

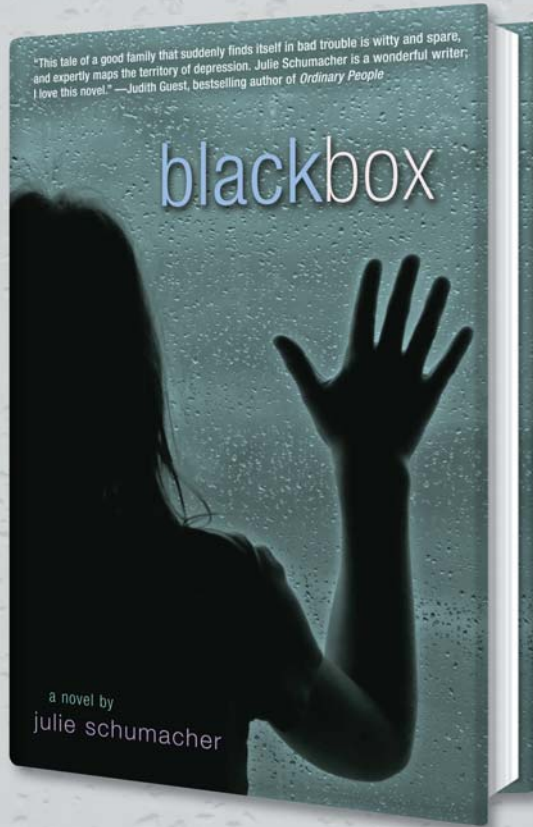
★ "A readable, ultimately uplifting book about a difficult subject."  
—*School Library Journal*, Starred

# blackbox

## Readers Guide



[www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)



**Grades 7 up**

Delacorte Press PB: 978-0-440-24064-8

HC: 978-0-385-73542-1

GLB: 978-0-385-90523-7

Listening Library CD: 978-0-7393-8593-7

## anote from theauthor

I started writing *Black Box* because a person very close to me was suffering from severe depression. Depression can be dangerous: suicide occurs almost twice as often as homicide in the U.S. But embarrassment and the mistaken idea that depression is a “personal weakness” keep many people from seeking treatment.

In creating Dora and Elena, I wanted to write about the shame and confusion that too often accompany mental illness. I wanted to write not only about what Dora suffers, both at home and in the psychiatric ward at Lorning; I also wanted to write about Elena’s helplessness, and about the ways in which she feels responsible for her sister as well as alone and afraid.

Despite its subject matter, I don’t think *Black Box* is a depressing or a hopeless book. I believe in hope—in real life and for my characters. Hope doesn’t necessarily mean a happy ending: but maybe, for Dora and Elena, it can mean greater honesty and understanding, and a refusal to give in to silence and shame.

# questions for group discussion

- Throughout the novel, Elena remains optimistic about Dora's recovery. Considering the totality of the girls' experience, why is Elena so hopeful? What role does Jimmy play in Elena's positive outlook?
- When Dora takes too many of her antidepressants, her mother assumes she is trying to kill herself and makes the decision to leave her in hospital lockdown. Does this experience help or harm Dora? Why? What does Elena think happened to cause Dora to overdose? Is her assumption probable?
- After two weeks in Lorning, Dora's condition continues to worsen. Why do her parents allow her to stay? What signs do they have that Lorning may not be the best place for Dora? What is Elena's attitude toward Dora's treatment?
- Why are Dora's parents so concerned about keeping Dora's illness a secret? Does this secrecy have any effect on Dora? Why or why not? How does the secrecy affect Elena? How does Jimmy's friendship help Elena?
- At first, Elena refuses to talk with the Grandma Therapist. Why does Elena finally decide to talk to the Grandma Therapist when she wants Dora out of Lorning? Does the Grandma Therapist help Elena? How?
- What evidence in the book supports the strong relationship between Dora and Elena? How does Dora's illness bring them closer together? How does the illness drive a wedge between them?
- Dora puts pressure on Elena to keep secrets about Dora's life: taking or not taking her medication, cutting classes at school, and hiding pills in the clock. How does Elena deal with the guilt of this secret knowledge? What does Elena do with this information? How does her response help or hurt Dora?
- Why is Dora's mother so resistant to Elena's suggestion about a new doctor? Why won't Elena's parents keep her informed about Dora's treatment? Why do they refuse to let Elena visit Dora? What effect does this have on both girls?
- Why does Jimmy lie to Elena about his brother Mark? How does this allow Jimmy to discuss what he knows about Lorning without being truthful? How does Elena react when she learns the truth about Jimmy? Is her reaction justified?
- When Dora tries to kill herself, why does her mother blame Elena? Could Elena have prevented the suicide attempt? Why or why not? How does Elena feel about Dora's attempt to take her own life?

Courtesy of the author.



## abouttheauthor

**julie schumacher** is the author of three books for middle-grade readers, including *The Book of One Hundred Truths*. *Black Box* is her first young adult novel. Schumacher is a professor of creative writing and English at the University of Minnesota. She lives in St. Paul.

For more information about the author, visit her Web site at [JulieSchumacher.com](http://JulieSchumacher.com)

### INTERNET RESOURCES

#### DEPRESSION IN TEENAGERS

[www.psychologyinfo.com/depression/teens.htm](http://www.psychologyinfo.com/depression/teens.htm)

#### DEPRESSED TEENS WORRY ABOUT FAMILY REACTION: STUDY

[www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSTRE5505LV20090601](http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSTRE5505LV20090601)

#### AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CHILD ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

##### FACTS ON TEEN SUICIDE

[www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/teen\\_suicide](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/teen_suicide)

##### THE DEPRESSED CHILD

[www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/the\\_depressed\\_child](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/the_depressed_child)

#### TEEN DEPRESSION TREATMENT OPTIONS

[www.about-teen-depression.com/treatment-depression.html](http://www.about-teen-depression.com/treatment-depression.html)

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