

Praise for *COMPULSION*

"A starkly honest, compelling read. It will grab you and plunge you into the unusual, yet strangely familiar mind of Jake Martin and you will come out different."—**Francisco X. Stork**, author of *Marcelo in the Real World*

"*Compulsion* is one of those books that immediately grabs the reader by the heart and won't let go, even after the final page is turned. Compelling and real, Jacob's story of grappling with devastating and frightening OCD is a must-read for anyone who ever thought they 'knew' what 'normal' looked like."—**Jennifer Brown**, author of *Hate List*

"A compelling entrée into the claustrophobic world of an OCD teen. Taut, suspenseful and well-realized."—**Kirkus Reviews**

"Both poignant and earthy. Teen readers will be quickly caught up in the sheer momentum of Jake's tale as he unwittingly reveals the source of his terrors and compulsions. Achingly believable. Highly recommended."—**Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)**

"When I finished, I closed the book and said, 'Wow.' The language, dialogue, and pacing is very realistic and stays true without falling back on clichés and stereotypes. A must read."—**YABooksCentral.com**

About the Author

HEIDI AYARBE grew up in Nevada and has lived all over the world. She now makes her home in Colombia with her husband and daughter. She is also the author *Freeze Frame* and *Compromised*. You can visit her online at www.heidiayarbe.com.

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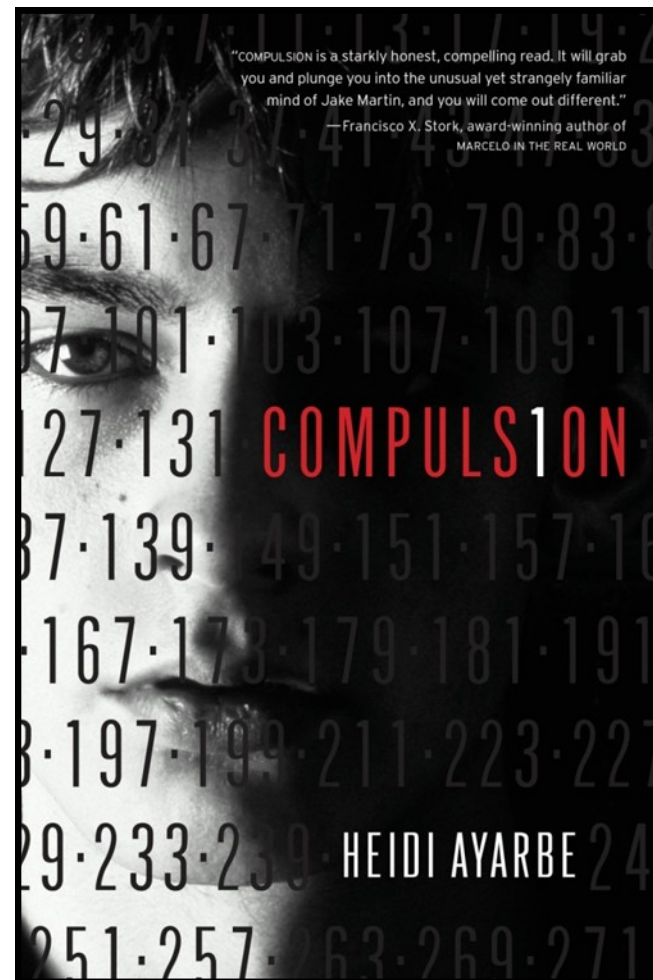
* Discussion guide created by Christina Koza, Master Teacher of English, NYC Dept of Education.

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DISCUSSION GUIDE *COMPULSION* by Heidi Ayarbe



"Ayarbe exercises both enormous skill and restraint getting to the root of just how debilitating OCD can become, juxtaposing descriptions of the way the mind's compulsions can trap a mental and physical anguish against a complex, credibly casted portrayal of teen social dynamics, which are treacherous enough on their own. A gripping, claustrophobic read."

