

TEACHING GUIDE

SCARS

By Cheryl Rainfield

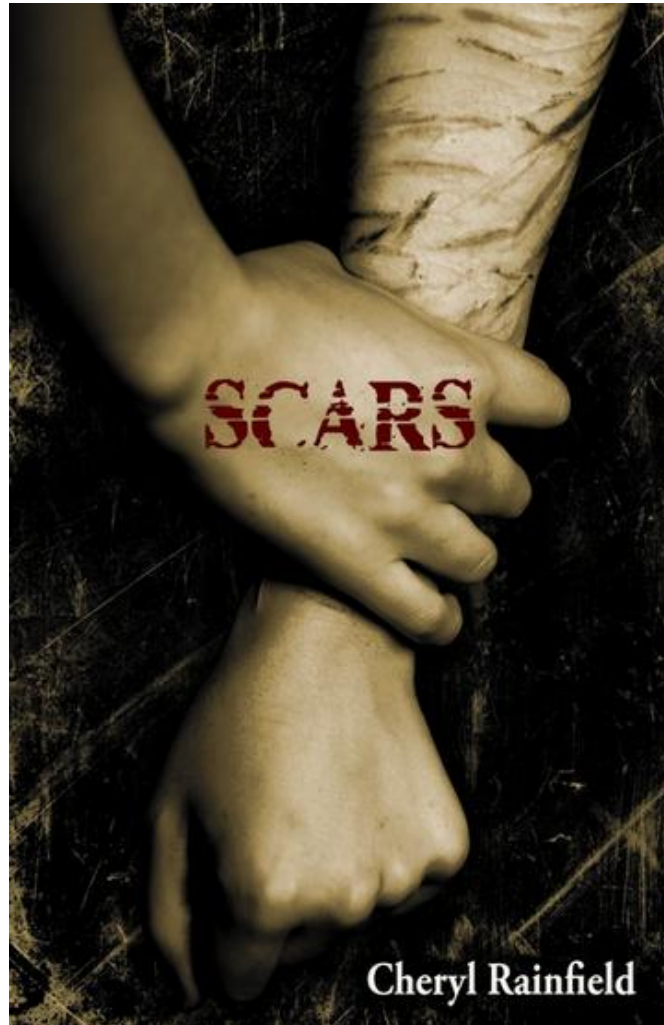
About the Book:

Someone's following Kendra, someone who raped her years ago. She knows she should try to remember who, but it hurts too much to. . The only relief comes from slashing herself with a blade. Now cutting is another secret that she must try to keep from the people she loves – if she can figure out who to trust.

About the Author:

Kendra's dilemma is one author Cheryl Rainfield knows well. A survivor of incest and ritual abuse, Cheryl Rainfield turned to cutting to try to feel better. Understanding the complex need cope, she tells Kendra's story with

honesty, compassion, and hope. Rainfield is also the author of *Hunted*, a novel about Caitlyn, a telepath in a world where any paranormal power is illegal. In her newest book, *Stained*, Sarah must find a way to rescue herself after being abducted. For more about Cheryl Rainfield and her work, including free resources, visit www.cherylrainfield.com .



Thematic Connections:

- Pain
- Fear
- Trust
- Art
- Control
- Secrets

Before Reading

Write about one or more of the following in your journal:

- Describe a time when you felt forced to keep a secret. What compelled you to keep it? What (if anything) persuaded you to eventually let it go?
- Discuss the saying “mind over matter.” To what extent can we talk ourselves through difficult situations?
- Describe a time when you feared the unknown: someone or something you couldn’t identify. How did it feel? How did you get past it (if you did)? To what extent does the fear linger?
- How do you decide whom to trust? Discuss a time when someone betrayed your trust. How did it affect you? What did you do about it?
- Describe a time when you felt better after creating something – a meal, a poem, a painting, or a similar effort. Why do you think the act of creation can make people feel better?
- Describe a time when you felt like a situation was beyond your control. How did you deal with it? How would you handle it differently if it happened again?
- What is pain? What types of pain are there? What causes pain? How do people deal with pain?
- Discuss two times you’ve felt pain, one when it was obvious to others around you, and one when you kept the pain to yourself. What was different about the pain in each situation? Which hurt more? Which was easier to get over?
- In what ways are secrets powerful?

