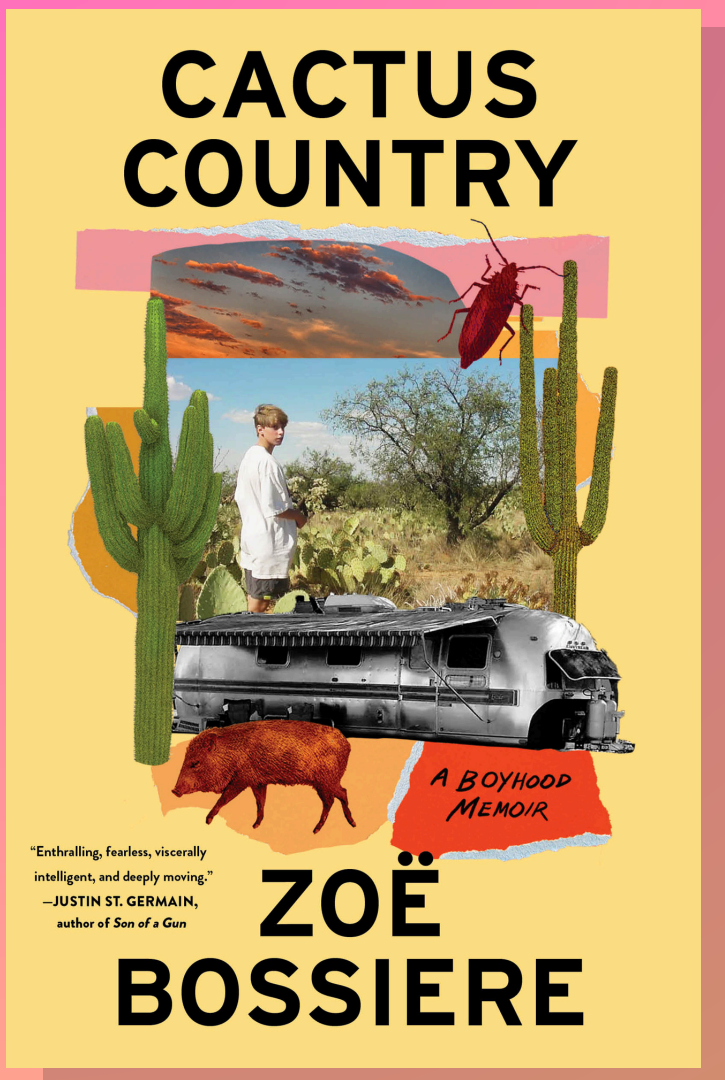


ASSIGN CACTUS COUNTRY IN YOUR NEXT CLASS!



A STRIKING MEMOIR OF GENDERFLUIDITY, CLASS, MASCULINITY, AND THE SOUTHWEST

Newly arrived in the Sonoran Desert, eleven-year-old Zoë's world is one of giant beetles, thundering javelinias, and gnarled paloverde trees. With the family's move to Cactus Country RV Park, Zoë has been given a fresh start and a new, shorter haircut. Although Zoë doesn't have the words to express it, he experiences life as a trans boy—and in Cactus Country, others begin to see him as a boy, too. Here, Zoë spends hot days chasing shade and freight trains with an ever-rotating pack of sunburned desert kids, and nights fending off his own questions about the body underneath his baggy clothes.

Equal parts harsh and tender, Cactus Country is an invitation for readers to consider how we find our place in a world that insists on stark binaries, and a precisely rendered journey of self-determination that will resonate with anyone who's ever had to fight to be themselves.

**ZOË IS AVAILABLE TO VISIT SCHOOLS AND
CLASSROOMS FOR READINGS, DISCUSSIONS,
AND/OR Q&A SESSIONS**

To schedule a virtual visit:
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To schedule an in-person visit:
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To request a complimentary desk copy:
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PUBLISHING DETAILS

Cactus Country:
A Boyhood Memoir
by Zoë Bossiere
On sale now

Eds: Print, ebook, audio

ISBN: 9781419773181



CLASS DISCUSSION PROMPTS FOR CACTUS COUNTRY: A BOYHOOD MEMOIR

- Some people feel strongly aligned with the gender assigned to them at birth while others struggle to fit into that designated role. Consider your own relationship to gender identity. When did you first become aware of gender? How did the way you understood yourself either align with or differ from what other people in your life seemed to expect of you?
- In *Cactus Country*, the child narrator is searching for media representation of their experiences, writing, “I wanted to read a story like mine, because I wanted to know how that story would end” (62). Have you ever had trouble finding characters that look, think, or act like you in books, onscreen, or in other media? What kinds of representation do you wish were more accessible today?
- Consider the book’s literary genre. How might the way you as a reader engaged with *Cactus Country*’s story have changed if the book had been written in another genre—for example, as a short story, graphic novel, or poem? Do you feel true stories, such as those often told in essays and memoirs, have different social, political, and cultural stakes compared to other genres? Why or why not?
- Why do you think stories like *Cactus Country*—that is, those of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals—have gone largely untold for so long? Why might it be important to tell such stories now, and how might the act of telling them impact how we, as a society, understand gender-expansive experiences?
- What is one new understanding—whether about the gender spectrum, trailer park living, the American Southwest, or something else entirely—that you feel you gained from reading *Cactus Country*? What are some subjects or themes in the book that you’re interested in learning more about?

WRITING ACTIVITIES BASED ON CACTUS COUNTRY: A BOYHOOD MEMOIR

- Generative Writing: In 750 words or fewer, write either a personal essay or a fictional short story that portrays a child narrator attempting to work through a big life question or problem. Be mindful of the limitations inherent to writing from the perspective of childhood, as there are many things an adult narrator might know or understand that a child would not (and vice versa!). In the story, be sure to include one or more additional characters for your narrator to interact with and a conversation between them with at least a few lines of dialogue.
- Genre Adaptation: Select one paragraph from Cactus Country that intrigued or resonated with you. Using its text as a basis, create a graphic novel-style page illustrating your chosen paragraph. Then answer the following questions: What drew you to your chosen paragraph, and why did you feel it would be a good candidate for illustration? Which aspects of creating the adaptation did you find most rewarding and which were most challenging? What can illustrations add to the story that can't be conveyed through text alone?
- Literary Analysis: Choose one chapter from Cactus Country. Then identify and analyze the following literary elements: Where is the chapter set, and who are its main characters? Describe the narrator—how do their voice and tone contribute to the reader's understanding of their age and personality? What problems or conflicts arise in the chapter, and how are they resolved (or left unresolved)? What are some of the chapter's primary images or thematic motifs, and what might they represent in the greater context of its story? Finally, in what ways do these elements contribute to the reader's narrative understanding of the chapter—what does it all “mean”?

Recommended for High School - Higher Ed. Undergrad; Ages 14+
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