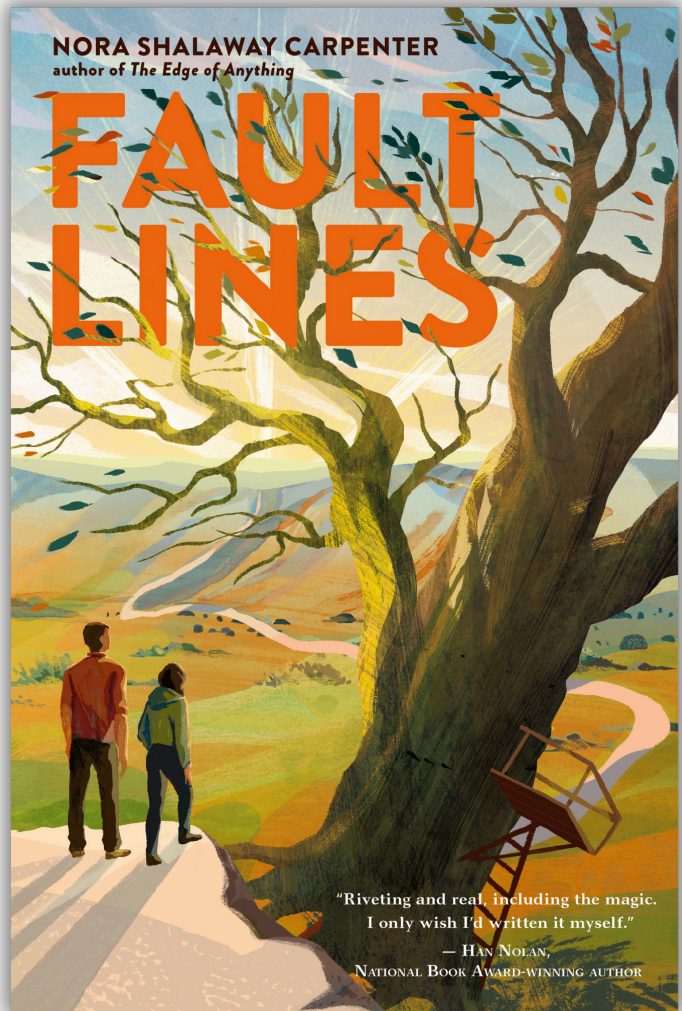


# NORA SHALAWAY CARPENTER'S FAULT LINES

## DISCUSSION & LESSON GUIDE



## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Fault Lines* tells the intertwined stories of two rural teens — one with a secret energetic connection to the earth and suffering immensely from damage caused by fracking — and the other depending on fracking completely, his mother's pipelining job being the only thing keeping his family off the street.

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**2024 GREEN EARTH BOOK  
AWARD WINNER,  
YA FICTION**

## VOCABULARY

### FRACKING (*noun*)



the process of injecting water, sand, and/or chemicals into a well to break up underground bedrock to free up oil or gas reserves

### ARBORIST (*noun*)



a tree surgeon; a professional who trims, prunes, and cares for trees and shrubs

### ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM (*noun*)



the intentional siting of polluting and waste facilities in communities primarily populated by African Americans, Latinos, Indigenous People, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, migrant farmworkers, & low-income workers

Ever since her aunt died four months ago, seventeen-year-old Vivian (Viv) Spry is aching to figure out where she belongs. Her father has become emotionally distant and even her best friend has found a new sense of identity in her theater group. Unfortunately, nobody in her rural West Virginia town has time for an assertive, angry girl, especially a girl dubbed “Ice Queen” for refusing to sleep with her popular boyfriend. On top of everything, she discovers a strange ability to sense energy that really freaks her out. The only place Viv feels like it’s safe to be her true self is the tree stand where her aunt taught her to hunt. It’s the one place she still feels connected to the person who knew her best. So when fracking destroys the stand and almost kills her, Viv vows to find a way to take the gas company down.

When Dex Mathews comes to town — a new kid whose mom lands a job laying pipeline — his and Viv’s worlds collide and a friendship (and maybe more?) slowly blossoms. But Viv’s plan to sabotage the pipeline company could result in Dex’s mom losing her job, putting them on the streets. Now Viv and Dex have to decide what’s worth fighting for — their families, their principles, or each other.

# PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

## ANNOTATION SUGGESTION



Create a character chart for either whole class use or as a handout for each individual student. As you read, have students note any time a character does or says something that contradicts their “normal” culture-assigned gender roles. (i.e. Oscar enjoys cooking, Dex’s mom served in Afghanistan, etc.)

Students can use these annotations as textual evidence for a formal writing assessment, class discussion, or debate at the conclusion of the novel study.

## “4 Corners” ANTICIPATION ACTIVITY

To get students thinking about the topics and themes within *Fault Lines*, complete this anticipation activity. Assign the four corners of your room “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree”. (Or, bonus points if you are able to complete the activity in an outside space!) Then, read the following statements aloud one-by-one and have students move to the corner with the sign that best describes their stance on the statement read. These statements can fuel an informal whole class discussion during the activity, and/or may be used for a more formal debate at the unit’s conclusion.



## ANTICIPATION STATEMENTS:

- 1. You can’t expect change to happen overnight. Real change is slow and subtle.**
- 2. It’s normal that people will grow and change, but not always in the same direction.**
- 3. Trash talk in sports is teenage boys’ way of showing they belong.**
- 4. Parents should include their teens in important family decisions.**
- 5. Fracking and pipelining are wrong.**
- 6. Going to college is more important than learning a trade.**
- 7. People in the wealthiest class have all the power.**
- 8. Different makes people uncomfortable.**
- 9. No one likes an angry girl.**
- 10. Trust is something you must earn.**
- 11. Hunting for food is different than hunting for sport.**
- 12. Someone with true pride should never accept help.**
- 13. People always show you who they are in little ways.**
- 14. When making a decision, financial benefits outweigh moral obligation.**
- 15. Sometimes it takes science a while to understand what goes on in the world.**





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Fault Lines* begins with a sinkhole robbing Viv of her tree, her mother's hunting stand, and her Aunt Elle's energy. Have you ever witnessed or seen photographs of a sinkhole? Did you know this was something that even occurred?
2. The book introduces a discussion about culture's toxic definition of "masculinity" as early as chapter two when Dex remarks that, "...his father loved to point out Dex wasn't much like other boys his age. *Normal* boys." As a male, what are the "normal" qualities Dex was raised with the expectation of having? What are some of the "abnormal" qualities Carpenter assigned Dex's character? What point do you believe she was making with these characterization choices?
3. One of the conflicts Dex faces throughout the novel is the conflicting opinions he and his mom have about him attending college vs. joining the army after high school. Why do you believe his veteran mom is adamant he not follow in her footsteps? Explain.
4. When the main characters first meet at ALL8, Viv assumes Dex is a guest staying at the local resort because "tourist kids are always trying to get free classes" (55). Provide three additional text examples of Carpenter illustrating the inequities of class systems in Appalachian communities.
5. On page thirty Viv recalls a grade she earned in debate class the year prior; reread the scene on that page. What point do you believe Carpenter is making with the inclusion of this recollection? Do you agree or disagree with her point?
6. In chapter thirteen we learn Briar Gas is offering Viv's father \$30,000 to create a right of way for pipelining trucks on his property. If you're Mr. Spry, would you sign the contract and take the money? Explain why or why not.
7. In chapter twenty-six Viv and Dex argue about which should come first: one's responsibility to the environment or to ensuring their family is sheltered and fed. Which character do you side with in this argument? Explain your reasoning.
8. At one point Maeve tells Viv, "Don't be sorry, ...*Learn*" (201). What does she mean by this? Do you personally believe it to be good or flawed advice?
9. Almost every key scene within *Fault Lines* takes place in the vast forests of Twisted Pines, West Virginia. Discuss the role that setting plays in the story. In what way does the natural landscape shape the characters? In what ways does it fuel the plot and conflict?
10. Read Carpenter's author's note at the end of the novel. When asked about the one thing she hopes readers take away from her stories, she says that she always hopes readers leave "with multiple ideas to ponder and with perhaps a slightly new way of seeing the world and the complex people in it" (375). Share *at least* one new idea you're pondering or one thing within *Fault Lines* that afforded you a different perspective.

# MULTIDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

## SCIENCE CONNECTIONS:

Viv tells Dex that trees “secrete hormones and chemicals to communicate” and “also give off hormones if they’re in distress...” (172-73). Research these claims and cite at least three scholarly sources in an essay defending or rejecting Viv’s claim.



Dex mentions that he listens to podcasts to learn about the economy and job market. Viv later listens to one in order to better educate herself on the economical impact of fracking. Find and listen to at least three podcast episodes about our country’s current climate crisis, and/or specifically about fracking’s current impact on U.S. soil. Present your findings to the class in a brief presentation.

## ART CONNECTIONS:

Imagine each of the teenage characters from *Fault Lines* is going to get a tattoo. Create a design that you believe would best suit Viv, Dex, Oscar, or Maeve and write a brief essay explaining the design and justifying why you believe the character might realistically chose it for a tattoo.



Viv sneaks onto the fracking site and describes the pipeline. Use Carpenter’s descriptions on pages 297-98 to draw a visual of Briar Gas’s work site. Then, do an “oil fracking” image search. Compare the image you drew to the pictures online. How did you do? Did Carpenter describe the machinery well enough for you to have a decent visual of the danger Viv was putting herself in while you were reading?

## MATH & FINANCIAL LITERACY CONNECTIONS:

Dex is extremely financially insecure. Estimate the average rent and mortgage cost in the area you live then research current prices. Were you close? What is the average salary of various professions in the area? Do you know how much tourism contributes to your local economy? Research and graph the results.



A common conflict for both Viv and Dex is their parents’ concern with the cost of college. Research college tuition for the five colleges closest to your hometown and record the annual tuition for each. Calculate the total cost for tuition and room & board for four years at ONE of the schools.

(Extra Credit: Viv’s father is offered \$30,000. If he had accepted the offer, about how much more would he and Viv still need if she were to attend this school?)



## HEALTH & WELLNESS CONNECTIONS:

In the novel, Dex's father deals with PTSD, depression, alcoholism, and opiate addiction. Unfortunately, these struggles aren't uncommon among service members. Research the percentage of veterans that return from service and suffer from PTSD, depression, and/or addiction. Create a brochure of resources that includes known symptoms of both PTSD and depression, a graph charting your statistical findings, and a list of organizations that are available to assist these veterans.



Viv is happiest when feeling the forest's energy. When he sits on his boulder overlooking the vast wilderness, Oscar admits, "it feels like truth somehow. Like I can just be whoever I want. Myself, even" (243). Have you ever felt something similar? Does science support these feelings? Research the health benefits of being outdoors and write a persuasive essay supporting or rejecting the claim that being in nature is good for your health.

## PUBLIC SPEAKING CONNECTIONS:

Have students research a topic from the novel and present their findings in a podcast episode. Divide students into groups of 3-5 and assign each one of the most prevalent topics from within the novel. Research topics may include, but are not limited to: fracking's environmental impact, fracking's economical impact, PTSD, environmental racism, or, even the Eliza Griswold book mentioned by Carpenter in her author's note, *Amity and Prosperity: One Family and the Fracturing of America*.



There are many debatable topics in *Fault Lines*. Take the anticipation statements from above and hold a formal class debate. Have students re-evaluate their position on each statement after reading the novel. When possible, allow them to partner up and prepare a debate against a team with a differing opinion.

**Find more resources, including interviews with the author, at <https://www.noracarpenterwrites.com/fault-lines-resources.html>**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from rural West Virginia, Nora Shalaway Carpenter lives and writes in the mountains of North Carolina. Her young adult novels and anthologies have been named "Best of the Year" by NPR, *Kirkus Reviews*, Bank Street Books, and *A Mighty Girl*, and have won accolades including the Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection, the Whippoowill Award for authentic rural fiction, and the Nautilus Award championing "better books for a better world." Nora holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and serves as faculty for the Highlights Foundation's Whole Novel Workshop and Intro to Short Fiction class.

Connect with her at [noracarpenterwrites.com](http://noracarpenterwrites.com).



The lesson suggestions, discussion questions, and multidisciplinary instructional opportunities were created by secondary educator Allie Bayer (@BayeringWithFreshmen on TpT and Instagram).