Discussion Guide

Knowledge:

- Who is Carolyn?
- Where does Kendra find the magenta envelope?
- What did Kendra’s abuser say would happen if she told anyone about the abuse?
- What object does Carolyn give Kendra to help her between sessions?
- Who is Sarah?
- Who intervenes between Danny and Kendra?
- Who is Mr. Blair?
- Who is Mrs. Archer?
- What does Jerry do to Kendra?
- What does Kendra’s mother do for a living?
- Who offers to help pay for Kendra’s therapy?
- What does Kendra do with the MP3 player she finds in her backpack?
- Who is Julie?
- Whose artwork is displayed at The Java Cup?
- Who tells Kendra’s parents about the blade Kendra carries with her?
- Who delivers the package with the handkerchief and the palette knife?
- Where does Kendra do her worst cutting ever?
- Whom does Kendra’s father teach at church?
- Who was Kendra’s abuser?
- Who shoots at Kendra?

- Who calls the police?
- Where does Kendra suggest Meghan should stay?

Understanding:

- What can't Kendra remember?
- Why can't Kendra remember?
- Why doesn't Kendra want Carolyn to see her arm?
- How does Kendra save Meghan from Danny?
- How does Meghan get revenge on Danny?
- What does Meghan have to deal with at home?
- Why does Kendra take an X-acto knife from the art room?
- How did Kendra first meet Sandy?
- Why might Kendra have to quit therapy?
- Why doesn't Kendra want her mother to see her paintings?
- How does Kendra feel when Sandy looks at her portfolio?
- Why doesn't Kendra "paint happy"?
- Why does Kendra decide to sell some of her artwork?
- What does Meghan ask of Kendra when Kendra spots a bruise on her neck?
- What angers Meghan during art therapy?
- Why might Kendra's family have to move?
- What does Kendra see her father doing in the basement?
- How does Meghan explain her sleeping with boys?
- How does Kendra's mother find out about her interest in Meghan?
- To whom does Kendra first show her cutting?
- Why does Carolyn tell Kendra's parents about her self-harm?
- Why do Kendra's parents go with her to see Carolyn?
- Why did Kendra's father lie about his job?

Application:

- Kendra says that having no reason to doubt someone isn't the same as believing them. Give an example from your own life to illustrate this point.
- Kendra "speaks" through her art. In what ways besides words do you "speak"?
- At the most fundamental level, Kendra cuts herself to feel better. What do you do to feel better?
- No one forces Kendra to make art, yet she says she does it because she has to. Explain what she means by this, and give a parallel example from your own life or from the life of someone you know.
- Kendra sometimes answers Mrs. Archer in a voice that's bright like her mother's. What do you do that's unintentionally like one of your parents?
- When Mrs. Archer praises her artwork, Kendra says it feels wonderful but frightening to have someone believe in her that much. When have you found praise hard to accept? Why do you think that's the case?
- When we know someone well, we often expect certain reactions from them. Find a place where Kendra's mother reacts in a way that's different from what Kendra

expected. Then describe a similar experience of your own – when someone reacted in a way you didn't expect.

- Using at least three examples from the book, discuss the relationship between love and trust.

