

THINGS I'LL NEVER SAY

STORIES ABOUT OUR
SECRET SELVES

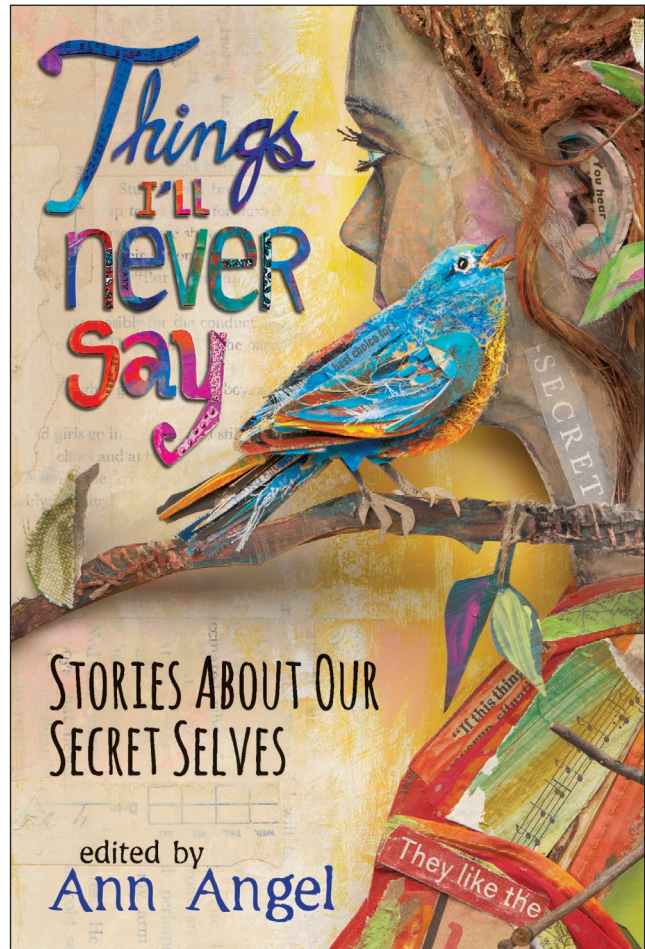
edited by Ann Angel

ABOUT THE BOOK

“Writers are a tell-all bunch,” explains Ann Angel in her introduction to this collection of fifteen short stories by top young-adult writers. A baby who can’t be claimed. A family of frauds. A hangout for shape shifters. These brilliantly written stories from a range of genres offer eye-opening perspectives on a world full of secrets—buried and otherwise.

ABOUT ANN ANGEL

The author of several biographies, including *Janis Joplin: Rise Up Singing*, winner of a YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults, Ann Angel is also a contributing editor for *Such a Pretty Face: Short Stories About Beauty*. She directs the English graduate program at Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, where she lives with her family.



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Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the Reading Literature standards for Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the Speaking and Listening standards for Comprehension and Collaboration and for Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.



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Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the pleasures of having a secret? Why does Cynthia hide her close friendship with Ruthie in “When We Were Wild”? Why do Liv’s parents live the way they do in “Quick Change”? What secret unites the two lovers in “Storm Clouds Fleeing from the Wind”?
2. Are some secrets just too big to keep? In the long run, is it possible for Jake to keep his son a secret in “Choices”? Will Sally John in “For a Moment, Underground” be able to keep her bulimia from her father? Why or why not?
3. What is the significance of the subway train that runs beneath Sally John’s home in Harlem? What makes it a fitting metaphor for secrecy?
4. When should a secret be revealed? Was Michelle right to tell Ms. Noel about Mr. Sumner in “A Thousand Words”? Should Kerry have reported Mr. P. in “Partial Reinforcement”?
5. “Choices” is the only story in this collection that isn’t told in the first person. Why do you think Mary Ann Rodman decided to use a third-person narration? How would the story have been different if it were told in Jake’s voice?
6. Secrets can be silly, as is true for the heroine of the hilarious “Call Me!” Why is she juggling so many boyfriends? Do you believe her stories? Do you think she does? Why or why not?
7. Mortals aren’t the only creatures with secrets. Why can’t Joshua in “Cupid’s Beaux” be truthful about himself with Jamal? What does he know about the Big Boss that many humans don’t? What role does free will play in his life and in the lives of all the Big Boss’s creatures?
8. In her preface to this collection, Ann Angel admits that, like most writers, she can’t keep a secret. Which other professions are good for secret-tellers? Which are good for secret-keepers? Are you a secret-keeper or a secret-teller? Why?
9. Take another look at the titles of these stories. Which is your favorite? Which best fits the story? Which is the most intriguing? Why?
10. Sex and secrecy often go hand in hand. What are some of the significant sexual secrets that are being kept by the characters in this collection? Why does Mr. P. turn on Kerry in “Partial Reinforcement”? How did Warren earn extra money in “Lucky Buoy”? Why does Luke convince himself that Wendy is to blame for Sarah’s condition in “We Were Together”?
11. In “A Crossroads,” Jason tells his old girlfriend, “You know you can’t change who you are just by changing your name.” But she insists, “Yes, you can” (page 234). What do you think? How important is a name? In “Quick Change,” how does Liv change when she’s called Hannah?
12. Families have many reasons for keeping secrets. Compare the family secrets in “Three-Four Time,” “Quick Change,” and “A Crossroads.” Would openness serve them better? Why or why not?
13. Why is Lord Lin eager to have his secret discovered in “Little Wolf and the Iron Pin”? How does Little Wolf’s secret weapon destroy him?
14. In “Three-Four Time,” Imogene thinks, “Sometimes I think I am like an experimental composition—full of dissonance, phrases that don’t mesh together, mixed rhythms and styles” (page 264). What does she mean? Which other characters in this collection feel the same way? Have you ever felt like “an experimental composition”?
15. How can secrets be used as weapons? How does Claire use a secret to control Lucy in “The We-Are-Like-Everybody-Else Game”? How does Beth’s mother in “A Crossroads” try to use her secret to win back her daughter?
16. What makes some places more inviting than others for keepers of secrets? What draws people with secrets to Lundy Lee in “Lucky Buoy”? What attracts non-mortals to Sanguini’s in “Cupid’s Beaux”?
17. Take a closer look at the order in which these stories are placed. What themes are developed over the course of this collection? How does the tone of the stories vary? Why do you think “The We Are-Like-Everybody-Else Game” was chosen to open the collection and “A Thousand Words” to close it?
18. Celeste asks Warren, “What would life be without a sequence of secrets?” (page 100). How would you answer her question? Would you be able to live a life without secrets? Would you want to?