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Discussion Questions

1. If you were told you were having an evening of cultural enlightenment, what would you think? What is cultural enlightenment?

2. Astrid really wants to learn roller derby; Nicole wants to get better at ballet – what is your passion?

3. How did Rainbow Bite help Astrid?

4. Astrid wants her mom to take her skating so she offers her orange juice and pays her a compliment. Does this work for you when you want something from your parents? Why or why not?

5. Astrid believes that Nicole will go skating with her because that’s what best friends do. Do you think best friends need to do everything together?

6. Astrid is really bad at skating, but she doesn’t give up. Have you ever been bad at something but kept trying until you got it? Have you ever been scared to try something new?

7. Astrid’s mom tells her to go get some fresh air. Astrid thinks that parents act like getting kicked out of the house is a treat when it really isn’t. What do you think about this?

8. How do you think Astrid should have dealt with Nicole not going to derby camp?

9. Have you ever had a friend like Nicole?

10. Astrid’s roller derby name is Asteroid, why does she pick this name? What would be your roller derby name? Why?

11. In Rainbow Bite’s note to Astrid she has her repeat three words: Tougher, Stronger, Fearless. Why? What is a mantra and what is its purpose? Have you ever tried to use a mantra and what was its effect on you?

12. Astrid thinks dying her hair will make her tougher, stronger, and fearless. Do you think appearances can change your attitude? How so? Can you think of any examples?

13. There is a saying that you can only make a first impression once. What do you think this means? How does this relate to Rachel and how she treats Astrid?

14. Rainbow Bite leaves a note telling Astrid the best things in life are worth fighting for. Can you think of examples from your own life?

15. Astrid goes out of her way to do something nice for Zoey, even after she had a hard time being nice to her earlier. Have you ever done something really nice for a friend?
16. Rainbow Bite says that it takes a real hero to let the spotlight shine on someone else and take one for the team. Do you agree with her? Do you think people notice everything you do or just the big stuff?

17. One of the book’s main questions is how you can just stop being friends with somebody. Have you ever had a friendship end? Why do you think this happens to Nicole and Astrid?
Rolling with Victoria Jamieson

By Julie Danielson on March 5, 2015, Kirkus Reviews

Author-illustrator Victoria Jamieson is new to graphic novels, but she proves with *Roller Girl*, on shelves next week, that she’s *got* this, thanks very much. “Full of charm and moxie,” says the Kirkus review of this book, which tells the story of two best friends, whose close friendship comes to an end one eventful summer. Astrid falls hard for roller derby and attempts to master the sport, yet her best friend Nicole’s interest in ballet grows even deeper and she’s hanging out with a girl who has a history of being unkind to Astrid. While learning the ins and outs of both roller derby and making new friends, Astrid learns a lot about herself and the difficulties of letting go.

I had an email conversation with Victoria, a roller girl herself, about this winning graphic novel.

**Jules**: Victoria, I love this book. And in the name of hard-hitting journalism, I’m dying to know: Do you hate clothes-shopping as much as your main character? (I do. I could relate to this.)

**Victoria**: Oh my goodness, YES. Personal Clothes Shopper is high on my list of priorities when I win the lottery. I’m wearing velveteen jeggings at the moment, if that tells you anything.

**Jules**: I’m not still in my pajamas OR ANYTHING.

I’d like to hear about your research and what sparked this story. You play roller derby yourself, yes?

**Victoria**: I do play roller derby! I was actually just adjusting my toe stops for this afternoon’s practice. I skate with the Rose City Rollers in Portland. My derby name is Winnie the Pow (because, you know, kids’ books!).

I first learned about modern roller derby through a book, the YA novel *Derby Girl* by Shauna Cross and the book the movie *Whip It* was based on. I pretty quickly became obsessed and bought my first pair of roller skates since childhood. I love the sport and the community so much, so I knew I wanted to write a book about roller derby.
Most of the research for the book came from my own experiences through years of playing the sport. However, when I started writing the book in earnest, I tried to become even more involved in the community through coaching in our recreational and junior programs. My writing enhanced my involvement with the community, and my involvement with the community enhanced my writing. That experience of life intersecting with art—and the two becoming better for it—was really meaningful and wonderful to me.

**Jules:** That sounds really rewarding.

I love that the protagonist is fierce and vulnerable all at once. And I love how learning how to roller derby was not easy for her. She really struggled, which made the ending even more triumphant (for her and readers). Did her struggles learning the sport mirror your own, by chance?

**Victoria:** I think roller derby requires both ferocity and vulnerability. There’s a learning curve for everyone learning to play roller derby. I mean, when else in your life do you hit someone while wearing roller skates (on purpose, I mean)? So you have to enter the sport with some humility, because you’re going to look pretty silly for a little while. I came in as a fairly good skater, because I used to Rollerblade a lot (thanks, 1990s!), but I struggled with landing effective hits, getting hit, learning strategy...oh, pretty much everything else in derby. I had plenty of frustrations that I could use in shaping my characters.