Booklist (starred review)

ABOUT THE BOOK

On Saturday, November 5th, at 3:00 pm, Jake Martin's life is going to change. But not because he's about to lead his team to the state championship, or because scouts from Ivy League universities will be there, dying to give him scholarships to the school of his choice. Jake Martin thinks that this Saturday, his obsessions and compulsions will finally go away, because the "magic," the prime numbers and rituals that he spends every moment thinking about, will line up and finally leave him free, clear . . . and normal. Everything will be okay. He won't have to rely on his sister, Kasey, or the school outcast, Mera Hartman. He won't disappoint his friend Luc, or his dad, or his team, ever again. And the headaches, the panic attacks, and the blackouts will stop. At least, that's what Jake has been counting on. But when the "magic" doesn't work, and a tragic event puts everything Jake cares for in danger, Jake finally has to face himself, his family, and the dangerous realities of his own mind.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) The National Institute of Mental Health* defines Obsessive Compulsive Disorder as an anxiety disorder, characterized by recurrent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions), and performing repetitive behaviors or rituals (compulsions) in an effort to make the obsessions go away. What are Jake's obsessions? What are his compulsions? How do they affect his life?
- 2.) Describe Jake's dad. What kind of person is he? What kind of parent is he? What kind of relationship does he have with Jake?
- 3.) Jake thinks, "It's weird that the people we spend the most time with know the least about us" (p. 34). Why do you think Jake keeps his secrets from the people closest to him? Why do you think people in general do so?
- 4.) The soccer field is the one place where Jake feels safe, in control, and clear: "Everything comes together" for him there. (p. 35). Why do you think that is? Why do you think his obsessions and compulsions disappear when he's playing soccer?
- 5.) When Jake gets overwhelmed, the "spiders" come. Describe the spiders and their effect on Jake. What might they represent?
- 6.) Mera Hartman is considered a "social outcast" but is the one person at school that makes Jake feel safe. Why do you think this is? Describe Mera: How is she like the other teenagers in this book? How is she different?
- 7.) Mera quotes John Steinbeck's novel, *East of Eden* to Jake: "You are one of those rare people who can separate your observation from your preconception. You see what is, where most people see what they expect" (p. 67). What does this mean? What is she saying that Jake is able to do? How is this similar or different to how Jake feels about the people around him?

8.) Throughout the novel Jake speaks a great deal about the difference between perception and reality; at the hospital, he thinks "I'm stuck here again—stuck in the door between inside and outside, between perception and reality, truth and lies" (p. 266). What does this mean? What are the different perceptions and realities in the novel?

9.) In his pep talk before the big game, Coach says to the team, "Being perfect is about being able to look your friends in the eye and know that you didn't let them down, because you told them the truth" (p. 194). Do you agree with this idea of perfection? How does Jake react to this speech? What does it tell us about Jake?

10.) Luc and Jake have been friends their entire lives, and have been through a great deal together. How would you characterize their friendship? How does it change or evolve over the course of the novel? Would you want to be friends with them? Explain.

11.) At Mario's party Jake thinks, "Nobody in high school should be so confident—so real. No masks. No hiding behind anything. It's unsettling" (p. 221). What is Jake saying about being a teenager? Do you agree with him? Is it hard for teenagers to show their "real" selves?" Why?

12.) Jake's mom is often criticized by Kasey as not being a "real" mom. What role does she play in her family's life? How do her issues affect her family? How would Jake's life be different if his mother was different?

13.) Jake experiences flashbacks to a traumatic moment in his childhood throughout the novel. He remembers thinking that "The numbers keep me alive. Keep Kasey alive. Just count. Make the numbers work" (p. 286). Describe what happened when Jake was little. How has it affected his life? How has it affected his relationships with his family? How much do traumatic experiences in childhood shape the adults we become?

14.) How does what happens to Kasey the night of the party affect Jake? How does it affect how he sees himself? Others? His relationships?

15.) Many of the teenagers in this novel have responsibilities placed on them by their families. Describe the different responsibilities Mera, Luc, Kasey, and Jake have. Are they reasonable? Is the responsibility Jake's father puts on him at the end of the novel fair? How does it affect Jake's decisions?

16.) Why is Jake finally able, in the last lines of the novel, to admit he is not okay? What has changed?

*SOURCE: National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov), part of the National Institutes of Health, a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.