Analysis:

- At the beginning of the book, Kendra wonders whether Carolyn trusts her. Why do you think she wants Carolyn's trust?
- Why do you think Kendra is able to speak more through her pictures than she can through words?
- Discuss at least three ways in which Kendra and her mother misunderstand or fail to communicate with each other.
- In what way is art therapy different from the art Kendra is used to making?
- What complicates Sandy's relationship with Kendra?
- How does Kendra's father react when he finds out she's a lesbian?
- Explain how their experiences with pain contribute to Meghan and Kendra becoming girlfriends. Use at least three examples from the book.
- When Kendra figures out that her abuser taught her to cut, how does this affect her?
- Describe what happened between Kendra and Sarah.
- Kendra trusts Carolyn. Why do you think she's reluctant to tell her about the cutting?
- In what ways does Kendra's abuser establish and keep his power over her?
- In what ways does Carolyn help Kendra? Cite at least three examples from the book.
- What excuses does Kendra's father make for his behavior?
- What does Kendra mean when she says that without meaning to, her father gave her freedom?

Synthesis:

- When Kendra shows her the note in the magenta envelope, Carolyn asks if she wants her to call the police. Why do you think she leaves this choice up to Kendra?
- Suspicions arise from not knowing. Name at least two people Kendra suspects might be her abuser.
- Besides art, what do Kendra and Sandy have in common?
- What evidence can you find to show that Kendra tries to understand her mother, or that her mother tries to understand her?
- What does Kendra discover about secrets, fear, and shame when Mrs. Archer offers to leave the art therapy group?
- What's ironic about Kendra's father saying he's not sure he can trust her? What's ironic about Kendra's mother protecting her father?
- In what ways does love save Kendra? In what ways does she save herself?

- Explain how Carolyn, Meghan, and Sandy show their love for Kendra. Use at least two examples for each character.
- What do you think prompted Kendra's memory to surface when it did?
- How did Kendra's abuser wield so much power over her?

Evaluation:

- Carolyn tells Kendra that in order to survive, her intuition had to be more finely tuned than most people's. Explain what she means, and tell whether you agree or disagree, using one example from the story and one from real life.
- Was Kendra justified in reacting so strongly when Julie wanted Meghan to talk about her picture? Explain.
- What reason does Carolyn offer for not sharing her own history of sexual abuse with Kendra? Do you agree she was right to withhold this information? Why or why not?
- Which relationship in the book is most complicated? Give at least three examples to defend your response.
- Do you believe Kendra when she tells Meghan that she's not punishing herself by cutting? Why or why not?
- By the end of the book, Kendra's relationship with her mother is improving. Do you think they will ever be close? Use at least three examples from the book to defend your answer.
- Kendra copes by cutting; her mother copes by denial. Which is more harmful? Defend your answer with examples from the book.
- Do you think Kendra understands herself well? Give at least three examples from the book to support your answer.

Projects

- **Create:** Use art to show a place you feel safe. Paint, draw, sculpt, sing, write a poem or story, dramatize.
- **Collage:** Gather at least six statements Kendra makes about pain in the book. Make a collage or other visual that illustrates the connections and contradictions in her thinking about pain. Present to the class.
- **Research:** Research the topic of repressed memories. Present your findings to the class, with applications to Kendra's story.
- **Research:** Cutting is a way some people cope with unbearable pain. Research at least two other coping mechanisms that involve self-harm and at least two that are healthy. Present your findings to the class.
- **Role-play:** If you discovered a friend was harming herself (or himself), what would you say to her (or him)? Role-play a scene or write a letter that shows what you've learned from the book about the complexity of self-harm.
- **Connections:** Kendra distinguishes between types of pain. Working alone or in a group, list at least five quotes from the books that describe different types of pain. Add to the list at least five types of pain that you've encountered or are aware of.

For each, suggest the healthiest way to confront or manage the pain. What conclusions and connections do you find? Present your findings to the class.

- **Research:** Research art therapy. What is it? How does it work? Who benefits from it? Present your findings to the class.
- **Cause and effect:** A variety of situations can trigger a behavior, just as a variety of causes can produce the same effect. Working alone or in a group, locate at least three times in the story when Kendra either cuts herself or has a strong urge to cut. In each instance, what evokes the desire to cut? Compare your conclusions with others in the class.
- **Connections:** Consider other ways in which people make permanent changes to their bodies: piercing, tattoos, gauging, rites of passage that involve pain. What motivates these activities? Do they have anything in common with self-harm? Present your findings to the class.
- **Visual:** Make a visual showing the various secrets kept by the characters in the book. Present to the class.
- **Revised thoughts:** Revisit your prewriting. Add your revised thoughts after reading the book. Cite examples.
- **Research:** Using the resources in the back of the book, research what experts say about self-harm and how to get help. Make a poster that summarizes what you found.

