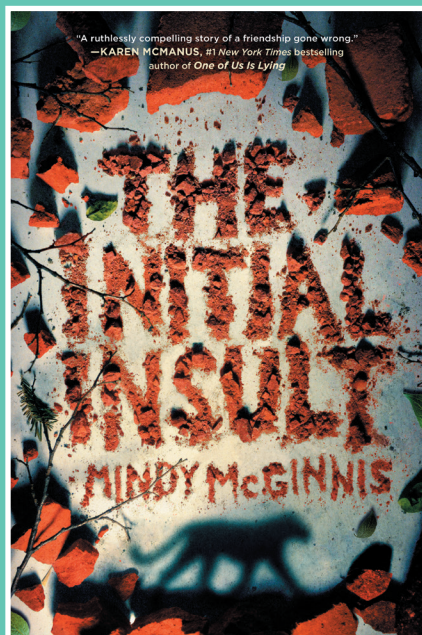
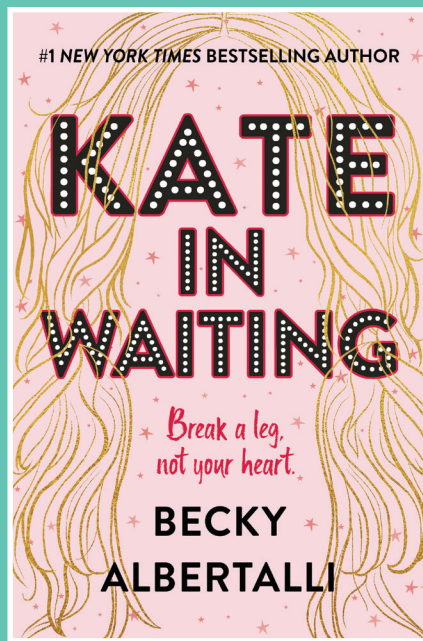
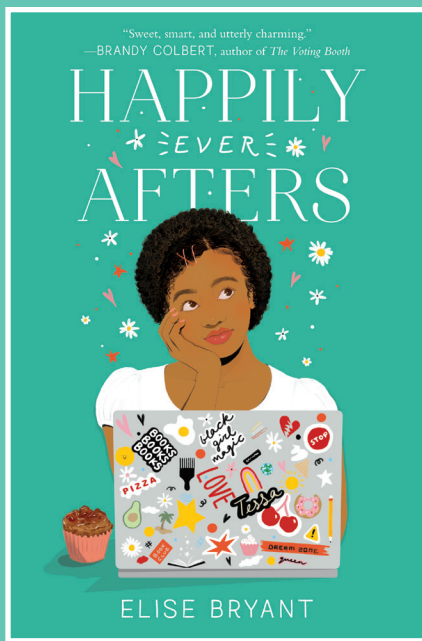




# GREAT PICKS FOR YOUR TEEN BOOK CLUB



# HAPPILY EVER AFTERS BY ELISE BRYANT



## BOOK TALK

Sixteen-year-old Tessa Johnson has never felt like the protagonist in her own life. She's rarely seen herself reflected in the pages of the romance novels she loves. The only place she's a true leading lady is in her own writing—in the swoony love stories she shares only with Caroline, her best friend and #1 devoted reader. When Tessa is accepted into the creative writing program of a prestigious art school, she's excited to finally let her stories shine. But when she goes to her first workshop, the words are just...gone. Fortunately, Caroline has a solution: Tessa just needs to find some inspiration in a real-life love story of her own. And she's ready with a list of romance novel-inspired steps to a happily ever after. Nico, the brooding artist who looks like he walked out of one of Tessa's stories, is cast as the perfect Prince Charming. But as Tessa checks each item off Caroline's list, she gets further and further away from herself. She risks losing everything she cares about—including the surprising bond she develops with sweet Sam, who lives across the street. She's well on her way to having her own real-life love story, but is it the one she wants, after all?

