

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO

It's hard to be yourself
before you know who that is.

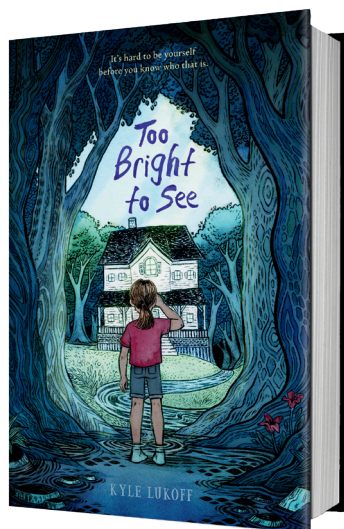
Too Bright to See



KYLE LUKOFF



ABOUT THE BOOK



*A HAUNTING GHOST STORY ABOUT
NAVIGATING GRIEF, GROWING UP, AND GROWING
INTO A NEW GENDER IDENTITY*

It's the summer before middle school, and eleven-year-old Bug's best friend, Moira, has decided that the two of them need to use the next few months to prepare. For Moira, this means figuring out the right clothes to wear, learning how to put on makeup, and deciding which boys are cuter in their yearbook photos than in real life. But none of this is all that appealing to Bug, who doesn't particularly want to spend *more* time trying to understand how to be a girl. Besides, there's something more important to worry about: A ghost is haunting Bug's eerie old house in rural Vermont . . . and maybe haunting Bug in particular. As Bug begins to untangle the mystery of who this ghost is and what they're trying to say, an altogether different truth comes to light—Bug is transgender.

HAL SCHRIEVE is a children's librarian in New York City. *Out of Salem*, his debut novel, received starred reviews from *Kirkus* and *Publishers Weekly* and was longlisted for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

“The girl ran barefoot over the lawn, a warm breeze caressing her face,” I imagine. That girl sounds like she’s having fun.

“She brushed the dirt from her cutoff jean shorts. I sure could go for some lemonade, she thought, wiping sweat from her brow.”

I want to be that girl. Not myself. Everything she does sounds significant. Real, somehow, in a way that my life isn’t.”

—**TOO BRIGHT TO SEE**, by Kyle Lukoff (pp. 45).

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1. Bug has always known about the ghosts in his house, but doesn’t believe they can hurt people. But then Moira hurts her foot on a broken nail polish bottle, Bug’s room is torn apart in the night, and the electronics in the house start to act weird (pp. 39, 48–49, 88–90). Bug doesn’t believe Uncle Roderick’s ghost would try to hurt people. **What—or who—do you think is causing the mysterious, destructive things in Bug’s house?**
2. We see Bug narrating the events of his own life to himself as if he is a character in a book (“the girl ran barefoot over the lawn . . .” “I imagine that I’m a well-behaved orphan . . .”). **Do you ever do this? Are there certain times where you daydream more? What kinds of things do you imagine? How does it make you feel to daydream?**

3. Moira, Bug's best friend, sees middle school as an important time to reinvent herself, and begins practicing makeup and going by her full name. She tries to get Bug to do the same. Bug says that this made him feel like she saw him as a problem, thinking "What was I before, if not someone you were trying to fix?" (pp. 166). **What does Moira think might change when they start middle school? Why does she change her name? What do you think she feels about Bug?**
4. When Bug stands in the creek fishing for minnows, he hears distant voices, and then hears a voice that sounds like Roderick—but can't understand what he's saying (pp. 83). **What do you think Roderick is saying to Bug? Why can't Bug understand him?**
5. Bug finds it difficult to make friends, but has an easy time talking to Griffin about ghosts at the library (pp. 100). Bug is surprised about how easily he speaks to Griffin. **Why do you think it's easier for Bug to talk to Griffin than to people at school?**
6. Uncle Roderick was a drag queen, meaning he dressed up in dresses, makeup, and jewelry as part of a performance or show. Bug says it's easier to think about putting on makeup and dresses if he thinks of himself as a drag queen (pp. 34, 111). **Do you ever feel like you're performing in parts of your life? Do you feel able to say when you're uncomfortable doing something, or does it depend on the situation?**
7. One Halloween when Bug was little, Uncle Roderick and Bug dressed up as Beauty and the Beast—with Roderick as Beauty and Bug as the Beast. When a woman asked why it wasn't the other way around, Roderick explained that they were each "exactly who

[they're] supposed to be" (pp. 140). Roderick and Bug are both different from how people expect them to be. **In what ways are Roderick and Bug similar to each other? In what ways are they different from each other? How are they different from what people often expect them to be?**

