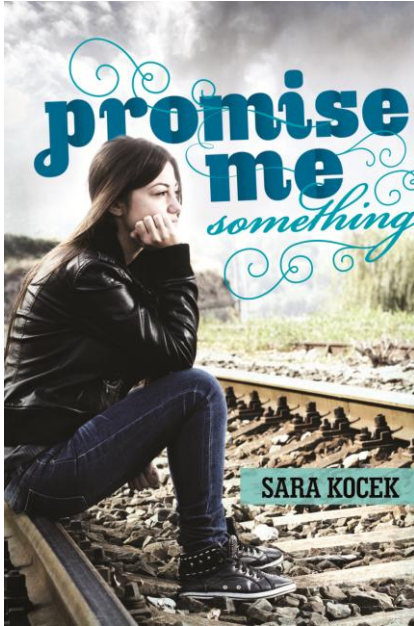


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Discussion Guide for **Promise Me Something** by Sara Kocek



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Ages: 13-18, Grades: 7-12

Plot Summary

As if starting high school weren't bad enough, Reyna Fey has to do so at a new school without her best friends. Reyna's plan is to keep her head down, help her father recover from the car accident that almost took his life, and maybe even make some friends. And then Olive Barton notices her. Olive is not exactly the kind of new friend Reyna has in mind. The boys make fun of her, the girls want to fight her, and Olive seems to welcome the challenge. There's something about Olive that Reyna can't help but like. But when Reyna learns Olive's secret, she must decide whether it's better to be good friends with an outcast or fake friends with the popular kids. . . .before she loses Olive forever.

Reviews

★“High school as crucible of character is a mainstay of teen fiction, but seldom have its dilemmas and dramas been so precisely re-created in all their brutal, claustrophobic intensity as in this debut: part morality play, part suspense tale. . . .Compelling, honest storytelling.”—
STARRED REVIEW, *Kirkus Reviews*

“Kocek's hard-hitting first novel offers smart dialogue, sharp descriptions, and a plot that unfolds in unexpected ways, as she explores the destructive power of casual, everyday homophobia. . . .”
Publishers Weekly

Common Core State Standards

CCR-RL.9-12.1,2,3,4,5,6,10

Discussion Questions

1. *Promise Me Something* is told mostly in the first person by Reyna, but is this really her story? Is Reyna or Olive the protagonist?
2. The story switches between a first-person narrative and the viewing of an online discussion between two characters. How does the author use discussion boards to move the plot? Reveal character insights?
3. How would Olive's coming-out scene have read differently if it had been told in third-person? From Olive's point of view?
4. Despite Olive's urging her to “follow your better nature,” Reyna often chooses to do or say things in order to fit in. Think about recent time when you have done the same. More generally, do you become someone different with different groups of people?

5. Do you think a Mr. Murphy could exist in your school? Would you or your fellow students report a teacher who says anti-gay (or other prejudiced) remarks in class and to his students?
6. Is Olive a bully?
7. Olive publishes the following poem in the school's literary journal:

*Turn the knob, Rachael Ray. The stove is hot.
Sprinkle me with sea salt. Set me on the pan.
I'll evaporate like steam. I'll disappear for you.
I'll be nothing but an empty calorie, a statistic.
Don't think straight, it'll kill you.*

What does it mean? How does it make you feel? What is Olive's intent in publishing it? Does Reyna eventually come to understand its meaning?

8. How do Reyna's actions following Olive's "death" enable her to finally heal from her mother's death and break through the lethargy she's been feeling since the start of high school?
9. As the title implies, trust is a major theme of the book. What is the biggest promise you ever broke? How did the consequences change you? Others?

About the Author



Sara Kocek received her BA in English from Yale University and her MFA in Creative Writing from New York University, where she taught fiction and poetry to undergraduates. A freelance editor and college essay coach, Sara has served as the Program Director at the Writers' League of Texas, a literary nonprofit. She lives in Austin, Texas. This is her first book. www.sarakocek.com