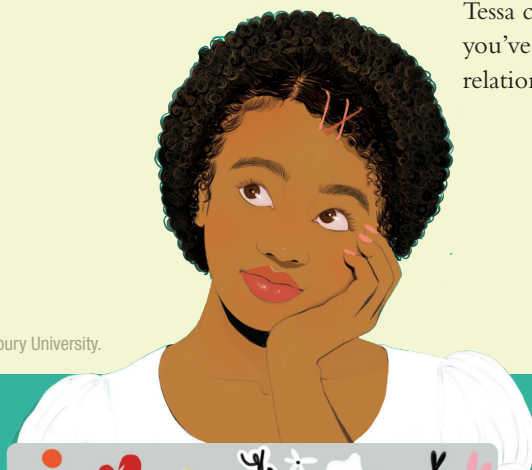
## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**IDENTITY:** Tessa is a Black teenage girl going through the ups and downs of finding herself while confronting societal expectations and microaggressions. She says, "I'm usually better at regulating my tone. I mean, I have to be. Because one note too loud, too aggressive, and I'm labeled as an angry Black girl forever" (p. 7). Discuss her statement. Why is the way she's perceived so important? How do Tessa's identity as a writer and her identity as a Black girl intersect? Why is representation in romance novels so important to Tessa? Discuss her statement: "It was empowering to create a world in which I was the center, the prize, the one desired" (p. 5).

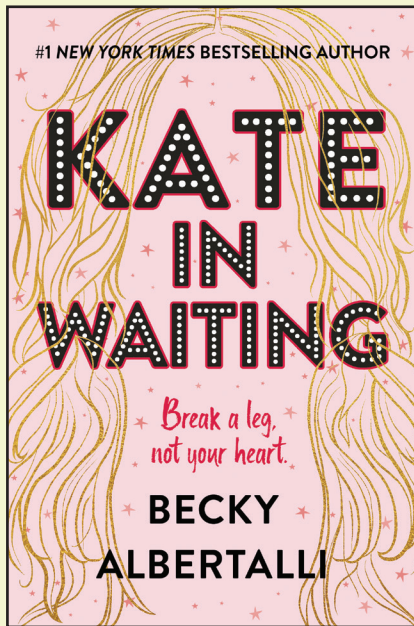
**FAMILY:** Family relationships and dynamics can be challenging at times. Discuss the relationship between Tessa and her mother. In what ways are they alike? What struggles do they have? Describe Miles' personality. What kind of relationship does Tessa have with her brother? Discuss Tessa's statement: "We used to call it special needs until a teacher pointed out that his needs aren't special. They're just his" (p. 16).

**FIRST LOVE AND CRUSHES:** Tessa's plan to use a real-life love story as writing inspiration doesn't exactly go as planned. Why does she first notice Nico? What is her plan to get Nico to notice her? What happens when they go to the gala together? How does Tessa's perception of Nico change? Have you ever had a crush on someone and then realized they're not who you thought they were? How does Sam show he cares for Tessa, even before she realizes she might care for him? How does her perception of Sam change the more they get to know each other?

**FRIENDSHIP:** How does Tessa's friendship with Caroline evolve and change when it becomes long distance? What becomes different when they are no longer in the same school or neighborhood? What are Tessa's new friendships like? How are the ways Tessa connects with Lenore and Theo similar or different from the way she and Caroline interact? How do Tessa's friends interact with Miles? When Caroline gets her first real boyfriend, how does her friendship with Tessa change? Why? Consider your own friendships and how you've responded to friends when the circumstances of your relationship changes. What makes a good friend?



# KATE IN WAITING BY BECKY ALBERTALLI



## BOOKTALK

Rules for crushes only work until they don't. And they fall apart pretty fast when the crush becomes... something more. Kate and Andy have a habit of crushing on the same guys, and so far, it's worked out fine. When the cute guy from their summer drama camp shows up at school, however, Kate and Andy's friendship is put to the test. Does Matt like either of them the way they both like him? What happens if he wants to start dating one of them, leaving the other one in the dust? These are things they never thought they'd have to consider, but now it's the difference between maintaining their friendship and shattering it. Will they come out unscathed? Or will their lives become a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions? With her trademark humor and insight, Becky Albertalli shines a spotlight on the messy and miraculous moments that make life so spectacular.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**FRIENDSHIP:** Becky Albertalli's books focus a lot on the power of friendship—the need for connection and support during the process of self-discovery and personal growth. Kate and Andy “know everything about each other” (p. 43). Kate even says, “I am so platonically in love with Anderson Walker, it makes my brain hurt” (p. 143). What do you think makes Kate and Andy's friendship so strong? How do they support each other throughout the book? How does their friendship help them to overcome obstacles? Are elements of their friendship mirrored in your own life? What do you value most in a friendship?

