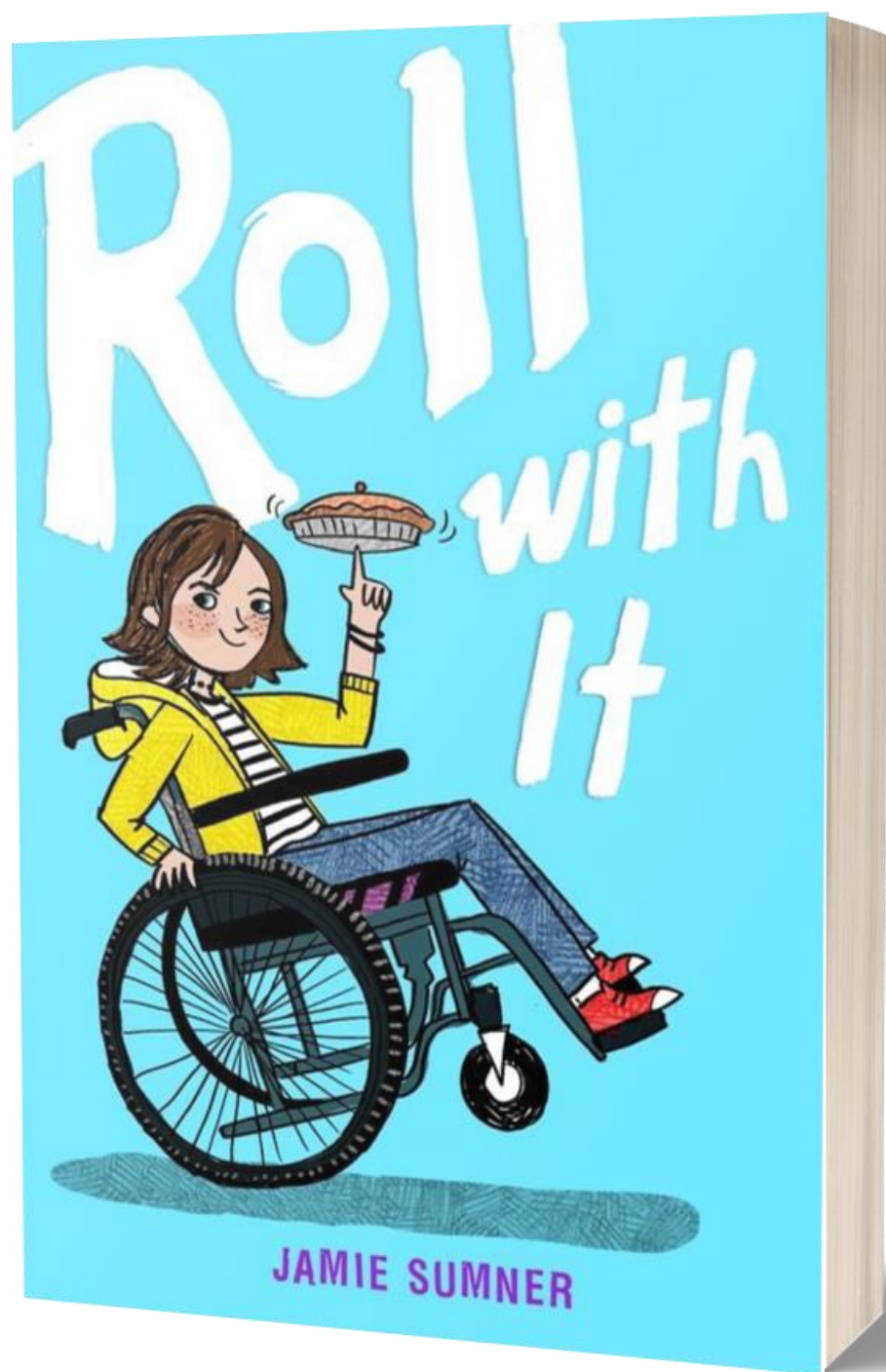

DISCUSSION GUIDE

EXPLORING CHARACTERS BEYOND THEIR DIFFERENCES





Exploring Empathy

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When guiding kids in discussing characters with special needs, the big takeaway is that these characters ask their readers to see them beyond their disability, as simply themselves. They are beauty and grit personified, not because of or in spite of their differences, but simply because they are human.

