimes I feel like a journal is the one place I can be honest and real, where I don't have to weigh my word and worry about what I'm supposed to say and who I'm supposed to be."* p.3

Janie often speaks of the pressure to fulfill the expectations of others – her parents, her friends, boys. How does this affect her self image?

2. As part of art therapy, Janie is asked to draw a personal mandala, (p.77) which she finds difficult. Why do you think she finds it so hard? If you had to draw your own mandala, what are the things you would put in the center, the things you consider most important to you?

3. *"As soon as I finish eating, it's like this tape starts playing in my head: "You are SO FAT! What the hell did you eat that for?"...Did I used to be able to eat a bar of chocolate without hearing that critical voice in my head?"* p.29-30

Do you ever hear a critical internal voice around food and eating? If so, what age were you when you first became aware of it? Are there any ways you've found to help silence that voice?

4. Bethany's mom keeps a laptop in the kitchen to keep track of the nutritional content of everything her kids are eating. Tinka's father commented that she was getting "a little chunky around the ass" while she was trying on jeans in Abercrombie (p.73). Royce's father boasts about his low body fat percentage, and criticizes his mother for eating dessert. Some of Janie's friends at school are taking diet pills and some, like Nancy, are purging too.

Have you experienced offhand remarks about weight, food and/or dieting? At home? At school? How do these make you feel? Do you know kids at school who diet or seem to be obsessed with weight? What's your opinion about dieting? Brainstorm some ways that you can promote healthy self-esteem at home and in your school.

5. *"Research shows that women who look at advertisements featuring thin, beautiful women experience greater dissatisfaction with their bodies and increased symptoms of depression after looking at them for less than three minutes."* p.68

Do you see a wide variety of body types on TV and in the media? Do you think the media influences your feelings about how people should look? If you could talk to a magazine editor or the producer of TV shows aimed at teens, what would you say to them? Discuss how someone can determine what his or her healthy weight should be.

6. *"I'm afraid that without [bulimia], I'll crumple into a heap of nothingness on the floor. But on the other hand, what if letting go is like being unshackled from leg irons that have been weighing you down? What if doing it makes you so light and free that you can fly?"*

What do you think bulimia gives Janie that makes it so hard for her to overcome it? What are some of the strategies she learns to use during the course of her treatment instead of purging?

7. When Janie is asked to come up with ten adjectives about herself, she only writes one positive thing, smart. (p.45). What are five positive things you can say about yourself that have nothing to do with your appearance?

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http://sarahdarerlittman.com/eating_disorder_resources.html**