**FOMO:** Kate and Andy both experience the fear of missing out throughout the book. After Andy and Matt end up in drama class together, Kate develops a strong sense of FOMO, telling Andy that she's “not used to being on the outside of your inside jokes,” and she's “not used to there being off-limit topics between us” (p. 42). Think about what other kinds of fears and disappointments they both experience. How does communication affect the ways these characters manage and react to FOMO? How do they support each other? Have you experienced FOMO in your own life? How did you cope? Did someone support you?

**JEALOUSY:** For Kate and Andy, a crush is usually something fun and silly they can experience together and then move on. But when it comes to Matt, things get out of control as they move into new territory. Andy says to Kate, “It's insane. I feel like this jealous monster” (p. 136). How does jealousy change their relationship throughout the book? How do they overcome these moments of envy? Consider the different ways that jealousy can manifest and discuss ways to confront or avoid negative reactions. Think of ways that you've experienced or witnessed jealousy in your own life. How did you react? Looking back, what would you change about your reactions?

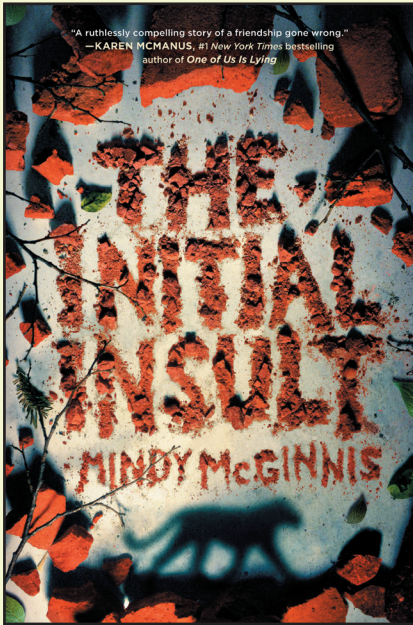
**THEATER:** *Kate in Waiting* begins at theater camp, ends with a theatrical production, and a number of life moments that happen in between are related to the theater. How does theater play a role in the everyday lives of Kate, Matt, and Andy? Kate notes that her brother “said once that theater kids walk around like we're each under our own tiny spotlight” (p. 7). What do you think Kate's brother means? In what ways do the characters treat life like a theatrical production? How does the school's theater program impact each of them? How does it influence the ways they relate to each other and their peers over the course of the novel?

**ASSUMPTIONS:** There are a lot of assumptions that Kate and her friends make about others in their high school. They have some very strong feelings about people who are involved in sports, for example. Similarly, Kate and Andy both make assumptions about who Matt might be attracted to, and that leads to trouble. Why do Kate and her friends refer to so many people as f-boys and f-girls? How does this affect how they approach various characters throughout the book? Think about assumptions that you make about people, whether groups or individuals, and consider how these assumptions can negatively impact both you and them. How might you go about reconsidering these assumptions, and how might that change how you approach others around you?

**BALZER + BRAY**

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# THE INITIAL INSULT BY MINDY MCGINNIS



## BOOK TALK

The name Montor used to mean something in Amontillado, but not anymore—not since Tress’s parents disappeared seven years ago, leaving her to be cared for by her less-than-attentive grandfather, Cecil. But more than one prominent family want to shut down the “zoo” that Tress and Cecil run, including Felicity Turnado’s. Felicity and Tress used to be friends, you see; at least, they were friends until Felicity ended up stranded in the woods the night that Tress’s parents went missing. And Tress is convinced Felicity knows more than she’s telling. So, one night at a Halloween party at an abandoned house, Tress enacts a plan to force Felicity to provide some real answers. But no matter what secrets are revealed, the night is bound to change them both... forever.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**FEAR:** Felicity denies knowing what happened the night of Tress’s parents’ disappearance, but Tress says to Felicity, “You wouldn’t tell me because fear is a powerful motivator. But you know what’s stronger? [...] Shame” (p. 107). What do you think Tress means by this? In what other ways do fear and shame play a role throughout the novel? How do these emotions transform Tress and Felicity’s relationship, as well as their relationships with others, over the course of their lives? Think about a time when you were afraid or ashamed and consider how that experience altered you. How has it changed the way you live your life now? Why do you think fear is such a powerful motivator for honesty and change?

