



A Little Trouble with the Facts

By **Nina Siegal**
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Introduction

Valerie Vane was an up-and-coming lifestyle reporter at a prominent New York City daily. Then she stumbled, rather publicly, and lost it all—her column, her fiancé, her access behind the city's velvet ropes. Now she's on the obituary desk writing death notices, and it feels like a dead end.

However, when she writes about a recently deceased once-famous graffiti artist, the phone calls start. A mysterious voice on the other end of the line tells her the artist's death was a murder—and if she were a real reporter, she'd investigate.

But can Valerie trade her stilettos for gumshoes?

A LITTLE TROUBLE
WITH THE FACTS

a novel

NINA SIEGAL

Questions for Discussion

1. Valerie is determined to see her name back on Page One of *The Paper* and graffiti writers in the novel talk a lot about becoming famous by, "getting their name up." What is the significance of names in the novel? How is each of the characters' names (or nicknames, or tags) reflective of their personalities and/or social position?
2. At the end of chapter one, Cabeza tells Valerie that she can be a real reporter again if she seeks the truth, and she hangs up saying, "Thanks, not interested." Later on, she changes her mind. How does she come to see the relationship between getting the facts right and finding the truth? Does it change over the course of the novel?
3. Valerie is obsessed with old movies, the "black and whites." Track the movies she watches. How do the movies change as the narrative moves forward? When and why does she turn to the "darker side of the screen?"
4. To what extent does Valerie's celluloid image of New York before she arrives define what she thinks of the city and how she behaves? When she starts watching new films, how does her understanding of the city, or her behavior, change?
5. Fine art versus graffiti, gossip versus "real news," uptown versus downtown, upstairs (in Culture) versus downstairs (in Obits), high society versus life on the farm, Manhattan versus the Bronx... There are a lot of contrasts in the novel. What do you think the author is trying to say about the divisions and distinctions that are made between "high" culture and "low?"
6. The word "style" appears a lot in this book. Most obviously, Valerie works for the Style section of *The Paper*, but she's often encountering other peoples' version of style, too. Cabeza, for example, says graffiti artists got too caught up with "style." Identify the various ways in which style is explored in the book, including the author's choice of writing style. Can you come up with a good definition of the word "style?"
7. What makes Valerie become so interested in what happened to Stain? What does she learn about herself when she's reporting on his life story? Are there parallels between their lives? Or are they just too different to compare?
8. What does Valerie learn about herself by learning about Stain and graffiti culture?
9. What role does the city of New York play in the novel? To what extent is the city a character in the book?
10. Why do you think Valerie allows herself to be seduced by Cabeza?
11. Does Valerie become "a real reporter" in the end?

About the Author

Nina Siegal received her MFA in fiction from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and was a Fulbright Scholar. She has written for the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, among other publications. She lives in Amsterdam.