

Charm & Strange

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the significance of the title *Charm & Strange*. What does it mean? Why is it important in the story?
2. Examine the character of Andrew Winston Winters. How does he change throughout the course of the novel?
3. The novel is structured in alternating chapters in the past and present. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story this way?
4. Discuss the idea between real and imaginary in this book. What is real to Andrew? What is imaginary?
5. The author uses foreshadowing throughout the book to help reveal the truth about Andrew's father. Go back to the text and reference specific points where this foreshadowing can be found. Explain how each works to show the secrets of Andrew's past.
6. Look at the titles of the book Andrew finds when he goes into the biology lab:

Neuroscience
Biopsychology
Origin of the Species
Philosophical Investigations

What is the significance of these titles? How do they relate to Andrew and the story?

7. The school motto is "*Ad astra per aspera,*" which is Latin for "To the stars, through difficulty." Stars are referenced often in the story. Where do we see them? What do they symbolize?
8. Why does Andrew's grandmother seem to hate him? Analyze her view toward him and explain why she might act this way.
9. What role does Keith and Charlie's relationship play in the novel?
10. When Andrew goes away to boarding school, he changes his name from Drew to Win. He says that his father's name is Winston. Why would he choose his father's name? What is significant about this?
11. What is the wolf in Andrew a metaphor for? Do you believe that Andrew really does have a wolf in him waiting to come out? Why or why not?

12. Discuss the night when Anna and Ricky kill a man. How is this event significant to the story?
13. When Jordan and Lex visit Andrew in the hospital, Jordan asks if being in the hospital has helped him. Andrew's response is, *Yes, it's helped...but you've helped more*. How has Jordan helped Andrew? How has Lex helped him?
14. While reflecting back to standing on the bridge with his siblings, Andrew recalls, *I looked at Keith and he looked at me. I didn't have to pull my hand back before they jumped. He let go*. Why do you think Keith let go?
15. The book ends with these words:

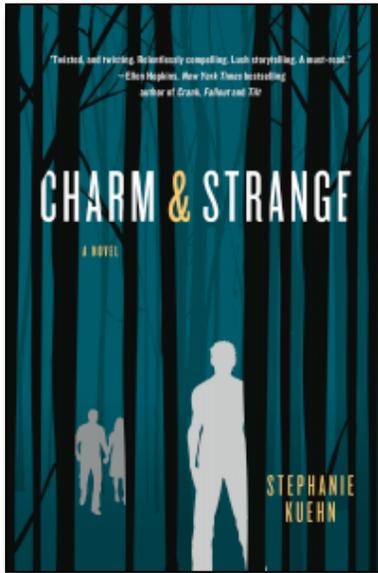
*Somewhere, somehow, adrift in the sea and far from the stars, I've found faith.
In myself.
And that makes all the difference.*

How has Andrew found faith?

Further Exploration

16. We read books for enjoyment, but sometimes we discover that books can teach us things. What has *Charm & Strange* taught you? Describe in detail.
17. *Charm & Strange* is written in first person POV. Select a scene in the book and re-write it in a different POV. How does this change the novel? What POV do you like better? Explain your view.
18. All forms of child sexual abuse can have a lasting negative impact on survivors. However, sexual abuse by a parent (parent-child incest), can be particularly damaging. Why do you think this is? How is this expressed in the story?
19. One of the major themes in the book is discovering who your true self is. Where do we see examples of this? How does this theme develop throughout the book and how does it affect the outcome. Cite specific textual examples to support your responses. Additional Question: Can you think of any other stories, poems, movies, or songs that have this same theme? Describe them.
20. What statement is the author making about family? Explain using specific examples from the text.
21. One could argue that this is a coming-of-age story. Support this claim using specific examples from the text. Then, dispute this claim. How is this not a coming-of-age novel?
22. Do you believe that people can escape their pasts? Why or why not?

About the Book



When you've been kept caged in the dark, it's impossible to see the forest for the trees. It's impossible to see anything, really. Not without bars.

Andrew Winston Winters is at war with himself. He's part Win, the lonely teenager exiled to a remote Vermont boarding school in the wake of a family tragedy. The guy who shuts all his classmates out, no matter the cost.

He's part Drew, the angry young boy with violent impulses that control him. The boy who spent a fateful, long-ago summer with his brother and teenage cousins, only to endure a secret so monstrous it led three children to do the unthinkable.

Over the course of one night, while stuck at a party deep in the New England woods, Andrew battles both the pain of his past and the isolation of his present. Before the sun rises, he'll either surrender his sanity to the wild darkness inside his mind or make peace with the most elemental of truths—that choosing to live can mean so much more than not dying.

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About the Author

Stephanie Kuehn holds degrees in linguistics and sport psychology, and is currently working toward a doctorate in clinical psychology. She lives in Northern California with her husband, their three children, and a joyful abundance of pets. When she's not writing, she's running. Or reading. Or dreaming. Please visit at www.stephaniekuehn.com.



This guide aligns with Common Core Standards ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10.