

WE ARE ALL SO GOOD AT SMILING

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

They Both Die at the End meets *The Bell Jar* in this haunting, beautiful YA novel in verse about clinical depression and healing from trauma, from National Book Award finalist Amber McBride.

Whimsy is back in the hospital for treatment of clinical depression. When she meets Faerry, she recognizes that they both have magic in the marrow of their bones. And when Faerry and his family move to the same street, the two start to realize that their lifelines may have twined and untwined many times before.

They are both terrified of the forest at the end of Marsh Creek Lane.

The Forest whispers to Whimsy. The Forest might hold the answers to the part of Faerry that he feels is missing. They discover the Forest holds monsters, fairy tales, and pain that they have both been running from for eleven years.



AMBER McBRIDE estimates she reads about a hundred books a year.

Her work has been published in literary magazines, including *Ploughshares* and *Provincetown Arts*. Her debut YA novel in verse, *Me (Moth)*, was published in August 2021 and was a National Book Award finalist. She is a professor of English literature and creative writing at the University of Virginia, and lives in Charlottesville.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Amber McBride decided to write *We Are All So Good at Smiling* in verse? How would the story be different in prose?
2. A host of characters from folklore and fairy tales from around the world end up trapped in Sorrow's Garden. We often see these characters as larger than life. Why do you think McBride choose to have them stuck in Sorrow's Garden?
3. Once Whimsy enters Sorrow's Garden time seems to pass by normally, but according to the time stamps at the start of each new chapter, in real life, Whimsy and Faerry only spend moments in each section of the garden. For them one minute feels like twenty. Why do you think the author did this?
4. How did you feel about how the book ended?
5. What does the line, "*The only way out is through...*" mean to you?
6. If you could pick one type of flower, plant, or tree to represent your current mental state, which one would you pick and why?
7. What do you think the title of this book implies? Is it good that we are all so good at smiling?
8. In what ways do you think Whimsy and Faerry feel isolated from the other students at school?
9. Do you believe in magic? If so, in what ways? Is kindness, love, or hope magic or magical?
10. Is there one song that encapsulates the "vibe" of *We Are All So Good at Smiling*?

