

THE DOGS

BY ALLAN STRATTON

DISCUSSION GUIDE



WHO'S WATCHING ME IN THE NIGHT?

Constantly on the run from a dangerous father, Cameron's used to pushing away the trauma of his past. But when his mother moves them to an old farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, he stumbles upon a child's drawings in the cellar that depict a violent history. The line between reality and nightmare blurs as the house's horrifying secrets mix with fragments of Cameron's own memories—best left forgotten.

“What would it be like if the most frightening thing in your world lay at the heart of your own family? Stratton imagines this horror fully and convincingly.”

— STARRED REVIEW, *Quill and Quire*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allan Stratton is the internationally acclaimed author of *Chanda's Secrets*, a Michael L. Printz Honour Book whose film adaptation (*Life, Above All*) won the François Chalais Prize at the Cannes International Film Festival. His most recent novel, *Curse of the Dream Witch*, won the CLA Book of the Year for Children Award and *The Grave Robber's Apprentice* was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award. Allan lives in Toronto. Visit him online at www.allanstratton.com.

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1. Is Jacky real or a figment of Cameron's imagination?
2. Cameron's mother says his father is stalking them. Cameron wonders if this is true or if his mother's fears have caused her to become unhinged. Are our memories reliable? Why do different people remember the same things differently? Is it possible for people to change?
3. If you saw and heard a ghost, would you believe your own senses, or would you fear you had a mental health issue? Would you tell others, or would you be afraid of the consequences?
4. Cameron's actions are partly based on what he thinks about Ken and Mr. Sinclair, yet his impressions of them change throughout the novel. How and why do we form impressions of people? How can we tell if those impressions are accurate? How easy is it to change first impressions?
5. Cameron acts based on his instincts and his understanding of the facts. Some of his instincts are good, some not. Some "facts" are true, some not. In real life, how do we decide what is true and untrue? How much should we trust our instincts versus what we are told is fact? How much should we trust what we see and read online, in newspapers, and on TV? How much should we trust what we are told by our friends?
6. Cody bullies Cameron, Benjie and others. He has also had a difficult childhood. Does Cody's background affect his bullying behaviour? Even if you disapprove of Cody's behaviour, does his background affect the way you judge him? Is Cameron right to be angry at the sympathy the adults have for Cody because of his background? Do people like Cody ever change?

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7. Cameron wants to find out the truth about Matthew Fraser. To do that, he lies to Benjie and visits Cody's grandmother under false pretenses. The consequences are terrible but unintended.
Is there ever a time we can/should do something bad in order to achieve something good? (Do ends ever justify the means?) Is Cameron responsible for what happened at the home, even though events spiraled out of his control? How serious was his violation of Benjie's trust and Cody's grandmother's privacy?
8. Cameron is afraid to be seen with Benjie because he's afraid he'll be bullied like Benjie. At the same time, he knows this is cowardly. What do you do when you see someone being bullied? Do you have a responsibility to intervene when someone is being bullied, or is your only responsibility to protect yourself? If you don't intervene to help someone being bullied and something bad happens to them, are you responsible?
9. Cameron changes his mind about Mr. Sinclair. Is it possible to ever fully know anyone in a world full of secrets? Is it possible for us to even fully know ourselves? How can we step outside ourselves to check for personal biases?
10. Mr. Sinclair reveals a big secret near the end of the novel. Should he have gone to the police or was he right to do what he did for the sake of his friend? What price did he pay for his secrecy? Was it worth it? Is honesty always the best policy?
11. Cameron's mother loves him deeply and is concerned for his mental health. Would you react the way she does to his behaviours? If not, what would you have done? Does her relationship with Ken help or hurt the situation? What would you do to help someone that you feared was falling apart?