**Jules:** You also capture well the insecurities of the tween age. It was fleeting, but I noticed how Nicole says at the beginning of the book, “My Mom said I should start watching what I eat.” (That also says a lot about her mother, too.) Was it challenging to delve into that tween mindset?

**Victoria:** I was unsure about including that line, but I wanted to hint at some of the pressures Nicole might be feeling at home, even if it's not a major storyline. And, yes, I think it says as much—or more—about her mom's character. Actually, Nicole's mom was one of my favorite characters to write. I clearly remember the day when, while playing at a friend's house, I came to the realization that her mom didn't really like me. She didn't do or say anything outright. I just got the distinct impression that she preferred some of her daughter's other friends to me. I don't remember being offended by this—more sort of fascinated that a grown-up would show preference among kids like that.
To get into the tween mindset, I tried to be honest and unflinching with my memories from that age. Luckily, I kept a diary, and re-reading that was helpful in reminding me of my thoughts and feelings. Actually, to prepare for *Roller Girl*, since it was my first graphic novel, I did a few short comics taken from the pages of my 1989 diary. You can find those on my website.

**Jules:** I love your hilarious, yet sophisticated, “Moona Lisa” shirt there at that link.

**Victoria:** I really, really loved that shirt.

**Jules:** I think that line from Nicole’s mother is very authentic. Also, I laughed when Astrid's mom said something like, "I never really liked Nicole's mom anyway" when she realized that Astrid and Nicole’s friendship may be ending. That rang true as well.

One of the book’s central, and very tough, questions is: *How do you just stop being friends with somebody?* That can be such a huge struggle at this age. My own girls are very nearly 11 and 9 years old, and I worry the friends they have now could just turn one day. Or even my own daughters could. (I'm making them all sound like zombies.) Did that part of this story come from your own experience too?

**Victoria:** The issue of friendships ending was certainly central for me, and it was the concept I was most interested in exploring in the book. Although the details of the story are different, the heart of the issue—the pain of a slipping friendship—was from my own experience. I had a very dear best friend all through my childhood. When I was 12, my family moved from Pennsylvania to Florida, and although we tried to keep up our friendship through letters, phone calls, and visits, it became more and more difficult to stay close. She made new friends, and I made new friends. I remember feeling really sad at our slipping friendship—and completely powerless to do anything about it.

One thing I tried to emphasize in the book is that neither Nicole nor Astrid did anything wrong. It's not like one character is good and the other is bad. They're just growing up and starting to follow their own interests and try on different personas. My own experience was a slow "turn," but I
also remember the seemingly overnight zombification of some kids at that age. I think the analogy is a good one. In one instance that still brings a flush of shame to my cheeks, I was the kid who "turned" on a nice, quiet friend in favor of a more popular girl. While I'm not proud of that moment, it helped me to understand Nicole's struggle a little more.

As a side note, my childhood best friend and I have since reunited. (Thanks, social media!) She was a bridesmaid in my wedding! I made a free e-book, available on my website, about the making of *Roller Girl*, and you can see some pictures of us there.

**Jules:** That is a happy ending, if ever there was one.

One of the best things about this book is that honest ending. These two friends part ways—Astrid realizes they have both changed and that she now has way more in common with her new friends—yet no one is hateful about it. It's true and poignant and very real.

Thanks for talking with me, Victoria!

*Victoria Jamieson, roller girl, photographed by Lisa Burke Photgraphy*

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https://www.kirkusreviews.com/features/rolling-victoria-jamieson
Five Questions With… Victoria Jamieson

By April Hall, Aug 14, 2015

There are ways in which roller derby is a lot like life. It moves fast, it can be slippery, sometimes you get a little bruised—physically and emotionally.

When Victoria Jamieson saw those connections, she turned it into Roller Girl, her latest graphic novel. In it she also follows the theme of many of her other books: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you still fail. And that’s OK. Jamieson knows that’s a hard lesson to learn, even for adults, but she keeps reinforcing it for her readers.

In Olympig! and Roller Girl, you aren’t afraid to show that sometimes, even when you tried really hard, you can fail. Do you think students are told enough that failing IS an option?

I know it was a tough lesson for me to learn as a kid. Instead of being told that failure is an option, I was more likely to hear, “If you try really hard, you can do anything you put your mind to.” That’s an important sentiment, but sometimes when the big game, test, or competition comes around, you try really hard and still fail. For example, Olympig! was born out of the memory of a Kid Olympics we had on my block when I was 6 years old. I was obsessed with Mary Lou Retton and was determined to win the gold medal (tin foil) in gymnastics. I practiced for weeks, tried really hard and—lost. I was devastated, because I wasn’t prepared for the fact that I could practice hard, try my best, and still lose. As an adult, this still happens of course, and I don’t think the pain gets any easier to bear! As an author, I think this is great fodder for stories—how do you rebound from crushing defeat? It’s a real test of character.

