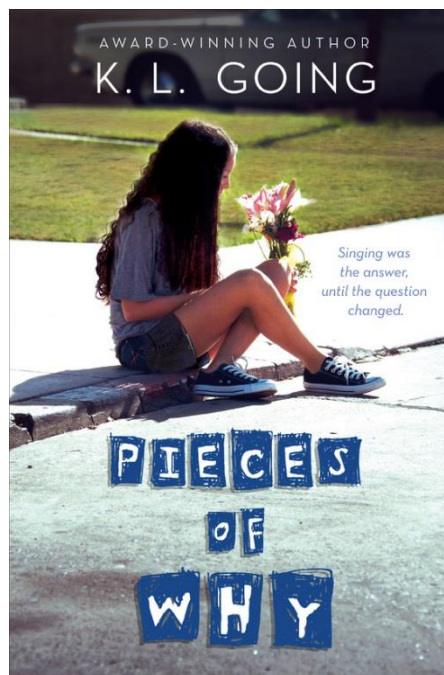




Penguin
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STUDY GUIDE



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CHAPTERS 1 - 8

- 1) On the first page of the novel, Tia says: “More than anything, I wanted to be a great singer. Not a rock star, but a singer who’d change the world with my voice, like Nina Simone, Whitney Houston, Adele, or Mahalia Jackson.” How do our dreams and goals define us? What roles do our heroes play in creating our ideas about who we want to become?

Personal Thoughts: What is one dream or goal that you have? Name three people that embody that dream or goal.

Activity: Listen to music by each of the four singers that Tia names.

- 2) Does Tia’s environment shape her identity? If so, how?

Personal Thoughts: Has your environment shaped your identity? What different qualities might you have if you’d grown up elsewhere?

- 3) In addition to our identities as individuals, there are also cultural identities that encompass groups of people who share common histories or qualities. Sometimes these group identities allow us to celebrate our differences, but other times they can come between us. In the start of the book, Keisha and Mary-Kate argue over whether white people should be allowed to sing gospel music since this type of music has its roots in African-American history. What do you think? Should people be allowed to participate in traditions that are not their own?

Personal Thoughts: Have you ever felt excluded from something?

- 4) In the beginning of the book, we see Tia lying. What kind of identity is she trying to create with her lies?

- 5) Tia’s mother also uses lies as a means of communication. Why do you think she continues to lie about the reason Tia’s father is in prison?

Personal Thoughts: Have you ever lied about something? What made you do it?



CHAPTERS 9 - 15

- 1) After learning the truth about why her father is in prison, Tia is drawn to visit the Raven woman. Why does she identify with this woman, even though she doesn't know the woman's real name?
- 2) After the shooting, Tia's identity within the community changes. How do you think they see her?

Personal Thoughts: How do you think your community sees you? Do you wish they saw you differently?

- 3) As Tia begins asking questions about her father, she struggles with anything that might portray him in a positive light, such as the photo of him as a happy young man. Why do you think this is hard for her? As a society, do we prefer people to be either all good or all bad?
- 4) In Chapter 14, Ms. Evette questions whether the police arrested the right men. Do certain groups get judged differently based on stereotypes? Is a stereotype different from a cultural identity?
- 5) Why is it hard for Tia to believe that someone in prison might sing? Why would learning the truth about her father stop Tia from singing?

Personal Thoughts: Have you ever felt as though you didn't deserve something good?



CHAPTERS 16 - 23

- 1) Ms. Loretta and Ms. Evette argue over Tia’s identity. One sees her as a potential threat and the other says she’s a “great kid”. Why might they see the same person so differently? How has history shaped their viewpoints?
- 2) Ms. Marion believes that: “No one shines unless we all shine.” In many cultures, people take their identity from their group, but in our culture, we are used to thinking in terms of individuality. We’re taught that the highest good is to be “the best”. Do you participate in any activities where your identity as a member of the group is more important than your individual identity? (For example, girl/boy scouts, a musical ensemble...)
- 3) Just as Tia is judged because of her father’s crime, Kenny is judged because of his stutter. Have you ever been judged? How did it shape your identity?

Personal Thoughts: In Chapter 17, Tia and her mom talk about reinventing themselves in California. Have you ever wanted to reinvent yourself? What type of person would you want to be?

Activity: Draw an alternative you.