1. Who is your favorite character in the novel? Explain your answer.
2. What challenges do Ellie, Bert, and Coralee face? How are their challenges similar to or different from things you've faced?
3. What are Ellie's, Bert's, and Coralee's strengths? What strengths do you have? How have you used them to face your challenges?
4. Describe Ellie, Bert, and Coralee's friendship. What do you think draws them together? How do they look out for one another?
5. This novel is written in first person, with Ellie telling the story. Do you think this impacts the way you feel about her disability? Might you feel differently if the story was told by a distant, third-person narrator? Explain your answer.

6. Ellie and her mom uproot their whole lives to move to Oklahoma to help take care of Ellie's grandfather. Describe Grandpa's illness. What does it look like on a daily basis? How are his struggles different from Ellie's? How are they similar?
7. For the first time in her life, Ellie is helping to take care of someone else instead of being the one in need of care. How do Ellie and her mom approach Grandpa's care differently? How might their previous experiences be affecting these views and actions?
8. Describe Ellie and her mom's relationship from both characters' perspectives. What is their main point of conflict? How do they learn to better relate to each other by the end of the novel?
9. Imagine moving to a totally new school; describe your best possible first day and your worst. Explain some challenges and exciting elements of the new experience.
10. If you met someone like Ellie, Coralee, or Bert, how might you go about befriending them? What strategies would you use to make sure all your classmates feel included?
11. How would you feel if you needed an aide with you at school all day? Would you react similarly to or different from Ellie?
12. Instead of going to the Valentine's dance, Ellie, Bert, and Coralee play miniature golf. They all play the game differently. What does their approach say about each of them? What makes this outing so special for Ellie?
13. Ellie bakes throughout the novel. Why do you think she enjoys it so much? How could making things like cookies and pies be empowering?
14. On Christmas Day, Ellie makes the perfect Linzer cookies with marmalade jam, but no one seems to like them very much. How can something be "perfect" but also not right?
15. Think of a holiday where food is a main element, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, or Halloween. What purpose—besides filling you up—does food serve on these occasions?
16. Name one of your own hobbies or interests. What do you like most about it? What purpose does it serve?
17. Every year the Bethlehem Methodist Church holds a contest for the best pie, and this year Ellie is determined to get first place. Why does she want to win? What do you think that blue ribbon means to her?
18. Explain the title of the novel, and give several interpretations.



Exploring the Hero's Journey

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

* Please use the chart on the next page to answer the following questions.

1. Describe Ellie's ordinary world. Consider not just her geographic location, but her day-to-day life at the start of the story.
2. What do you think serves as Ellie's call to adventure?
3. Who is Ellie's mentor?
4. What tests does Ellie face?
5. Who are her allies?
6. Who are her enemies?
7. What do you see as Ellie's main ordeal? Explain your answer.
8. What is Ellie's reward or "sword" that she seizes?
9. How has Ellie changed by the end of the story?

Joseph Campbell's Stages of "The Hero's Journey"

Departure	Initiation	Return
1. Ordinary World	5. Crossing the Threshold	10. The Road Back
2. Call to Adventure	6. Tests, Allies, Enemies	11. Resurrection
3. Refusal of the Call	7. Approach to the Inmost Cave	12. Return with the Elixir
4. Meeting the Mentor	8. Ordeal	
	9. Reward (Seizing the Sword)	

For more detailed information on each stage, please visit: <http://www.movieoutline.com/articles/the-hero-journey-mythic-structure-of-joseph-campbell-monomyth.html>