You are a roller girl yourself. How far were you into roller derby before you thought, “This would be a great book concept for kids”?

I first learned about roller derby through a YA novel (Derby Girl, by Shauna Cross; later renamed Whip It after it was turned into a movie). At first, I was not thinking at all about writing a book about derby; it was a new and exciting obsession, but it took all my energy just to learn how to skate. As time went on and derby became more integrated into my daily life, I began to see how “real life” and roller derby intersected and informed one another. I began making little “mini-comics” about my personal trials and tribulations with the sport. At the same time, junior roller derby for skaters ages 12–17 was becoming more and more popular. I finally felt ready to write a longer story about roller derby, and a story about junior derby told as a graphic novel seemed like a perfect match.

I’m sure you’ve been asked this a million times, but… What is it like as a woman creating graphic novels, and has that changed since you began in picture books?
I am very lucky that my book came out in the PRT (Post–Raina Telegemeier) age. I am not even sure that I would have considered a graphic novel format if I had not read *Smile* and thought, “Yes! This is the type of book for older readers I want to write!” And of course, the month before *Roller Girl* was published, Cece Bell won the Newbery Honor for her graphic novel *El Deafo*. So I am very lucky and grateful for the achievements of these trailblazing women. Honestly, when I decided to write a graphic novel I was less concerned about being a woman, and more concerned with not knowing very much about the comics industry. I didn’t read comic books growing up, I wasn’t interested in superheroes, and I wasn’t aware of anything beyond that in comics. I loved comic strips like “For Better or For Worse” and “Calvin and Hobbes,” but that was about the extent of my knowledge. In that respect, I am also thankful to the work of Matt Phelan and Jarrett J. Krosoczka; I watched as they transitioned from picture books to graphic novels, and it gave me the courage to try it too.

**What’s your process for picture books compared with graphic novels?**

The process for writing both is actually quite similar! I tend to spend a lot of time thinking about my characters first. I doodle, draw, and daydream for quite some time before worrying too much about the details of the plot. As I get to know the characters more, I can start to think more concretely about the story. For both picture books and graphic novels, I like to think of the story as an arc. Who is the character at the beginning of the story? What is his or her struggle? What is the emotional climax of the story? How has the character changed by the end of the book? The transition from picture book to graphic novel was actually much smoother than I had envisioned, because I could apply this same “formula” to both.

**Recently, William Joyce released *Billy’s Booger*, a revision of the very first book he wrote in elementary school. You’ve mentioned *Super Cow!* as your first book. Would you ever go back and revise that?**

I didn’t know *Billy’s Booger* was a revision of a childhood book! I also love *No, David!* which, as David Shannon explains in the author’s note, is a revision of the first book he wrote as a child. So maybe you’re on to something! I know my mom would be thrilled; I think it is still her favorite book that I’ve written. I’ll need to revisit the ending, because if I remember correctly, *Super Cow!* ends with the statement, “... and it was all a dream!” I’m not sure if that ending will “fly”—har har!

https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-daily/2015/08/14/five-questions-with-victoria-jamieson-em-roller-girl-em-}
Illustrated excerpts from my 1989 diary! I've kept the diary entries exactly as they were written, save for the changing of names.

April 6, 1989

I have lots of friends (unfortunately, they’re all in a different class than me.) Even my best friend, Noelle Benedetto, who hasn’t been in my class since second grade.

My homeroom teacher is the BEST! She’s really cool. Her name is Miss Packer, but in July (July 15 to be exact) she’s going to be Mrs. Bauer. Some other time I’ll write how she got engaged, but not tonight.

P.S. I won’t write every day, just when I feel like it.
I found true love today. Now before I tell you who I like, I've got to tell you that I've liked this person before. It is B-R-A-D-T-H-A-Y-E-R who I like for your information. He isn't cute but he's funny.

I found out during science when he said that Aaron had finished his procedures while Miss Packer was talking.

I said to Brad,

That's because he's dumb... kind of like you. You know, you two are a lot alike.

From that moment on, I knew he was the one for me, for now at least.
In a few minutes I’ve got to watch “The Wonder Years”. That show is sooo cool.

Kevin (the star) has a neat voice. His girlfriend, Winnie, is really pretty. But his best friend, Paul, is a true nerd.

This week's show sounds pretty cool. It's about the end of school... and what Kevin and Winnie (umgh) do in the summer.

Victoria Jamieson 2012
Ugg! Today was orchestra. I really hate it.

The music teacher is Mr. Martin, but I refer to him as Mr. Martian.

At least I get to quit next year.

After all, the only way I can stand it is the bus ride home. The bus driver is really cool. He lets us sing and talk as loud as we want.

Tomorrow in school we have to dress up as our favorite book character. I'm being Wendy from Peter Pan (not because she’s my favorite book character, but because I can wear my nightgown all day.)