- 4) Why do you think Tia feels the need to apologize for something she didn’t do? Why does it hurt to be recognized by Danielle’s grandfather?
- 5) In Chapter 19, Tia makes a concerted effort to stop lying. In the beginning of the book, we discussed why Tia needed to lie. Now, why does she need to stop? How does telling Kenny the truth help her heal?
- 6) When Khalil cheats on Keisha, how does this betrayal change the way she sees herself? Do you think this change will be permanent or temporary?

Personal Thoughts: Have you ever gone through something (good or bad) that changed the way you saw yourself? Was that change permanent?

- 7) Tia’s mother’s identity has been shaped both by Lyle’s crime, and by how she responded to it. How might Tia’s life have been different if her mother had responded differently?



CHAPTERS 23 - 30

- 1) Danielle's parents have been profoundly changed by what Tia's father did. How did they choose to respond? How else might they have responded?

Personal Thoughts: Do you know anyone in real life who has overcome a tragedy? How did they keep going?

- 2) On page 161, Dwayne talks about the ways that Tia changed after her father's crime. Although many of those changes were negative, one change was in her singing. Is it possible for positive changes to come out of bad experiences?

- 3) After Keisha experiences the effects of Khalil's cheating, she feels terrible. But eventually, this experience allows her to develop empathy. She realizes how much she judged Tia's mom, and can see how unfair her judgement was. Can making mistakes truly make us better people? If so, why do we try so hard to get everything right?

Personal Thoughts: Are you ever afraid of making mistakes? What was the most recent mistake you made, and how did you feel about it? Did it change the way you saw yourself?

- 4) In Chapter 24, Tia recognizes her singing as a gift that she can give to her community. In many ways, this brings the story full circle, returning to the opening quote in which Tia talks about changing the world with her voice. However, this result isn't quite what Tia had imagined. How do you think Tia's identity has changed from the beginning to the end of the novel?

- 5) In Chapter 26, Tia has a second experience with the men who scared her in the beginning of the book. This time she sees them differently, but she still makes choices to keep herself safe. What roles do fear and safety play in how we view others?

- 6) In this book, nearly all of the characters have communication barriers that they must overcome. The Raven woman doesn't speak English. Tia loses her ability to sing. Kenny stutters. Tia's mother hides from the world. Lyle Frank is behind bars. What does communication have to do with identity?

Personal Thoughts: Have you ever been in a situation where it was hard to communicate? What other forms of communication do you rely on besides words?



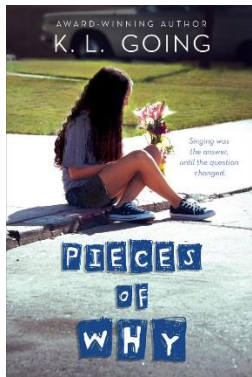
Activity: Listen to *Pyramid*. Play charades!

- 7) Why was it important to end the story by giving the Raven woman and the baby their rightful names?



ABOUT THE BOOK

A beautiful story about the small kindnesses offered in the midst of tragedy that can change the course of lives.



Tia lives with her mom in a high-risk neighborhood in New Orleans and loves singing gospel in the Rainbow Choir with Keisha, her boisterous and assertive best friend. Tia's dream is to change the world with her voice; and by all accounts, she might be talented enough. But when a fatal carjacking in her neighborhood takes the life of an infant, she finds she can't sing anymore. From the gossip ignited in her community, she learns the truth about her own father: His life-sentence prison conviction was not just for a robbery, as her mother always told her. The shock of finding out what really happened prompts Tia to start asking the people in her community hard questions—questions everyone has always been too afraid to ask.

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Author Bio:

K.L. Going began her career working at one of the oldest literary agencies in New York City and has worked at an independent bookstore in Cold Spring, NY. She is the award-winning author of several books for children and teens, from picture books to young adult novels. She received a Printz Honor for *Fat Kid Rules the World*, which was subsequently made into a feature film directed by Matthew Lillard. Her first middle-grade novel, *The Liberation of Gabriel King*, is taught in classrooms across the country. Kelly wrote *Writing and Selling the Young Adult Novel*—a how-to book for aspiring writers, published by Writer's Digest, and has contributed short stories to several anthologies. She continues to write books for children of all ages, and lives in Glen Spey, NY, with her husband and son, where she writes and runs a business critiquing manuscripts.

Visit K.L. at:
<http://klgoing.com/>

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