Author Interview

Q. How hard was it to write about something so personal and private, based on your own experience? When it felt hard, what kept you going?



A. In the first few years when I wrote and re-wrote SCARs, it was hard because I was living the pain I was writing about; I felt like I was pouring my pain onto the page. It didn't feel like a relief or a release, even though I think it was. I think if I hadn't been writing it, the pain would have been much worse. But it got better—most especially once SCARS was accepted and published, and then again when the reader letters started pouring in! Both were the most healing experiences of my life.

What kept me going when it was hard were a few things. I needed to be heard about these issues that had affected my life so deeply—self-harm, sexual abuse, and being queer—and writing is my way to be heard, to have a voice, the way Kendra's is her art. I also really wanted to reach people who'd been through the same or similar experiences as mine, to let them know that they weren't alone and that things could and would get better. When you feel alone and in pain, the pain is so much worse. And I also wanted people who hadn't had any of those experiences, especially with self-harm, to understand why someone might cut or

otherwise hurt themselves. I think there's a lot of societal judgment about it. But once someone really understands something, it's easier to approach from a place of compassion and less judgment.

Q. To what extent can the impulse to harm oneself be completely extinguished?

A. Hm. I don't know if the desire to self-harm ever completely goes away—I know when I have really rough periods, I still *want* to. But now I can choose not to. I have had enough support over the years, enough compassion and love from the people around me, and enough love for myself that now I don't turn to cutting even if I feel like it. I also have had enough positive experiences now that help bolster me.

Q. Though *Scars* is a book about self-harm, it is also a book about love. How do you define love?

A. Love is compassionate, caring, and unconditional. It does not try to control, judge, or harm. It supports.

Q. In the Author's Note, you mention the importance of taking gentle care of oneself. What are some specific ways that you do this?

A. I have a lot of ways. If I'm upset or in pain, I can try to soothe myself—read over a letter or email from someone I love; put essential oil handcream on my hands; hug someone around me, my pet, or a pillow; try to talk to myself in my head the way I know a friend would. Involving all the senses helps, so smell (essential oil), taste (foods I love), tactile (cream), auditory (music I love), visual (an image I find soothing or uplifting). I often turn to my favorite books for comfort—picture books, middle grade magic books, and YA (realistic and fantasy). Distraction is really important sometimes - it helps. Other times I'll write or draw to find a way out of the pain.

I work myself too hard, but I'm trying to make a more conscious effort to do things I enjoy—word games, spending time with friends, reading for fun. I also have my little dog Petal to distract me. 😊

Q. What do you most love about Kendra?

A. I love that she doesn't give up, even though she's afraid, even though she's terrified. She keeps facing her fear and going after her memories, trying to work things through. I love that she trusts people and loves them fully, even though she was horribly hurt. I love her emotional strength and bravery.

SCARS Goodies

Reasons Not To Hurt Yourself

<http://cherylrainfield.com/blog/index.php/2011/05/06/reasons-not-to-hurt-yourself/>

Cheryl Rainfield: It Gets Better video for LGBTQ youth and anyone who's wanted to kill themselves.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_XlpkisWxo

Tips on Dealing With Self-Harm (Helpful Responses To Someone Who's Self-harmed; Alternatives to Self-Harm; How To Stop Self-Harming)

<http://www.cherylrainfield.com/articleList.php?cat=Self-Harm>

Self-Harm Is Not Trendy

<http://cherylrainfield.com/blog/index.php/2011/06/10/self-harm-is-not-trendy/>

Cheryl Rainfield interview on Fox25

<http://topics.myfoxboston.com/m/34325912/teen-girls-self-harm.htm>