**TRUTH:** Tress wants Felicity to tell the truth about her missing parents, but Felicity’s seizures make that impossible: “The truth... a slippery element stuck somewhere between what I witnessed but wasn’t there for, something I saw but can’t remember” (p. 147). In what ways does truth get revealed throughout the novel? What are some truths that remain hidden? How do you feel about Ribbit and how social media and inebriation are used to get him to tell the truth? How does the truth help some and harm others within different scenarios? Have you ever wanted (or had) to tell someone the truth, even though you knew it might hurt them? How did that play out? Consider how you understand and apply the concept of truth within your own life.

**STRENGTH:** Strength is often seen as something to strive for; however, the idea of strength can become a façade or a way of hiding something deeper. When discussing Felicity’s seizures, for instance, Felicity’s mom tells her, “Never let anyone know there is something wrong with you” (p. 118). For Felicity’s mom, strength means hiding anything that can be *perceived* as weakness. What other displays of strength do you see throughout the book? Are there differences between how characters of different genders show—or are expected to show—strength? In what other ways does strength manifest (as toxic masculinity, for example)? Consider how you think you and others in your life understand and show strength, both physical and otherwise.

**GUILT:** Felicity feels an incredible sense of guilt over the disappearance of Tress’s parents. She’s the last one to have seen them alive, and her mind keeps telling her, “You’re the reason they left the house in the middle of the night,” and “It’s your fault” (p. 94). But guilt is different than accepting or taking blame, because it can cause a lot of unnecessary anxiety and can build up feelings of insecurity. How else does guilt manifest in Felicity, Tress, and others throughout the novel? How do they deal with their feelings of guilt? How do the ways the characters manage their guilt affect others? Have you ever felt guilty for something that wasn’t your fault? How has it impacted you?

**PRIVILEGE:** When Brynn is afraid of being pulled over by a cop, Felicity says that it’s okay because Brynn’s dad is white. But Brynn retorts, “That doesn’t outweigh my mom being Black. Might even make it worse” (p. 43). Felicity has the privilege of not fearing for her life if she’s pulled over while driving. What other forms of privilege do you notice throughout the book? How does it affect different characters, both directly and indirectly? How do you see privilege playing out in your own life? Is there a difference between how privilege plays out in different contexts (school vs home, for instance)?



## BOOK TALK

Ana is a sixteen-year-old poet at a loss for words. After leaving everyone and every place she loves behind in Argentina to find her way in this strange new place called New Jersey, it seems she'll always be a "fish out of water." When she meets Harrison, a cute boy in her math class, she starts to feel like she might have found a place to belong... and it could be in his arms. But then she starts hanging out with Neo, the Greek boy from her ESL class, and she finds herself navigating the tricky ins and outs of the English language and the even more baffling language of her heart. With playful and poetic prose, this novel brings you into what it feels like to struggle to understand another language, another culture, and ultimately another way of being in a world where you are constantly misunderstood.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**POSSIBILITY:** When asked why she came to America, Ana knows the "right" answer because she hears it all the time from the people around her: "they come here for a better life," (p. 103). But why doesn't that feel right to her? What do those people assume about the life that Ana had before she came here? Instead, Ana says she came here for a "bigger life" (p. 103). What's the difference between a better life and a bigger one? What are some good things about your life now? What kind of life do you want to have?

**VOICE:** Ana says the reason she likes art is because there's "no talking, not too much trying to understand" (p. 57). What is Ana's relationship to poetry? What is it about poetry that makes Ana feel more comfortable with expressing herself? How does Ana find her voice in this country? Who helps her along the way?

**CONNECTION:** Ana has to navigate between what she wants to say with what she *can* say all the time. How does this affect her ability to make relationships with people at school? Does Ana connect differently with students in her ESL class than to her other teachers and friends whose first language is English? Why or why not? What makes it easier or harder for you to connect to other people?

**LANGUAGE:** When Ana says she is "grateful for every new word" (p. 155), what do you think she means? How does she collect new words throughout the book? Who and what helps her to understand and make meaning of those words? What words are you grateful for? What wonderful words would you want to collect? Why do you think the author uses #####'s? What purpose do they serve? How does the author bring you into Ana's experience?

