

Alex Flinn attended a performance-arts high school similar to the program in *DIVA* and has a college degree in vocal performance. She can still sing a high F. . . but not in public! She is also a former lawyer whose experience dealing with juvenile crime has solidly informed the subject matter of her novels. She is the author of four acclaimed previous novels for young adults. *BREATHING UNDERWATER*, which tells the story of Nick and Caitlin's relationship, was recently chosen by the American Library Association as one of the top one hundred young-adult novels of the past ten years. You can visit Alex online at **www.alexflinn.com**.



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By Alex Flinn

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About the Book

For most people, the word "diva" means brilliant, talented, over-the-top, and glamorous. Caitlin, however, feels trapped in the not-very-glamorous life of a cheerleader wannabe with serious ex-boyfriend issues and a permanent yo-yo diet. At least until the day she auditions for Miami High School of the Arts and—*gets in*! Then all she had to do was blackmail her mother to allow her to change schools and go downtown every day to hang with the "music geeks." But once she's there, Caitlin's not so sure she can cut it as a diva-in-training. . . .

Both readers who are familiar with Caitlin's story from *Breathing Underwater* and those meeting her here for the first time will be engrossed by the story of a talented singer striving to let go of her past and shape her future.

Discussion Questions

- 1. What is a diva? When you picked up the book, what assumptions did you make about it based on the title? What are your associations with the word "diva," and how do they differ from Caitlin's definition? Is Caitlin a diva by any definition? Can she become one? By which definition?
- 2. In the first chapter, Caitlin remembers the first time she sang in public. What do we know about how she feels about singing from this passage? Why is singing so important to Caitlin?
- 3. Caitlin has several reasons for trying out for the arts school. What are they? Do you agree with the order in which she puts them in the first chapter? Might there be any other reasons she doesn't mention? Do these reasons change in their importance as Caitlin goes to the school?
- 4. Is Caitlin running away by going to another school, or is she being brave? Why?
- 5. What do you think of Lucia's idea of Caitlin keeping a journal for her thoughts? How does what Caitlin writes in the journal differ from what she says and thinks in real life? Why do you think this is?

- **6.** Why does Caitlin lie to her friends about living with her father, rather than just telling the truth about changing schools? Have you ever felt as if there was something about yourself you couldn't share with your friends? Is it okay to lie if someone just wouldn't understand?
- 7. Have you ever attended an opera? What did you think of opera before reading this book? Has your attitude changed at all?
- 8. Discuss Caitlin's relationships with male characters in the book her father, Nick, Sean, and Arnold. How are these relationships similar and different? Which is the most satisfactory? Caitlin says of her father, "The first thing I remember my father doing was leaving. That was the second thing too, and the third and the tenth." Does Caitlin wish for more of a relationship with her father? Why or why not? Does her lack of a relationship with him affect her views of men in general?
- 9. Though she's broken up with him, Caitlin still feels drawn to Nick. Why? Does she have qualities that make her an easy target for a guy like Nick? Does she also have qualities that make her more likely to leave an abusive relationship?
- 10. Caitlin says, "The thing about losing a lot of weight is, it feels temporary, like you're just a *thin* fatgirl, and one good Big Mac will send you exploding from your jeans again." What are Caitlin's attitudes about food and diet? Where do they come from? Do you agree with them? How do they change throughout the book?
- 11. Caitlin is disappointed when she finds out that she can never have a romantic relationship with Sean. What does she do instead? Is she better or worse off with the relationship she has in the end?
- **12.** How are Caitlin's and Valerie's attitudes toward relationships similar? Why does each feel a romantic relationship is important?
- 13. Caitlin has a passion for opera that causes her to give up other things. She'll have to work hard to achieve her goal. What is your passion? What would you give up for it?

Extension Activities for Your Book Group

- 1. Research the life of a great diva. Suggestions: old-fashioned divas like Maria Callas, Beverly Sills, Luisa Tetrazzini, Lily Pons, Nellie Melba, or modern ones like Deborah Voigt and René Fleming.
- **2.** Have a dietician from a local hospital come to your group to discuss healthy eating habits.
- Find out if your city has any opera programs for students that your group could attend.
- **4.** Rent and watch opera and/or performing arts-themed movies together as a group. Some suggested movies: *La Traviata*, *Moulin Rouge*, and *High School Musical*.
- 5. Download and listen to opera that is mentioned in the book as an opening to your book group. Some suggestions: La Traviata (there are many versions available); or single songs "Parigi, o Cara" (the duet that Caitlin and Sean sing) or the "Brindisi" (the song that Caitlin and Sean sing in opera workshop.) For a different style, download The Movies go to the Opera, which includes all the most popular opera tunes you hear in movies and on commercials.
- **6.** Invite mothers to your book group and have a mother-daughter discussion of *Diva*, since Caitlin's relationship with her mom is a central issue of the book.

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