

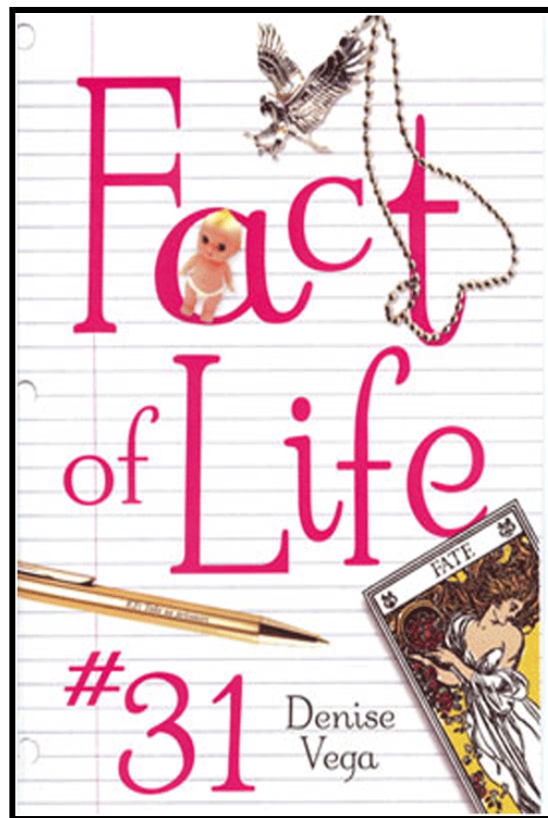
Discussion Guide

Fact of Life #31

By Denise Vega

"...athletic, artsy, oddball Kat is an unusual protagonist who doesn't easily fit into type, and many readers will welcome her strong individuality and believable growth."

-Booklist



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16-year-old Kat Flynn prides herself on going with the flow. She's a little different. (She practices yoga in the school halls to center herself.) But that's okay. She loves her job at Abra's midwifery, where she helps expectant mother's plan their births and labor/delivery playlists. She's an avid runner, training for the Danskin triathlon. And in her spare time she draws and paints, sharing it all with her best friend, Christy Buchanan.

There are only a few things disrupting Kat's flow, her strained relationship with her practically perfect mother, Abra, the perfect Libby Giles, who makes her feel invisible and the fact that her crush, Manny Cruz, has no idea who she is. But all that changes sophomore year, when her crush turns into a connection and she finds herself in the middle of the Perfect Couple's drama.

When Kat and Manny develop a relationship that turns romantic, she is all too happy to keep it to herself, until she realizes Manny's reasons for keeping them a secret is very different from hers. She tries to go with the flow, but Christy keeps pointing out all the reasons why her secret relationship isn't so cool. She ignores the little voice that agrees with Christy, resulting in a huge fight where she says some hurtful things. To make things worse, the perfect Libby comes to Abra for help and bonds with Abra in a way Kat never has. She feels even more alienated from Abra and feels even more vindicated in her strong dislike of Libby.

When she finds an unexpected friend, in Mitch Lowry, Libby's ex boyfriend, and starts to get to know Libby outside of school, Kat has to re-examine some of her assumptions about Mitch, Libby, Abra and herself. When Kat finally finds her voice and stands up to Manny and Abra, she realizes she's a strong person as well as a strong athlete. She takes responsibility for her actions and words, and mends her relationships with Christy, Manny & Abra. By letting go of her assumptions, Kat discovers that Abra and Libby aren't so perfect after all and maybe they were "trying to find [their] way, just like [her]."

Note from Denise This guide includes two sets of questions: Questions about the characters and story in *Rock On*, and general questions about your real experiences as they might relate to the book.

Pick and choose among these two sets of questions to get your discussion going. You'll probably have some of your own questions as well. Have fun!



