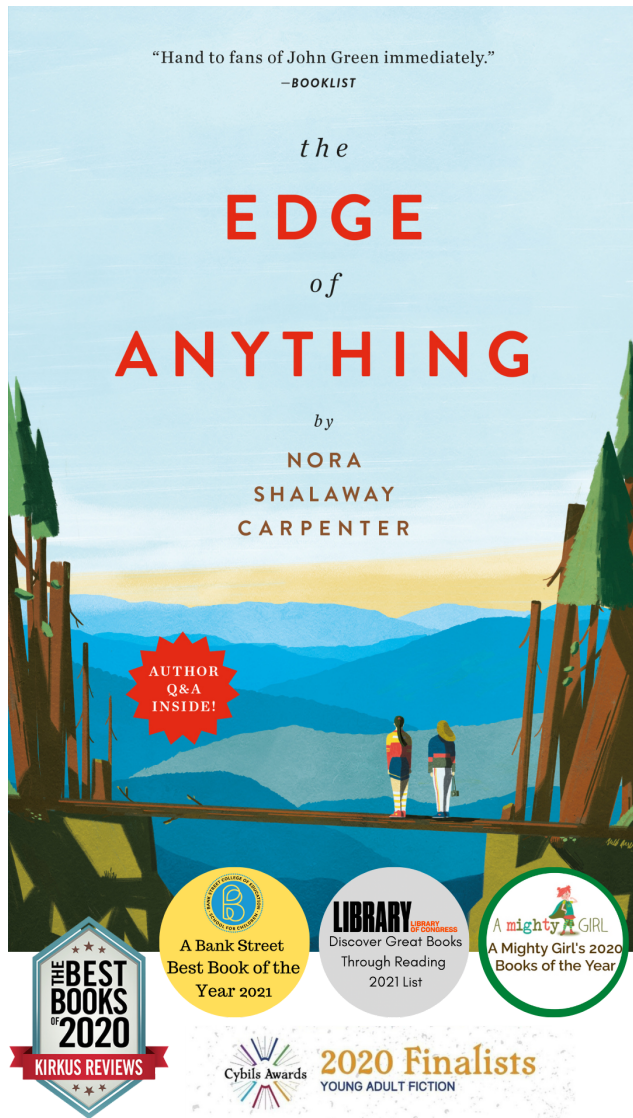


The Edge of Anything discussion guide

by Nora Shalaway Carpenter



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About the Book

Len is a loner teen photographer haunted by a past that's stagnated her work and left her terrified she's losing her mind. Sage is a high school volleyball star desperate to find a way around her sudden medical disqualification. Both girls need college scholarships. After a chance encounter, the two develop an unlikely friendship.

But both Len and Sage are keeping secrets that, left hidden, could cost them everything, maybe even their lives.

Set in the North Carolina mountains, this dynamic #ownvoices novel explores grief, mental health, and the transformative power of friendship.

Honors

- A Bank Street Best Book of the Year
- A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of the Year
- A *Mighty Girl's* Book of the Year
- North Carolina Humanities' 2021 Selection for the Library of Congress Discover Great Books Through Reading list
- A Cybils Awards Finalist
- A Tar Heel Teachers' Book of the Month selection



