

FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

Discussion Guide

GOING UNDER

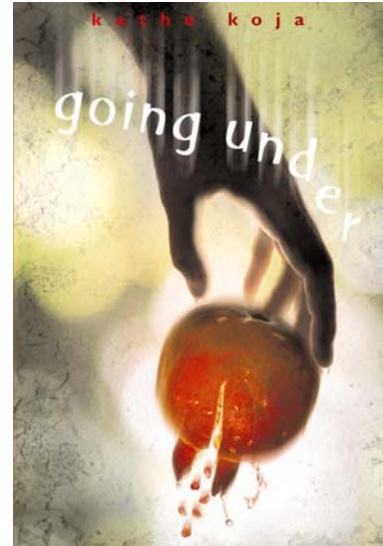
by Kathe Koja

Grade Level

Grades 9 and up / Young adult

Introduction

Hilly and her brother, Ivan, have been homeschooled by their parents. All their lives it has been just the two of them—Ivan and Hilly, brother and sister, pilot and copilot—until Hilly breaks out of their cozy cocoon to work on the local high school literary magazine as an extracurricular activity. Ivan feels betrayed: it's no longer just the two of them. And when Hilly goes into a depression after the suicide of a friend she has made at the magazine, she drifts even further away from Ivan. Hilly's parents insist that she see a psychotherapist. Ivan steps in to help manage Hilly's recovery by taking her to and from her appointments, but he compounds their estrangement by establishing his own relationship with the manipulative therapist.



Through the alternating voices of Hilly and Ivan, and drawing on the myths of Persephone and Narcissus, Kathe Koja explores the souls of two teenagers caught in a world where love takes you deeper than you ever dreamed you'd go.

Discussion

1. Compare and contrast Hilly and Ivan. How is their relationship alike or different from other brother/sister relationships you are familiar with?
2. What role do the parents play in the story? What are Hilly's and Ivan's relationships like with their parents?
3. How has Elisha's death affected Hilly and how has it impacted Hilly's relationship with her brother? What does Ivan think of his sister's reaction to her friend's death?
4. Marshall says at one point in the story: "It's always been between Ivan and you" (p. 81). How do you think that Ivan and Hilly become the people they are in the story? How did their upbringing shape their respective characters?
5. From what we are told, Hilly has always trusted and looked up to Ivan. Do you think that Hilly is losing trust in Ivan? Why/why not?
6. How does Ivan view himself throughout the story?
7. In the second-to-last chapter, Ivan finally defines his relationship with Hilly as "pilot to pilot" (p. 116). How will this definition affect their relationship if and when Ivan returns home?
8. Hilly and Ivan identify with the mythological characters of Persephone and Narcissus, respectively. What do they learn about themselves as they better understand these mythological characters? Does what they learn help them to better understand one another? Does it help to improve their relationship?

9. How does Dr. Roland manipulate Hilly and Ivan? What effect does this have on their relationship?
10. Do you think that Hilly needs therapy to deal with her friend's death? Why is Ivan so insistent that Hilly continue her therapy?
11. The novel is told from both Hilly's and Ivan's points of view. Why do you think that the author wrote the story this way? How would the story be different if there were only one narrator?
12. Hilly's dialogue is set in italics. Why do you think the author does this? What effect does this create?

About the Author



Kathe Koja is the author of several notable books for young adults, including *Buddha Boy* and *The Blue Mirror*, both ALA Best Books for Young Adults. She lives near Detroit, Michigan, with her husband.

For more information on Kathe Koja:
Web sites:

www.fsgkidsbooks.com

Includes a biography of the author and additional information about her novels.

www.kathekoja.com

Contains more information about the author and her books.

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