8. Uncle Roderick is haunting the house, but Bug knows there are other ghosts there too. These ghosts don't bother anyone, but sometimes brush against Bug, or creak on the stairs (pp. 67). **Why do you think the other ghosts linger in Bug's house? How old do you think the ghosts are?**
9. Uncle Roderick moved from New York City to a small town in Vermont, and Bug wonders if he misses things he had in the city (pp. 42, 43). **What kinds of things do you think Roderick would miss? Why do you think he decided to stay in Vermont?**
10. Bug's mom is worried about money from her greeting card business, and talks to Bug honestly about not having much money (pp. 16). **How does Mom's honesty change how Bug acts around her? Do you think he should have acted differently? How does it feel when adults speak to you about problems they're dealing with? Make a list of problems you think adults should talk to their kids about and what they should say. Are there some problems you think adults should keep private from their kids?**
11. Bug and his mom talk about the stages of grief that a book describes—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. Bug

says he feels like he's somewhere between "depression" and "acceptance." (pp. 93) **Do you think people always go through these feelings when they lose someone? Are there other emotions you think people feel? What would you do if your friend lost someone important to them?**

12. Bug thinks for a while that he can't be transgender because he's sure that transgender people know who they are for sure, and he just feels weird about his body and about doing things girls are supposed to do. But then he cuts his hair, and he suddenly does feel sure because of how much he sees his own face as a boy's face (pp. 136, 154). **Why do you think he didn't realize he was a boy earlier? Have there been times when you have felt unsure of yourself, and then suddenly felt very sure of yourself?**
13. **What kinds of friends do you think Bug will make in middle school?**
14. Moira refuses to go into some parts of Bug's house because she is nervous about the ghosts there. Other people avoid Bug's house because it's haunted. **Would you be interested in talking to a ghost? If so, what questions would you ask them? If your house was haunted, would you stay or move?**
15. **Do you think that Uncle Roderick will disappear after Bug's final dream, or do you think he will still visit? Will Bug still think about Uncle Roderick even if he doesn't visit? When, and why?**

CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS:

1. Rewrite a scene in the book from Uncle Roderick's perspective.
2. Write about how it feels to be a ghost.
3. Write a scene where Bug and Roderick's ghost talk again when Bug is twenty years older.
4. Write about discovering a ghost in your own house.



FURTHER READING:

ZENOBIA JULY by Lisa Bunker. Computer genius Zenobia's dad has just passed away, so she's off to live with her aunts. Nobody at her new school knows she's trans, and she's not sure what will happen if they find out. Can she make new friends and defeat a bigoted hacker?

THE MOON WITHIN by Aida Salazar. Celi's mom is determined to celebrate her first period with a traditional moon ceremony, which Celi does not love the idea of. Besides that, Celi's friend is coming out as genderfluid, and Celi thinks she may have a crush on someone.

AS THE CROW FLIES by Mel Gillman. Charlie likes the outdoors, but she knows she's queer, and she isn't sure that Christian Camp Three Peaks is a place where she belongs. Will her new friend help her get through a grueling hike—and grapple with the camp's awful history?

SNAPDRAGON by Kat Leyh. Snap has always been a weird, animal-loving tomboy, so when she meets Jacks, the old lady who everyone says is a witch, she doesn't feel weird asking her for lessons in taking care of sick animals—and when she meets Lu, who loves witch movies too and feels more like a girl than a boy, she knows they'll be friends for sure. But is Jacks really just a strange old lady? And who is that ghostly one-eyed fox?

KING AND THE DRAGONFLIES by Kacen Callender. When King's brother unexpectedly passes away, King is sure he's not gone, but has turned into a dragonfly—and also fears that if his brother had known he was gay, he wouldn't have approved.

99% CHANCE OF MAGIC: STORIES OF STRENGTH AND HOPE FOR TRANSGENDER KIDS, edited by Abby Darling and Amy Eleanor Heart. An anthology of fantasy stories by trans authors, for transgender kids.

PRAISE FOR

Too Bright to See



★ “A chilling, suspenseful ghost story . . .
Haunting and healing.”

—**KIRKUS REVIEWS, STARRED REVIEW**

★ “Equal parts unsettling, heartwarming, and satisfying...a nuanced
and compelling exploration of gender, friendship, and family.”

—**BOOKLIST, STARRED REVIEW**

★ “A hopeful examination of grief and gender, and a good ghost story
to boot. Recommended as a first purchase for all libraries.”

—**SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL, STARRED REVIEW**

★ “Through Bug’s journey to self-realization and self-acceptance,
and the wonderfully nuanced understanding of gender he comes to,
Lukoff provides a tender rumination on grief, love, and identity.”

—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY, STARRED REVIEW**

“Bug’s first-person, present-tense narration gives readers a close look
at his sense that things don’t quite fit, both in interactions with peers
and on his own, and his gradual understanding of why that is.”

—**THE HORN BOOK**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KYLE LUKOFF is the author of the Stonewall Award winner *When Aidan Became a Brother* and *A Storytelling of Ravens*. While becoming a writer, he worked as a bookseller and school librarian. He lives in New York City, and hopes you’re having a nice day.



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