

ALWAYS THE ALMOST

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There are a number of queer characters in the book. How do all of them inhabit their identities differently? How are they similar?
2. What do you think about Miles's New Year's resolutions? Is it fair of him to think he can "win" Shane back?
3. Miles doesn't know of any LGBTQ composers until Stefania tells him Tchaikovsky was gay. Why do you think this element of history is erased? How does it expand our understanding of their art to know more about their identities?
4. Eric asks Miles if he likes playing the piano. What do you think the pressure of the looming competition does to Miles's feelings about the piano? How does competition drive Miles to improve and grow? Miles also notes that you can't win with Mozart. Do you think competition can also be stifling? How so?
5. Miles faces online transphobia, while Eric experienced queerphobia and bullying in person at his old school. Do you think there's a difference between online and in-person bullying and harassment? How do you think the fact that Eric is at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities impacts his experience of bullying?
6. What are some ways we see different characters try on identities throughout the book? For example, Paige changes her appearance when she begins dating Josie, and Shane kisses Miles because he wants to try on the feeling of kissing him as Miles. What are other examples?
7. Cameron calls Miles and Lily "diversity tokens." What do you think about this term?
8. What do you think about the ways Miles apologizes to each of his friends? Do you think he does enough? Why do you think he needs to apologize?
9. What is the role of performance in the book? What are some examples of performances (musical and non-musical), and in what ways do they drive the plot forward or deepen our understanding of the characters?
10. Miles's parents are not overtly transphobic, but both of them are still uncomfortable with various aspects of his identity. How do their hang-ups hurt Miles? How do Miles's relationships with his parents change over the course of the book? Do you have sympathy for their insecurities about his identity? Why or why not?

