

# TRUTH BE TOLD

Sue Divin

Macmillan Children's Books  
Paperback, 304PP, £7.99  
ISBN 9781529040982

## Themes

- Family relationships
- Trauma
- Grief
- Friendship
- Identity
- Class
- Gender
- Religion

**Summary** Northern Ireland, 2019. Tara has been raised by her mam and nan in Derry City. Faith lives in rural Armagh with her strict evangelical Protestant parents. Their lives on opposite sides of a political divide couldn't be more different. They are both dealing with their own struggles. Tara is angry and grieving after the sudden loss of her boyfriend, Oran, and Faith is hiding a secret from her parents for fear of being disowned. When they come face to face with each other, they are shocked to discover they look almost identical. Are they connected? In searching for the truth about their own identities, the teenagers uncover more than they bargained for.

**Judges' Comments** Set in contemporary Northern Ireland, *Truth Be Told* is a beautifully written young adult novel full of distinctive voices. Tara and Faith are from different backgrounds and religious denominations but when they meet they realise that they have a lot in common – they look just like each other. As they try to figure out who they really are, they must delve deep into the pasts of their families and communities, uncovering secrets that some would prefer remained hidden.

**About the Author** Sue Divin is a Derry-based writer and peace worker, originally from Armagh in the North of Ireland. With a master's in Peace and Conflict Studies and a career in community relations, her writing often touches on diversity and reconciliation. Her short stories, flash fiction and poetry, have been published in a range of literary journals.



## QUESTIONS

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. What do you think of the title, cover design and tagline?
2. Based on these elements of the front cover (illustrated by Tiana Dunlop), what do you think the book is about?
3. Read the blurb on the back of the book. Would this encourage you to pick up the book? What parts of the story interest you most?
4. On YouTube, listen to Damian Gorman read his poem 'If I Was Us, I Wouldn't Start From Here' ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ui5Mv\\_46Cc&ab\\_channel=UCDLibrarySpecialCollections](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ui5Mv_46Cc&ab_channel=UCDLibrarySpecialCollections)), which is quoted in the epigraph of this book. He also gives the background to the poem and says his brief was to reflect on the Good Friday Agreement and look to the future. Do you think his poem fits the brief? Why do you think Sue Divin uses this quote at the start of the book?

### AS YOU READ

#### Chapters 1–3

1. Tara is searching for a Child of Prague in the attic. What other superstitions or rituals for good luck can you think of?
2. What do you think is the significance of the items Tara finds in the attic? Who might they belong to?
3. What are Tara's and Faith's first impressions of each other when they meet? What do we base our first impressions of other people on?
4. What secret do you think Faith is keeping? How can keeping secrets affect us?

#### Chapters 4–7

1. Do you think the assumptions Tara makes about Faith's life are correct? How do you think Tara sees herself?
2. What do you think the relationship between Tara and Faith is? How do you think they will find out the truth?
3. Do you think community-building initiatives like the one in this book work? What ways do you think differences can be bridged?
4. Why do you think Faith chose to come out to Tara first? What did you think of Tara's response?

#### Chapters 8–12

1. There is a very exciting atmosphere when Tara and Lena have their day out in Derry. How does the author create this atmosphere?
2. Faith talks a lot about apples in this book. She references Newton, Adam and Eve and William Tell. Later on, she speaks about baking with apples for church. What do you think apples symbolise for her?
3. In Chapter 9, Faith comes out to Jack. Compare how she feels telling Jack to how she felt telling Tara. What is Jack's reaction like?
4. Discuss the different ways in which Tara's and Faith's families deal with past hurt and trauma.

#### Chapters 13–17

1. What does Faith learn about her family and their past in Chapter 13?
2. What is Tara's experience of art therapy? How can creativity help people process difficult experiences?
3. Which details stand out to you from the descriptions of the Halloween celebrations in Derry? How is this night out important for Tara and Faith?
4. Do these chapters give you more of an understanding of Faith's fears and her reasons for not coming out? How do you think she should speak to her family about her sexual orientation?

#### Chapters 18–23

1. Consider what Tara learns about her family history. How did you feel when you read about her nan's experiences? You may have come across Seamus Heaney's poem 'Punishment', which is a response to these attacks on women.
2. What kind of relationship does Faith have with her dad?
3. How do Tara's actions at cross-country training show her growth since the start of the book?
4. How do Faith's family and community react when she is outed? Do you think the Faith you met at the beginning of this book would have expressed herself the way she does in Chapter 23?

**Chapters 24–26**

1. Re-read Tara's speech from the exhibition. How has her attitude changed since the beginning of the book? What has she learned?
2. Think about Tara's paintings of the women impacted by the Troubles. How do these paintings reflect the stories told in the book?
3. What does Faith learn about her family in Chapter 25? How does she process this news?
4. How have Tara's and Faith's relationships with their families changed over the course of the book?

**AFTER YOU HAVE READ**

1. Were you satisfied with the conclusion of the story?
2. What do you think the future holds for Tara and Faith?
3. Did you learn more about the Troubles from reading this book?
4. Which character did you identify with more, Tara or Faith?

**ACTIVITIES**

- Write the scene of Tara and Faith meeting in Chapter 2 from Faith's perspective.
- Smores are described in Chapter 6 – 'melted silk with chocolate crunch'. Write a description of your favourite food or the last thing you ate. You cannot name the food. Describe it as vividly as you can, then share your description with your class or book club and try to guess what food each person is describing.
- Watch Season 2, Episode 1 of the TV series *Derry Girls* (rated 15+), 'Across the Barricade', in which the characters take part in an outdoor activities peace initiative. Compare the experiences the characters have and the differences between 1995 and 2019.
- After Faith comes out to her, Tara mentions taking Faith to Foyle Pride. Research a Pride celebration near you. When did it start? What are the events that take place?
- Research the artist Andy Warhol's paintings – such as his *Campbell's Soup Cans* or his Marilyn Monroe portrait. Create an artwork in his style – this could be based on an object or a portrait.
- Look up the artist Colin Davidson's *Silent Testimony* portraits on the Difficult Conversations website (<https://adifficultconversation.com/item/colin-davidson-silent-testimony-an-introduction/>). How do you think they relate to Tara's artwork at the exhibition?

**FURTHER RESOURCES**

- Check out the 'What You Need to Know about the Troubles' online resource from the Imperial War Museum to learn more about the Troubles: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-troubles>
- For mental health support for young people, visit the Jigsaw website: <https://jigsaw.ie/>
- For support for LGBTQ+ young people, visit the Belong To website: <https://www.belongto.org/>
- Visit 'How to Help People in Period Poverty' on the Spunout website to learn more about period poverty: <https://spunout.ie/health/general/period-poverty>
- Check out the interview with author Sue Divin on the ReadingZone website: <https://www.readingzone.com/authors/sue-divin/>