

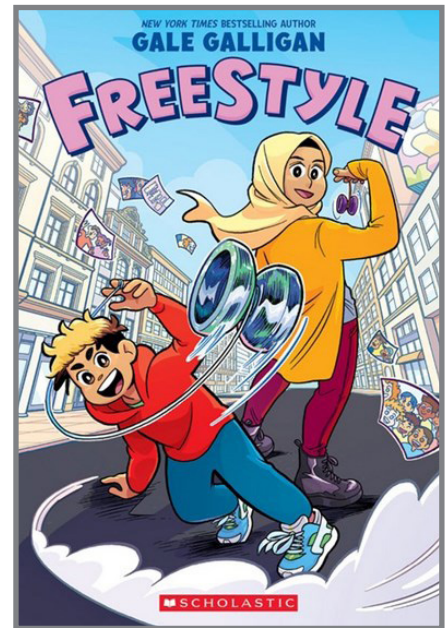
Freestyle

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Cory's dance crew is getting ready for a major competition. It's the last one before they graduate eighth grade and go their separate ways to high schools all over New York City, so they have to make it count!

The group starts to have problems as their crew captain gets increasingly intense about nailing the routine, and things go from bad to worse when Cory's parents ground him for not taking his grades seriously. He gets stuck with a new tutor, Sunna, who he dismisses as a boring nerd . . . until he catches her secretly practising cool yo-yo tricks. Cory wants to learn the art of yo-yo, and as his friendship with Sunna grows, he ends up missing practice and bailing on his crew—and they are not happy about it. With mounting pressure coming from all sides, how is Cory supposed to balance the expectations of his parents, school, dance and his new friend?

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Gale Galligan is the creator of the *New York Times* bestselling Baby-sitters Club graphic novel adaptations by Ann M. Martin. Gale was featured in *The Claudia Kishi Club*, a documentary now streaming on Netflix. When they aren't making comics, Gale enjoys knitting, reading and spending time with their family and adorable pet rabbits. They live in Pearl River, New York. Visit them online at galesaur.com.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What can you see happening on the front of this book?
 - What genre do you think this book might be, and why do you think this?
 - What is happening in the picture on the back cover, and how does it differ from the front?
 - Where do you think this book might be set?
 - Who do you think might be the protagonist, and why do you think this?
 - What do you think the title 'Freestyle' might refer to and why?
 - What do you think might happen in this story? Before reading the back cover, hypothesise as to possible plot elements that are hinted at by the cover artwork. After reading the back cover, discuss and refine your hypotheses.
- Cory lives in New York. How similar is his local area to where you live? In pairs or small groups, think of at least five similarities, and five differences, between life in your local area, and life in Cory's local area. Individually, write a short piece describing some of the similarities and differences, being sure to relate them to your own life. Include in your

description, an assessment of whether you think you would prefer to live somewhere like New York, or if you prefer your home area, and why.

- What does it mean when Tess is described as a ‘choreo queen’ and says she has ‘fresh choreo’?
- Why are eighth graders having to apply for schools? How different is the New York school system from the school system where you live? In what ways does it differ?
- When they were first starting their new routine, why did Tess get upset with Cory? Do you think that Cory was wrong to improvise, or should he have stuck to the routine like Tess wanted him to?
- Why do you think Cory and his friends dance and practise outside in a public place?
- In Chapter Three, Cory tipped an entire box of baking soda into a beaker full of vinegar. What happens when you mix baking soda and vinegar? What would happen if you tipped a whole box of baking soda into a cup or beaker full of vinegar? Try this yourself—but be sure to do it outside in a clear space where nothing will get damaged, and clean up well afterwards. (Note: vinegar will kill grass if it is poured onto it, so try to choose bare dirt, asphalt or cement for your safe place to experiment. Sandpits make an excellent place to try this type of experiment.) After cleaning up, write a brief description of what you did, and what happened, and what you might like to try next time.
- As a class, discuss the importance of compromise and communication. Use as your starting point the disagreement between Tess and Cory over his wanting to improvise while she wants everyone to stick to the routine she’s choreographed. Some things to think about might be:
 - Did Tess and/or Cory find it difficult to open a conversation after they fought?
 - How did they manage to finally talk to each other about their different needs?
 - What is the most important first condition that needs to be met before any compromise is possible between people who are arguing or disagreeing?
 - How much does understanding the other person’s point of view influence one’s ability to compromise in a situation?
- How does the author show the passing of time in the story? (Hint: look at the start of Chapter Seven.)
- Sunna is very into yo-yoing, and Cory is becoming hooked himself. Do you know anyone who likes to play with a yo-yo and can do tricks? If you can find a yo-yo see if you can learn some of the simpler tricks that Sunna teaches Cory at the beginning of the book.
- Cory is surprised when he finds out that yo-yo clubs exist. What other clubs do you think might exist (in larger cities) that cater to niche interests or unusual hobbies? Think about what sort of clubs you might enjoy joining, and if one doesn’t exist, talk to your friends and classmates about starting one.
- When Cory first watches videos of yo-yo competitions, how does he feel? Write a short paragraph describing his reaction to first seeing professional/competitive yo-yoers perform.
- Watch a video of a high level yo-yo competition. As a class, discuss your reaction to seeing extremely skilled people perform their tricks, and compare your reaction to Cory’s.
- Hold a class yo-yo competition, and a class dance competition. Students can choose to perform in one, in both, or to participate as an audience member.
- After reading Chapter Ten, as a class, discuss the action in the novel so far, and hypothesise as to what you think might happen next; and how Cory, Sunna, Tess and the crew might resolve their differences and overcome their different challenges.
- Cory tried to write an apology sonnet to Sunna—but ran out of ideas before he could write the final two lines. In pairs, write the final two lines for him. Be sure to read the rest of his poem carefully first, so that you can make sure your final couplet fits with what he is trying to say!
- What is the final resolution of the story, and how does the crew do at the competition in the end? Do you like the way the story ended? Why/why not? Write a single paragraph sharing your answer and reasoning.
- Which of the ‘bonus comics’ do you think is the funniest? Write a single strip comic of your own, featuring one (or more) of the minor characters in the story.