**FINDING A WAY:** While walking home, Ana thinks "Somewhere in my brain, when I wasn't paying attention, I learned the way" (p. 120). How does Ana find her way in this new country? Who and what helps her learn the way? Have you ever had a hard time fitting in? Who or what helped you find your way?

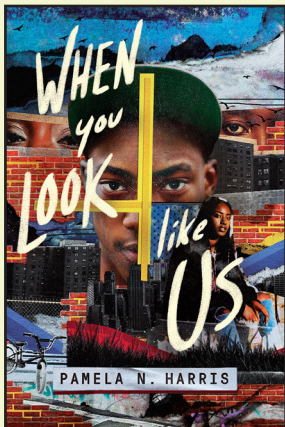
**LOVE:** "Love comes in many languages and shapes . . . and small things can add up to a garden full of beautiful" (p. 242) What kinds of love do you think this book is about? How does Ana's understanding of love change over time? What are some of the "small things" that add up to a "garden of beautiful" in Ana's life? What about in your life? What are some of the "small things" that show you that you are loved?

## TIPS FOR ORGANIZING A BOOK GROUP FOR TEENS:

- The fastest way to advertise is through word of mouth. Social media accounts run by the grown-ups are only successful in starting a book group or promoting your event if you have teens sharing your posts. Recruit a few enthusiastic readers who are willing to get things started!
- Give teens options and let them decide. Pull a list of potential books and share information about them with your readers.
- Come prepared with a few good questions, but let them drive the discussion. Begin each meeting by letting the teens introduce themselves and share their thoughts and initial impressions about the book. Let their conversation about the book start organically and use the questions if and when you need them.
- Don't be afraid of silence. It can be scary to speak up for the first time—especially if you're new to the group—so don't feel the need to fill the silence with chatter. The quiet gives them some time to think about how to answer a question you offered or to build up the courage to say something.
- Be ready with information about the next book club selection before they leave!

Tips provided by Cindy Minnich, a high school English teacher and certified school librarian in Pennsylvania.

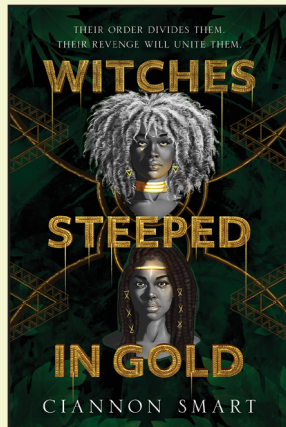
## MORE DISCUSSION-WORTHY TITLES FOR YOUR BOOK GROUP



**WHEN YOU LOOK LIKE US**  
PAMELA N. HARRIS

★ “A high-speed story that will draw teens in and keep them turning pages until they reach the unpredictable and thrilling ending. A must for YA collections.”

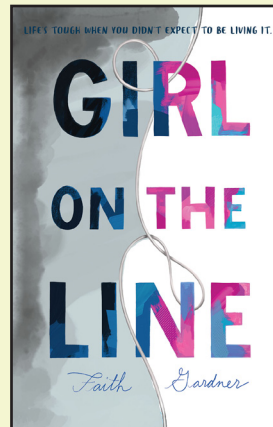
—*School Library Journal* (starred review)



**WITCHES STEEPED IN GOLD**  
CIANNON SMART

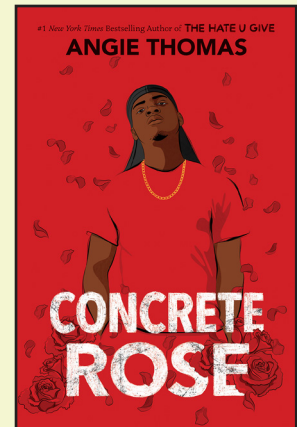
“Aglow with detail, *Witches Steeped in Gold* is a thundering waterfall of magic, vengeance and intrigue.”

—Samantha Shannon, author of *The Bone Season* and *The Priory of the Orange Tree*



**GIRL ON THE LINE**  
FAITH GARDNER

★ “An achingly authentic depiction of cycling through depression and healing ... An incredibly tough but worthwhile read.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)



**CONCRETE ROSE**  
ANGIE THOMAS

★ “This literary DeLorean transports readers into the past, where they hope, dream, and struggle alongside beloved characters from Thomas’ *The Hate U Give*.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

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