Questions about Fact of Life #31

- 🕒 Early in the book Kat struggles with being her own person but also wanting to be recognized, e.g. wondering if Libby Giles knows who she is. She says there is a difference between being anonymous and being invisible. What's the difference? Which one does she think she is? How do you think this influences how she sees Libby? Mitch? Manny?
- 🕒 Throughout the book Kat continually compares herself to Abra. Or asks herself, "What would Abra do?" What does this tell you about Kat? What does it tell you about her relationship with Abra? Describe Abra and Kat's relationship.
- 🕒 How did Kat's work at the midwifery shape her relationship with Abra? What is the importance of Kat's birth drawings?
- 🕒 What prompts Kat to start writing her Facts of Life? How do they influence her journey to become her own person?
- 🕒 Kat has a very close connection to her sister, Lucy. She also has a strong commitment to running. How do these personal accomplishments help her find her way?
- 🕒 Why does Kat start out keeping her relationship with Manny a secret? When and why do you think her feelings change?
- 🕒 False assumptions surface throughout the story. What false assumptions does Kat make about Abra, Mitch, Manny & Libby? What false assumptions did they make about her? Did they discover their assumptions were wrong? If so, how?
- 🕒 How does Libby's relationship with Abra make Kat feel? How does she handle these feelings? What is the outcome?
- 🕒 In her public life at school, Kat is anonymous but unique ☐ yoga girl. In her private life, especially with Abra, she goes with the flow. When Kat stands up to Manny, she takes an important step toward giving herself a voice. What did she risk by making this decision? How did she handle the consequences?
- 🕒 Kat's friendship with Christy has always been rock solid and a refuge. Why did Kat attack Christy? Why did it take her so long to apologize?
- 🕒 By the end of the book, Libby and Kat are developing a friendship. What kind of friends do you think they are? What kind of relationship do you think they will have going forward?



General Questions

- 🕒 High School is full of unspoken social boundaries, some real, many imagined. By answering Mitch's rhetorical question, "What are you lookin' at?" Kat crosses one of these boundaries. Do you feel like your school has certain unwritten rules that you are supposed to follow? If so, do you go with the flow or make your own rules?
- 🕒 Kat, despite her best efforts, continually made assumptions about many of the characters. Think of a time when you made an incorrect assumption about someone you didn't know. Did your assumption end up hurting you or the other person? How did you find out your assumption was wrong? Do you still make assumptions about people?
- 🕒 Which parts of the book could you relate to the most? Which parts were the least like your life?
- 🕒 Kat often compares herself to Libby Giles. Is there someone you continually compare yourself, too? Why? How does it make you feel about yourself and the other person?
- 🕒 Throughout the book Kat struggles to define and redefine her relationship with Abra. Why do you think it so hard for teens to talk to their parents and for their parents to hear them (and vice versa)? How do you handle conflict with a parent?
- 🕒 If you found out someone you trusted pretended not to know you, what would you do? How would you feel? Would you be able to give them a second chance like Kat did?
- 🕒 Have you ever "gone with the flow" rather than saying what you really think or feel? Why? How did you feel after?
- 🕒 Everyone has a Manny or "Minnie" Cruz. Did you ever befriend or go out with your impossible crush? If so, did he/she live up to your fantasy? Why did you think it was impossible in the first place?
- 🕒 What was your favorite *Fact of Life*? Write your own fact of life.



Denise's Thoughts on *Fact of Life* #31

This book began because I had always hoped to have my children born at home with a home birth midwife. Unfortunately, the idea kind of freaked out my husband so we compromised—I used nurse midwives and gave birth in the hospital. I loved the process and the approach that midwives have to childbirth—that it's natural and not a medical condition, which is how a lot of people see it.

I knew I wanted to write about midwifery (pronounced with a short “i” as in “whiffle”), but I really wanted to do it as a young adult novel. That's when I came up with Kat, a smart, caring girl who works at her mother's midwifery. But as I wrote, the midwifery part became the backdrop to the story, and the real story emerged, which is how Kat comes to realize her strengths and figures out how she can be her own person with a “practically perfect” mother.

While I was working through the story, I was training for the Danskin Triathlon in Colorado, so that's one of the reasons why Kat is also into training for a mini-tri. I had also begun practicing yoga and felt that was the right mix for a girl whose mother was a home-birth midwife and also into yoga and meditation.

Finally, when I was in sixth grade, I had a betrayal of sorts by a boy I was crazy about. I may write about that specific experience in another book so I won't elaborate here, but that incident became the basis for the complicated relationship between Kat and Manny.

I hope you enjoyed reading *Fact of Life* #31 as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Note from Denise: I'm happy to be a part of your discussion and am available for a 20-minute Q&A in-person (Denver area) or via Skype.

For answers to frequently-asked questions or to read more, visit my website,
www.denisevega.com

