THE YEAR OF THE BEASTS – READING GROUP GUIDE

About the Book:

During a small town summer, Tessa watches as her younger sister Lulu begins dating Tessa’s crush, becomes closer to Tessa’s friends, and starts to outgrow girlhood. Meanwhile, Tessa begins secretly seeing Jasper, the town loner, in the woods between their houses. Tessa seeks to reconcile her different worlds when tragedy strikes, and Tessa must instead face a world without Lulu at all.

For Discussion:

Year of the Beasts is part graphic novel, part prose. How did the two types of narrative function together? How would it have been different if the book were just prose or just art?

The chapters alternate between prose and art, but they are not in chronological order. In fact, the plot of the art at the beginning of the book overlaps with the prose at the end of the book. What did you think of the author’s choice to structure the book this way?

Tessa is ambivalent about Lulu’s increasing involvement in her life, going as far as to purposefully ruin Lulu’s shoes. If you were Tessa, how would you react to your younger sister spending so much time with you and your friends?

Jasper tells Tessa, “There’s a beast inside all of us, you know.” What would your beast look like? Both Tessa and Lulu experience their first loves over the course of the summer. How are their experiences of new relationships similar and different? Did either experience resonate with you?

Tessa’s alter-ego is Medusa, a character from Greek mythology called a Gorgon with snakes for hair—when people looked at Medusa, they were turned to stone. Are there figures from legend with whom you identify?

Jasper is called a weirdo and loner, but he doesn’t seem to care. What do you think of the balance he and the other characters strike between staying true to themselves and fitting in?

Tessa pushes her friends away after the accident. Charlie and Celina keep reaching out to her, while Jasper is too hurt to try. How would you support a friend in Tessa’s situation?

Tessa thinks a lot about her own identity in Year of the Beasts, and she changes significantly by the end of the story, even before Lulu’s death. Have there been periods of intense change in your life? What brought them about?

Tessa and her family are irrevocably changed by Lulu’s death, but they deal with their emotions in different ways. Tessa’s father cooks and puts on a brave front, and her mother listens to music and plays guitar. How do you think you would react to a difficult and troubling occurrence?