

Reading Group Guide

Time to Roll

By Jamie Sumner

About the Book

It's going to be a long summer for twelve-year-old Ellie Cowan. Ellie's mom just married Ellie's favorite teacher and physical therapist, and they're about to leave on a six-week honeymoon. That would be great news, except they're leaving Ellie with her absentee dad while they're gone. Ellie's dad hardly knows her, and she hates that he treats her like she's fragile because she uses a wheelchair. Plus, her two half-brothers create chaos in the house.

So, when Ellie's best friend, Coralee, asks for Ellie's help winning the Little Miss Boots and Bows pageant, Ellie agrees (even though pageants make her squirm). Coralee needs her, and at least the pageant will keep her out of the house and away from her dad. Things take a surprising turn, though, when the pageant director pressures Ellie to enter the pageant too. Ellie hates being in the spotlight, but being treated like an invalid by the director—and her dad—is even worse. Ellie decides to compete in the pageant, but can she find a way to do it on her own terms? And will her friendship with Coralee survive the competition?

Discussion Questions

1. Ellie, Coralee, and Bert are all very different from each other, but become best friends anyway. What do you think draws them to one another? Do you have a best friend or friends? How are you similar and different? Why are you drawn to one another?
2. In what ways are Bert, Coralee, and Ellie different from other kids? Have you ever felt like you were different from most of the people around you? What made you feel that way?
3. Who was your favorite character in this novel? Why? If you read *Roll with It*, who was your favorite character in that novel? If you had a different favorite character in each book, explain why your feelings changed.

4. Even though Ellie and Bert are not beauty pageant fans, they agree to help Coralee with the pageant. Why do they do this? Have you ever done something like this for a friend, or has a friend ever done something like this for you? What was it? How did it turn out?

5. Ellie thinks that “Coralee’s got her own kind of deep magic. But she’s determined not to see it until a committee tells her it’s true.” (Chapter fourteen) What does she mean by this? In what ways does Ellie think Coralee is magical? Why can’t Coralee see it herself?

6. When Coralee and Ellie get in a fight, they both end up saying things they regret later. What do they fight about? Why do you think they say mean things to each other? How do Ellie and Coralee eventually make up?

7. After Ellie and Coralee fight, Mema tells Ellie, “You only get one or two really good friends in a lifetime. I mean the kind that stick around through thick and thin and fightin’ and fun. One or two. Three, if you’re lucky. That’s *it*.” (Chapter sixteen) How do you think a person can tell when they’ve found this type of friend?

8. Ellie says, “The thing about cerebral palsy is that I’ve lived with it every day of my life, so I’m used to it. But to the rest of the world, it’s a surprise. And not usually a good one.” (Chapter three) What does Ellie mean by this? In what ways do people treat Ellie differently from other kids?

9. At the first Little Miss Boots and Bows Pageant rehearsal with Coralee, Ellie gets angry when the pageant director, Rae Ann, touches her wheelchair without permission. Why is this such an important boundary for Ellie?

10. People with disabilities are often treated differently because of stereotypes about what they are and are not capable of doing. Give some examples of this happening to Ellie from the novel. Why do you think people do this? What are some ways that you can work against these kinds of stereotypes?

11. Early in the book, Ellie thinks, “There is nothing, I repeat *nothing*, as satisfying as blasting through walls that were made to hold you back.” (Chapter three) What does Ellie mean by this? What walls has Ellie had to blast through? Have you ever had to blast through walls that were meant to hold

you back? Explain.

12. Ellie thinks that pageants are almost like “cults” and doesn’t approve of them. Why does Ellie decide to do the pageant anyway? Why are pageants so important to Coralee?

13. After the pageant director’s attempt to set up a wheelchair ramp for Ellie ends in disaster, Ellie thinks, “It’s the roll of shame. Except *they* should be ashamed, not me—Rae Ann and Coralee and all of them with their deep looks of concern and not an ounce of understanding.” (Chapter eleven) What does Ellie mean by this? What don’t Coralee and Rae Ann understand?

14. After the incident with the wheelchair ramp, Ellie vows never to go back to the pageant. Coralee, however, says “This was just a teensy bump.” (Chapter eleven) Why do you think Coralee can’t see the problem? How does it make Ellie feel?

15. Ellie’s new friend Maya tells her, “Life is a test. Make sure you take it on your own terms.” (Chapter eighteen) What does Maya mean by this? What does it look like to take life on your own terms? Why do you think Maya shares this with Ellie?

16. What does Ellie do during the talent portion of the pageant? Were you surprised? Why do you think she chooses this as her talent? How do her friends and family react?

17. How does baking make Ellie feel? What in your life makes you feel like this?

18. Ellie believes that “Good food can . . . smooth over all the moods.” (Chapter eight) Do you agree with this statement? In what ways does good food help in your life?

19. What is Ellie’s relationship like with her dad? How is it different from Ellie’s relationship with her mom? Do you ever struggle to relate to your parents or other adults in your life? Why? How do you navigate that?

20. Ellie believes her dad thinks she’s “pathetic.” Do you think she’s right? Do you think Ellie’s dad is as bad as she thinks he is? Provide evidence from the book to support your answer.

21. Ellie claims that she is “the *opposite* of a needy kid . . . fully self-sufficient.” (Chapter four) Is she?

Do you think anyone is fully self-sufficient? Explain.

22. If you've read the first book in the series, *Roll with It*, how do you think Ellie has changed since that book? How is she the same?

Extension Activities

1. In *Time to Roll*, Ellie discovers that the theater where the Little Miss Boots and Bows Pageant is held is not accessible for her wheelchair. Research what is needed to make a space accessible for people in wheelchairs (or another disability of your choice). Then, create a poster or report assessing the accessibility of important places in your community: your school, your local park, the grocery store, YMCA, etc. If you'd like, you can include video clips or photographs in your report.

2. Throughout both *Roll with It* and *Time to Roll*, Ellie writes letters to famous bakers. Discuss with a partner or small group why you think Ellie does this. Then write a letter to a public figure who is important to you.

3. Design your own beauty pageant. What would you call your pageant? What events would it have? What do you think are the key things that show you someone is worthy of being celebrated? Create a poster advertising your pageant.

4. Choose a supporting character from the book and write a short story about an event in that person's life: Coralee, Maya, Bert, Mema, Ellie's mom, etc. Be sure to think about what your chosen character is like as a person, what's important to them, and what challenges they might face.

5. Imagine you are Bert or Coralee. Write a letter to a friend describing your friend Ellie. If you'd like, you can draw or paint a picture of Ellie to include with your letter.

6. Create a "book commercial" encouraging other kids to read *Time to Roll*. You can do this either as a poster or a video. Be sure to give potential readers a good sense of what the book is about and why they will enjoy reading it.

7. The pageant director, Rae Ann, calls Ellie her "role model" because "'She might be wheelchair-bound, but she gets up there on that stage and works just as hard as the rest of them.'" (Chapter

eighteen) Ellie is deeply offended by this: "Wheelchair-*bound*? Is she *kidding* me? Like my chair is some torture device instead of the means of freedom that lets me navigate my *entire life*?"

Research the technology available to assist people with disabilities today, and then write an essay about the ways that technology can help people with disabilities navigate the world.

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