



# positive

DISCUSSION GUIDE

*Surviving my bullies,  
finding hope,  
and changing the world*

A MEMOIR

# positive

+ PAIGE RAWL +

WITH ALI BENJAMIN

FOREWORD BY JAY ASHER

Aligns with Common Core State Standards for grades 9-12

# ABOUT THE BOOK

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Paige has been HIV-positive since birth, but growing up that was never *The Thing* that defined her. It was just one facet of her life, like competing in beauty pageants or making the honor roll. But in middle school, in a moment in which she was attempting to console a friend, Paige disclosed her HIV-positive status. Relentlessly bullied from then on, Paige suffered from stress-related seizures, she cut herself, and her normally athletic frame withered to a mere eighty-one pounds. One night, desperate for escape, Paige swallowed fifteen sleeping pills—one for each year of her life. That could have been the end of her story. Instead, it was only the beginning.

In this dazzling memoir, Paige tells the deeply personal yet universal story of how she managed to overcome the trauma of persistent bullying by choosing compassion over cruelty, and how she resolved to fight daily on behalf of others in her place.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Describe Paige’s childhood prior to entering middle school. How does she view herself, and how does she view her visits to the hospital? Use examples from the story to support your answer. *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
2. Discuss how Paige begins losing control of her life and her self-confidence. What event triggers the change in her relationships at school? How does Paige respond to the treatment she receives from her classmates? Describe her reaction to Yasmine’s betrayal. How does their relationship change after this event? How might you have reacted under a similar circumstance? Similarly? Differently? Why? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
3. On several occasions Paige (and her mother) communicate with school administration about the bullying Paige endures. How does the administration respond to Paige’s needs? What about her coaches? Did Paige’s mother make a good decision to home school Paige in middle school? Why or why not? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
4. Paige entitles one chapter “Ugly.” Paige began middle school feeling confident about herself, yet as classmates continued to taunt her, her self-perception changed. How does this title set a tone for the rest of the story? Discuss several events that occurred in middle school that changed the way Paige viewed herself. *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.4, RL.11-12.4, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*

5. Is Ethan a likeable character? Why or why not? Consider both his trip to the administrative office to report on what is being said about Paige as well as his request that Paige remain his friend “in private.” Discuss how their relationship evolves over time. *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
6. Identify Amber and Heather and explain what roles they play in Paige’s life. Compare and contrast Amber and Heather with Yasmine. In what ways are Heather and Amber similar? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
7. How would you characterize Paige’s relationship with her mother? What evidence from the story supports your answer? Pay particular attention to the ways in which her mother supports her through her journey. *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
8. Paige reflects on the time between leaving middle school and entering high school. She says, “There was darkness inside me. It would be inside of me for a while longer” (p. 174). Discuss the meaning of the passage. Would a “change in scenery” be enough to help Paige? Why or why not? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.4, RL.11-12.4, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
9. While in high school, Paige enters a stress center. When she tells a group that she ignored people who bullied her, Brendan, the group leader, points out that few people can actually ignore such things. Explain how this discussion informs her understanding of her own stress, anxiety, suicidal tendencies, and self-worth. *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
10. Toward the end of her memoir, Paige writes, “What is this thing we do, I wonder, this all-too-common human tendency to attack other people, or to pile on to attacks?” (p. 248). Discuss how this statement is representative of Paige’s experiences. In what real-world ways have you seen this tendency play out? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.4, RL.11-12.4, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
11. The book is structured in four sections: “Beginning,” “Stumbling,” “Falling,” and “Becoming.” Summarize the defining events in each section. Discuss how this structural device is appropriate for the narrative. *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.5, RL.11-12.5, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*

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12. As Paige continues to heal, she attends a summer camp for kids who have HIV/AIDS and makes new friends. What does she learn from these new friendships? Who is Bryn Jackson and what does she learn from him about forgiveness? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
13. In what way does the title of the book align with Paige's personality? How has this attitude helped Paige work through her challenging teen years and negative school experiences? Can thinking positively save someone? Explain. *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.4, RL.11-12.4, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
14. What did Paige learn about her mother as she worked through her own identity and confusion about living with HIV? In what ways could her mother be considered heroic? What changes do you see in their relationship? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.11-12.3, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*
15. Review key events in the story, paying particular attention to the way in which Paige views herself and those around her. In what ways is Paige's story one of hope? In what ways might readers view it as a universal truth about the human condition? *CCSS: RL.9-10.1, RL.11-12.1, SL.9-10.1, SL.11-12.1*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paige Rawl is a national youth advocate, anti-bullying crusader, and powerful HIV/AIDS educator. She is currently a student at Ball State University, where she plans to study molecular biology. You can visit her online at [www.paigerawl.com](http://www.paigerawl.com).



Photo by Polina Oshero

Ali Benjamin is a writer who lives in Massachusetts.

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