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Discussion Questions

1. *The Edge of Anything* begins with this epigraph from Albert Einstein: "Once we accept our limits, we go beyond them." How did your understanding of Einstein's meaning change after you read the book? How do Sage's and Len's journeys epitomize the quote?
2. *The book* is written in dual point of view, with both Len's and Sage's stories told from a close third perspective. Why do you think Carpenter chose this specific structure? How would the story have differed if told solely from one character's point of view?
3. Both Sage and Len insist they do not want pity, so much so that fear of pity causes them to keep dangerous secrets. What is the difference between pity and empathy? Point to examples in the text in which characters express empathy rather than pity.
4. Compare Sage's and Len's economic backgrounds and financial (in)stability. How do these shape the characters' beliefs and assumptions about the world?
5. In chapter twenty, when considering Len, Sage thinks: "There was fear, definitely. Probably pain, too. But underneath all of that, there was something else. Something terribly strong (160)." The theme of strength and what constitutes it appears throughout the book in various ways. Compare how Sage and Len define strength in the beginning of the book versus the end. Did your understanding of strength evolve after reading the book? In what ways?
6. In chapter twenty-one, Len notices: "Fireflies were lovely when illuminated, but Len liked them best the moment before the spark, when they were dark and small and nearly invisible—tiny gems of overlooked potential" (169). Find other instances in the text where the things the characters notice reflect their own feelings.
7. Several key scenes take place in the wilderness. Discuss the role the natural setting plays in the story. In what way does it shape the characters?
8. In the author's note, Carpenter writes "unfortunately, many people still don't understand (or refuse to believe) that mental health conditions are as real as physical illnesses." Before reading the book, what was your understanding of OCD? How would you have described someone who had it? Where did those ideas come from? Have your ideas about mental health changed?

Multidisciplinary Instructional Opportunities

1. Media Center and Science Connections:

- Sage does extensive research in order to figure out what is going on with Len, including finding scholarly articles through her school library's database. Choose a research topic related to the book (heart conditions, mental health statistics, SIDS, most effective workouts to increase vertical jump, local rent and utility averages, etc) and create a properly cited bibliography of at least three scholarly sources.
- Write an essay using your sources.

2. Art Connections:

- Create a photography portfolio based on the story, much like Len creates for her scholarship.
- Sage and Len believe others see them in a shallow way that is very different from how they view themselves. Create a character study of your perception of yourself versus how you imagine others perceive you.

3. Math & Financial Literacy Connections:

- What do you think is the average rent/mortgage cost in your area? What about utilities? What is the average salary of various professions in the area? Research and create a graph detailing the results.
- What type of profession would you need to achieve the lifestyle of your choice? What types of classes/grades do you need to attain that?

4. Career Counseling Connections:

- Sage is so single-minded in her professional goals that she is blindsided when her heart condition prevents her from pursuing her dreams. Work with your local Chamber of Commerce to create a student Career Fair, introducing students to jobs they might not know exist.
- Help students secure mentorships or a one-time "shadow a professional" afternoon.
- Have students create a list of professions of interest and then determine which classes/extracurricular activities can help them prepare for those jobs.
- Both Sage and Len are trying for scholarships. Have students research and prepare a list of scholarships in their field and what they need to do (volunteer hours, GPA) to be eligible.

5. Horticulture/FFA Connections:

- Create a map or list of the important outdoor places in the book. What plant and animal species are found in these areas?
- Choose one to research in depth and create a poster to convey your findings.

6. Health and Wellness Connections:

- The character Mountain introduces Sage to the term "magical thinking," and her YMCA team wears "lucky" socks for every game. Research the difference between magical thinking and OCD. Write a short essay on your findings.
- The book lists multiple mental health resources at the end (358). Using these and others you find, choose a mental health disorder to learn more about. Compare popular myths about the disorder to scientific facts. Present your findings in a short presentation to the class.
- Is mental health as important as physical health? Write a persuasive essay to present your opinion.

Find more resources, including interviews with the author, at www.noracarpenterwrites.com/the-edge-of-anything-resources.html

About the Author



Nora Shalaway Carpenter lives and writes in the mountains of North Carolina. Her young adult novels and anthologies have been named "Best of the Year" by NPR, *Kirkus Reviews*, Bank Street Books, and *A Mighty Girl*, and have won accolades including the Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection, the Whippoorwill Award for authentic rural fiction, and the Nautilus Award championing "better books for a better world." Nora holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and serves as faculty for the Highlights Foundation's Whole Novel Workshop and Intro to Short Fiction class. Connect with her at noracarpenterwrites.com.

Discussion questions were prepared in collaboration with the author. The Multidisciplinary Instructional Opportunities were created by award-winning educators Marlow Artis, Kelly Poquette, Pamela Sands, and Amy Leatherwood, members of the Tar Heels Teachers Book Club. View their YouTube video about *The Edge of Anything* here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjr-RBK3BMs>