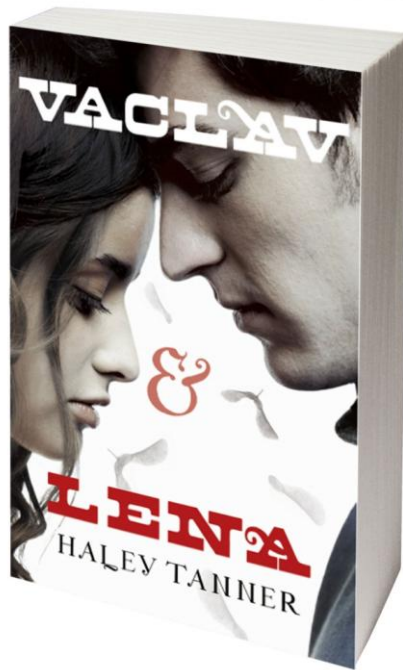


Windmill reading group guide to



Vaclav and Lena seem destined for each other. They first meet as children in an English-as-a-second-language class in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. Vaclav, who dreams of becoming a famous magician, is precocious and verbal. Lena, struggling with English, takes comfort in the safety of his adoration, his noisy, loving home, and the care of Rasia, his big-hearted mother. Vaclav imagines their story unfolding like a fairy tale, but among the many truths to be discovered in Haley Tanner's wondrous debut is that happily ever after is never a foregone conclusion.

When Lena is not around Vaclav and his parents, her world is unsafe. Her poor language skills isolate her. She lives with a mostly absent, neglectful aunt, and has no connection to her parents, who she believes are still in Russia. Then, one day, Lena does not show up for school. She has disappeared from Vaclav and his family's lives as if by a cruel trick. For the next seven years Vaclav always says goodnight to her, wondering if she is doing the same somewhere. On the eve of Lena's seventeenth birthday he finds out.

Haley Tanner has the originality and verve of a born storyteller, and the boldness to imagine a world in which love can overcome the most difficult circumstances. In *Vaclav & Lena* she has created two unforgettable young protagonists who evoke the joy, the confusion, and the passion of having a profound, everlasting connection with someone else.



Discussion guide:

Vaclav and Lena is mainly told from the perspective of those for whom English is a second language. How does Haley Tanner capture the voice of these people, and what effect does it have on the way the story is told?

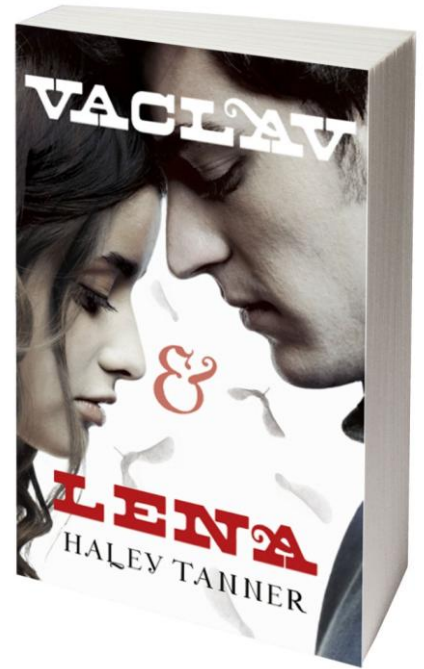
Why near the beginning does Lena push Vaclav away? Is it because of what is happening at home, or is it something else?

Was Rasia right to do what she did for Lena, in the way she did it? Would you have done differently? How would you have explained it to Vaclav?

Vaclav grows up to be an 'American boy', according to his mother. What sort of difficulties do the immigrant families face – both outside and within their family circles?

Does Ekaterina really care about Lena as she claims near the end?

The theme of truth runs throughout the novel: whether it is right to always tell the truth, and whether we want to know it. How do different characters face up to (or avoid) their own truths, and do you agree with how they do this?



Join us with Haley Tanner for a live Q&A on 30th June from 4pm!

Follow @WindmillBooks on Twitter and send end your questions #vaclav



On the Windmill Book Group Facebook page:

- Join our discussion board with reading groups across the country, and tell us what your group thought
- Haley Tanner tells us what inspired her to write *Vaclav and Lena*
- Check out our future Windmill Book Group titles

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