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## *The Loudest Silence*

by Sydney Langford

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Two disabled queer teens find belonging in this poignant platonic love story about singing, signing, and solidarity.

Casey and Hayden are both determined to hide who they really are. But when they cross paths at school, they bond over their shared love of music and their mutual feeling that they don't belong, and the secrets come spilling out. Their friendship is the beating heart of this dual-perspective story featuring thoughtful disability representation, nuanced queer identities, and a lovably quirky supporting cast.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In the opening sentence, Casey Kowalski says, "I'm starting to suspect that I live in a coming-of-age movie" (p. 1). Define coming-of-age. Consider Casey's growth as a character and discuss her coming-of-age. What is Hayden González-Rossi's role in Casey's movie? Discuss his coming-of-age journey.
- Casey has suffered a sudden and profound hearing loss. How does Casey explain a "loud silence"? Describe Casey's life in Portland after her hearing loss. Why did her friends ghost her? Casey is a budding singer. Explain what happened with her vocal coach in Portland. How did these experiences in Portland shape the way Casey plans to navigate her new life in Miami?
- What is Casey's first impression of Palmera High School? Describe her first day. Why is she annoyed with Audrey, the student ambassador? Discuss her interaction with other students. Explain her coping skills. What are Casey's thoughts about joining the ASL club? Why is it important for her to take ASL classes from a Deaf person?

- How do Casey and Hayden meet? Discuss how he discovers that she is Deaf-Hard of Hearing. Why is Casey determined to keep her hearing loss a secret? Explain how she discovers Hayden's secret. How do their secrets create a bond between them? Discuss the moment they learn they can trust one another. How does this trust lead to a strong relationship?
- Hayden is like a puzzle to Casey. Debate whether he is a 500-piece or 1,000-piece puzzle. Describe Hayden's edge pieces. What might Casey say is his center piece? When does Casey finally fit each of Hayden's pieces together? What picture is revealed when she completes the puzzle?
- Casey is an outstanding vocalist. Why is she reluctant to take singing lessons in Miami? She finally enrolls at the Rossi Music Studio. Describe Taylor Rossi's approach to teaching Casey. Casey says, "By the time the lesson is over, the apprehension I was feeling has been replaced by a sense of fulfillment" (p. 65). How do Taylor Rossi and Casey develop a respect for one another? Taylor tells Casey to select a piece of music to work on at the next lesson. Explain why she chooses Elton John's "I'm Still Standing." Why does Casey call the song a "screw-you anthem"? Make the argument that this song would be an appropriate theme song for Casey's coming-of-age movie.
- Describe Hayden's family. Henry, Hayden's older brother, plays professional soccer. How did Hayden and Henry's relationship change when Henry left home? Discuss Hayden's admiration of his grandfather. How does Hayden strive to be like him—courageous and passionate about his dreams? What is Hayden's passion? At what point does he get the courage to reveal this passion? How does his family react? Explain how Papá shows his pride in Hayden after he and Casey win the talent show.
- Explain what Casey means when she introduces Hayden to her parents as "friend adjacent." At what point in the novel does their relationship develop into something more than "friend adjacent"? Debate whether their friendship and respect for one another gives them courage to reach for their dreams. Who are the supporting characters in Casey and Hayden's coming-of-age movie?
- Hayden suffers from Generalized Anxiety Disorder. How does this make it difficult for him to perform his music in public? Explain what Hayden means when he says that he and Casey both have "musical trust issues" (p. 119). Discuss Casey's role in helping Hayden develop coping skills. What advice does Henry give Casey about dealing with anxiety? How does winning first place in the talent show change Casey and Hayden's lives?
- Take a close look at the lyrics of the song that Casey and Hayden perform (pp. 288–289). How do the lyrics reflect Casey and Hayden's lives? What is especially significant about "I am not background noise"?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Sydney Langford** (they/them) is a queer, Deaf-Hard of Hearing, and physically disabled author living in Portland, Oregon. When not singing musical theater songs or playing with their dogs, they are passionate about writing stories that celebrate inclusivity and the diverse experiences of queer and disabled teens. *The Loudest Silence* is their debut novel. You can find Sydney on social media @slangwrites, or visit their website at [SLangWrites.com](http://SLangWrites.com).