

## About *The Beginning of After*

Sixteen-year-old Laurel's world changes instantly when her parents and brother are killed in a terrible car accident. Behind the wheel is the father of her bad-boy neighbor, David Kaufman, whose mother is also killed.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, Laurel navigates a new reality in which she and her best friend grow apart, boys may or may not be approaching her out of pity, overpowering memories lurk everywhere, and Mr. Kaufman is comatose but still very much alive. Through it all there is David, who swoops in and out of Laurel's life and to whom she finds herself attracted against her better judgment. She will forever be connected to him by their mutual loss—a connection that will change them both in unexpected ways.

Jennifer Castle's debut novel is a heartwrenching, surprisingly witty testament to how drastically life can change in the span of a single second.

**A 2012 YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults selection**

**A 2012 Chicago Public Library "Best of the Best" Book**

**A 2011 ABC New Voices selection as one of the year's most outstanding YA debuts**

## About Jennifer Castle

Jennifer Castle received her B.A. in Creative Writing at Brown University and worked as a celebrity publicist's assistant, an advertising copywriter, and a struggling screenwriter before falling into a niche producing educational websites for kids and teens. *The Beginning of After* is her first novel; her next novel, *You Look Different in Real Life*, is forthcoming from HarperTeen in June 2013. She lives in New York's Hudson Valley with her husband and two daughters.

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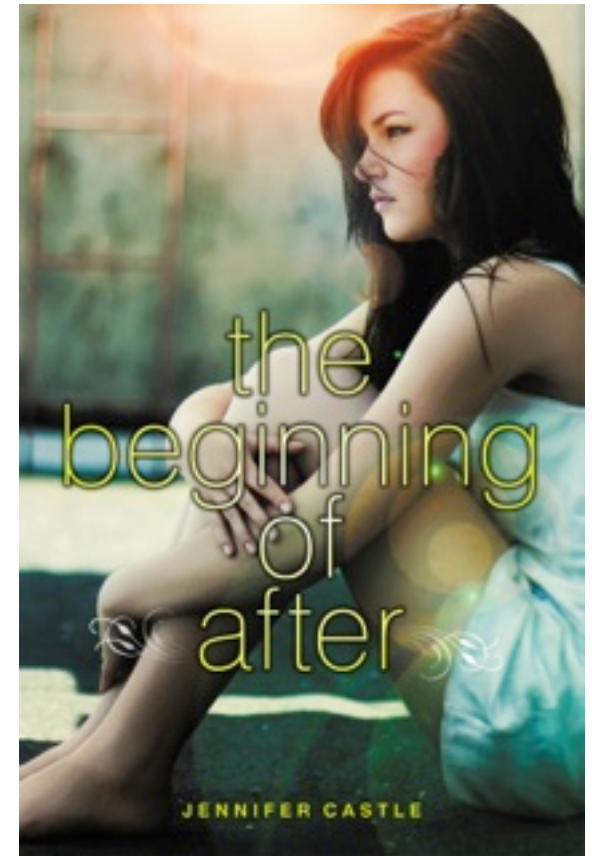
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## *The Beginning of After* Educators' Guide

**A teaching plan and discussion questions for students in grades 8 - 12.**

By Eileen Quinn



## Teaching Ideas

It is recommended that students keep a journal in which to respond to some or all of the questions that follow. Questions may also be selected for small group or class discussion.

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## A Note About Journals

Ofentimes people choose a “fancy” notebook for a journal. Be mindful that such a journal does not necessarily welcome experimentation and the free flow of ideas. It is recommended to use a basic composition book, spiral notebook, or even stapled loose leaf for a journal. This encourages the creative process without added pressure or expectations.

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## Extensions

Encourage students to select a journal entry from which a short story or memoir may be built.

Characterization is the method by which writers develop characters. Students may further examine the novel’s many rich characters, both major and minor, through role play or monologue writing.

Arrange a Skype or in-person visit with Jennifer Castle. Each student should be prepared with at least two thoughtful questions for the author dealing with the story itself, the writing process, or a relevant personal question. Online interviews are also available to read.

Two provocative topics regarding alcohol are woven throughout the novel, drunk driving and underage drinking. Use this as a springboard for research and or debates involving these topics.

Though Laurel’s religion does not shape the story, the traditions and terminology of her Jewish religion (e.g. Seder, Haggadah, bar mitzvah) may not be familiar to all students. This may be an opportunity to discuss the vocabulary and traditions of different religions.

## Journal Questions

1. Write about a childhood friend from whom you have drifted apart. (Suggested before reading)
2. Discuss a time that drastically changed your life forever. (Suggested before reading)
3. Write about caretaking for someone’s animal. (Suggested before reading)
4. Discuss times and situations when it is acceptable to be selfish. (Suggested before reading)
5. Reread page 86. Discuss this scene when Laurel learns her SAT scores and make some connection to your own life. (Suggested after Chapter 8)
6. Laurel needs her grandmother to be strong. Write about the person you need to be strong in your life. If you don’t have such a person, write about who the person should be and why. (Suggested after Chapter 8)
7. Along with discussing your views on underage drinking, discuss what happens in Chapter 10 that probably would not have happened if the characters were not under the influence. (Suggested after Chapter 10)
8. Suzie, the therapist, tells Laurel that one thing to help her survive the trauma of loss would be to think of her relationships with her mom, dad, and brother “as things she can work on and develop” even though they have died. If you have experienced the loss of a loved one, discuss ways in which you have continued to work on the relationship even though the person is no longer in your life. (Suggested after Chapter 12)
9. On page 224, Nana says, “I lost them too, you know.” In discussing why Nana says this, also discuss Nana’s character. (Suggested after Chapter 20)
10. Explain why working at Ashland is so important to Laurel. What does it provide her, other than just a job? (Suggested after Chapter 20)

11. Describe David’s character. Would you be able to be friends with him? Explain why or why not. (Suggested after Chapter 25)
  12. Explain why you think Eve has become less bossy yet also less friendly toward Laurel since having learned Laurel’s “secret.” If you ever experienced learning something totally unexpected about a friend or relative, describe the news and your reaction. (Suggested after Chapter 28)
  13. Describe the changes that occur in Laurel and Meg’s friendship. Include your feelings on each girl’s behavior. (Suggested after Chapter 33)
  14. Laurel and David deal with the tragedy very differently. Summarize each person’s way. Is one person more right than the other? Why? (Suggested after Chapter 35)
  15. Take any scene and rewrite it from another character’s point of view. (Suggested after reading)
  16. Did you identify with any particular character in the book? Explain why. (Suggested after reading)
  17. Review the book. State your impressions, likes, and dislikes. Be sure to support your opinions with examples from the book. (Suggested after reading)
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## Vocabulary

In reading *The Beginning of After*, students have the opportunity to expand their vocabulary. Ask students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them using context clues. Such words may include: indecent (p. 2), intently (p. 10), flaunting (p. 61), bland (p.76), hover (p.111), baffled (p.115), morphing (p. 115), pathetic (p.133), cooing (p.158), status quo (p. 299), dejectedly (p. 316), rehashing (p. 374)

Also, in studying the new vocabulary, it is recommended to observe the use of affixes and to discuss their meanings in order to strengthen word attack skills.