



**ASHLEY HOPE PÉREZ** grew up in Texas and served in the Teach for America Corps in Houston. She has worked as a translator and is completing a PhD in comparative literature. She spends most of her time reading, writing, and teaching college classes on vampire literature and Latin-American women writers. *Kirkus* called her first novel, *What Can't Wait*, "Un magnífico debut." Ashley lives in Indiana with her husband, Arnulfo, and their son, Liam Miguel.



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## Discussion Guide

the **knife** and the **butterfly**

ASHLEY HOPE PÉREZ

After a marijuana-addled brawl with a rival gang, 16-year-old Azael wakes up to find himself surrounded by a familiar set of concrete walls and a locked door. Juvie again, he thinks. But he can't really remember what happened or how he got picked up. He knows his MS13 boys faced off with some punks from Crazy Crew. There were bats, bricks, chains. A knife. But he can't remember anything between that moment and when he woke behind bars.

Azael knows prison, and something isn't right about this lockup. No phone call. No lawyer. No news about his brother or his homies. The only thing they make him do is watch some white girl in some cell. Watch her and try to remember.

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Lexi Allen would love to forget the brawl, would love for it to disappear back into the Xanax fog it came from. And her mother and her lawyer hope she chooses not to remember too much about the brawl—at least when it's time to testify.

Lexi knows there's more at stake in her trial than her life alone, though. She's connected to him, and he needs the truth. The knife cut, but somehow it also connected.



**the knife and the butterfly**  
Ashley Hope Pérez

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Interest Level: Grades 9-12

Ages: 14-18

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## Topics for Discussion:

1. Why does Azael have mixed feelings about Regina living with their abuela in California?
2. Why do you think Pakmin forces Azael to observe Lexi? Come up with at least three possibilities.
3. How do Azael's feelings towards Lexi change as the story progresses? Why? Give specific examples from the text.
4. Azael means "avenging angel." Why do you think this was his nickname? Why do you think the author chose it for him? Discuss the significance of the name's meaning.
5. After reading Becca's letter to Azael, explain why you think she decided to give him back the butterfly necklace instead of keeping it.
6. Why doesn't anyone tell Azael what happened to him? Why do you think it's important for Azael to figure it out for himself?
7. What do you think about the people such as Pakmin and Gabe who are working in the facility? Why are they there, and who are they?
8. Why do you think Lexi wanted so badly to fit in with the Crazy Crew boys?
9. Azael says that he hopes Lexi will understand the meaning of the butterfly necklace. What does Azael hope to communicate to Lexi by sending her the necklace? Support your conclusion with a detail from the text.
10. Is there hope for Azael's brother and friends? How do you think his final drawing will play out? Support your claim with a detail from the text.
11. Lexi, not Azael, is standing trial, but if you were a juror, how would you evaluate his past actions?
12. Imagine Lexi's thoughts and feelings as she gives her testimony in court at the end of the book. Describe them in as much detail as you can.

## About Carolrhoda Lab™

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