



RACING HEARTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Five months ago, Sienna Shoring lost her best friend, Stacey, to suicide. Now Sienna's back at school, struggling—and failing—to find her new place in the social hierarchy. Awkward and alone, Sienna is still dealing with her grief. When a package arrives for the “Try It Triathlon,” which Stacey signed them up for as a joke, it's like receiving a message from the grave. Sienna has no experience with running or biking. And she doesn't even own a swimsuit. But she decides to take on the challenge in honor of her best friend, despite being a “fat girl.” And when mysterious jock Blake Romano approaches her unexpectedly and offers to train with her, she can hardly say no. He seems to understand her in a way no one else does. But Blake has a secret that might just break Sienna's heart, even as he's winning it.

THEMES:

Suicide | Grief | Bullying | Love | Body Positivity

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The main character, Sienna Shoring, is a teen who has been picked on for her appearance. Have you ever been in a situation where you or someone you know has been bullied for the way you look? If so, how did it make you feel, and what, if anything, did you do about it? Do you think that there are enough resources available for children who are bullied in school? Why or why not?
2. Sienna talks about how she was picked on. People called her names. But now that her best friend is dead, people ignore her. Is this still bullying? Why or why not?
3. Sienna lost her best friend to suicide. She feels tremendous guilt over not recognizing just how deep her friend's mental health battle was. It's important for Sienna to learn that her best friend's death was not her fault. What are some ways that Sienna can work through her guilt and realize she is not to blame for her friend's death?



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4. In addition to her feelings of guilt, Sienna is experiencing grief over losing her closest—and only—friend. If you knew Sienna in real life, what are some words of comfort you might offer her? If you have lost someone you loved, what are some things that helped you deal with your grief?
5. In the book, Sienna gets to know Blake Romano, a school jock she's had a crush on. At the beginning, Sienna talks about some of the stereotypes that go along with being a jock. What are some of those stereotypes? Can you think of other stereotypes, either in school or out of it?
6. Once Sienna knows Blake better, she learns that he has many characteristics that are not stereotypical. Can you identify some things that make Blake unique? What are some stereotypical things people might assume about Sienna? Do you think that when you get to know people, your assumptions about them will change? Why or why not?
7. At the end of the book, Sienna finds out that Blake has been keeping a secret from her. The secret almost ruins the relationship they've been building. Is she right to forgive Blake? Was he right to keep the secret from Sienna in the first place? Explain your thoughts.
8. Ultimately, Sienna accomplishes her goal of completing the "Try It Triathlon." She works hard to be able to do the three athletic activities—running, biking and swimming. However, Sienna does not undergo a "makeover." Physically, she is still the same girl she was at the beginning of the book. How does this conclusion challenge stereotypes?
9. When Sienna crosses the finish line, she has forgiven Blake and also understands his motivations. In romantic fashion, she throws herself into his arms, and a happy ending is implied. What does the future hold for Sienna and Blake? Write a few sentences about what comes after the happily ever after.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Melinda Di Lorenzo has been writing professionally for more than a decade and is the author of *Counting Scars* and *Racing Hearts* in the Orca Soundings line. In 2013 she won Harlequin's annual So You Think You Can Write contest, which came with a publishing contract and launched her successfully into the romance world. With a BA in English from Simon Fraser University and a passion for classic love stories that feature strong (albeit sometimes problematic) female leads battling social constraints, such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Wuthering Heights*, Melinda infuses her books with flawed characters in real, relatable situations. Bullied as a teen, Melinda sought refuge in books. She now wants to bring that refuge to others, and she draws on her experience as the parent of three teens to craft stories that reflect modern struggles without turning those struggles into stereotypes. She also supports young writers and makes an annual creative writing scholarship donation to École Salish Secondary. Melinda lives in Surrey, British Columbia.



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