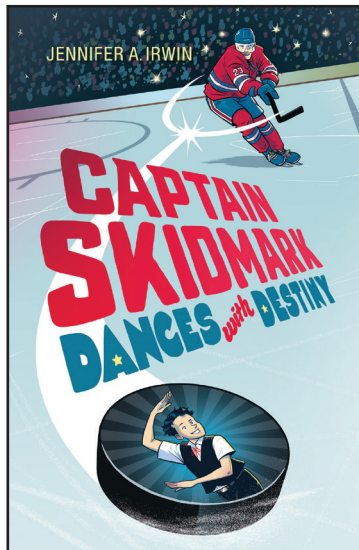


# CAPTAIN SKIDMARK DANCES *with* DESTINY

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



Jennifer A. Irwin  
978-1-62354-254-2 HC  
e-book available

### About the Book

Will is an eighth grader who hates hockey—and he stinks at it, too. Will is bullied at school, doesn't have any friends, and is generally miserable. His seventeen-year-old hockey-star cousin, Alex, is the cherry on the sundae: when he comes to stay with Will's family in Evanston, Ontario—the Armpit of the Universe—the boys hate each other on sight.

Then Will stumbles into a local dance school and discovers that for the first time ever, he's good at something—but his dad forbids it.

Will takes readers on a journey through noogies, awkward conversations, and epic farts. Filled with nuance and emotion, this novel asks serious questions with lots of humor about what makes a family and what makes a man.



### About the Author

Jennifer A. Irwin holds a master's degree in English literature, as well as a bachelor's in education from McGill University. She teaches middle and senior school English at Lower Canada College. She lives in Montreal, Quebec, with her husband and two sons. *Captain Skidmark Dances with Destiny* is her first novel.



## Discussion Guide

Use these questions to kick off classroom discussion, guide pre-thinking and post-reading responses, or inspire a writing assignment!

### About Hockey and Dance

- Why does Will play hockey even though he's terrible at it? What error does he make on the ice in chapter 1?
- Why does Will agree to go to goalie camp? What's the connection between goal defense and dancing?
- Why does Will keep his dance lessons a secret? Why does he keep going back?
- Why does Will's dad pressure him to give up dancing? What are the repercussions of that conversation?
- How does Will's performance go at the Spencerville Fair? How was it like or unlike he imagined in previous chapters?
- Why does Will's dad say that sports saved him when he was Will's age in chapter 36? Do you have an activity or hobby that you love the way Dad loves hockey and Will loves dancing?

### About Friends, Family, and Relationships

- What are some of the struggles Will has faced since moving to Evanston? Why doesn't he tell anyone that he's being bullied?
- Will's relationship with his father is complicated, to say the least. How does their relationship change throughout the book? How does it compare to other father-son relationships we see in Will's family (Alex and Uncle Eric, Will's dad and Poppy)?
- Who is Gordie? What impact does he have on Will's family?
- What does Will mean when he calls Safi "a friend of necessity"? Have you ever had a friend of necessity? What is that kind of friendship like? What other friendships (or other relationships) of necessity appear in *Captain Skidmark Dances with Destiny*? Does being a friend of necessity mean you can't become closer friends over time or as circumstances change?
- In chapter 23, is Alex right when he tells Will, "If you spend the rest of your life worrying about [pleasing people], you're going to be a very unhappy little person"? (pg. 192) Why or why not?
- What is Will's visit to Safi's home like in chapters 26 and 27? What does this visit reveal about Safi's life and personality? Why does Will feel ashamed at the end of the visit?



## About Friends, Family, and Relationships (cont'd)

- At the end of chapter 30, Will lists a number of recent disasters that he attributes to his dad's decisions. Are all of these actually his dad's fault? What role does Dad play in them, even if he's not solely to blame? Why do you think Will focuses the blame on his dad?
- Discuss Tessa's relationship with her sister, Sheri. How are they like or unlike Will and Alex?

## About Gender and Masculinity

- Do you have interests or hobbies that some people might consider unusual for your gender? What do you like about those hobbies?
- Why does Will think of Sheri as a "puck bunny" in chapter 11? What are some other examples of internalized sexism that we see embedded in Will's point of view (for example, feeling emasculated by helping in the kitchen in chapter 9)? How do his ideas about gender change, or not, over the course of the book?
- Consider the lunchroom conversation in chapter 20. Why do the boys get into a one-upmanship contest over doing or liking "unmanly" things? What makes something "manly" or "unmanly"? Who decides? Why do you think Will's dance lessons are considered going too far?
- In chapter 24, Tessa and Will talk about what makes someone a "real man." What do you think makes someone a "real man"? Should there even be the idea of a "real man" at all? Where did Will get his ideas about what makes someone manly or unmanly?
- Compare and contrast Will's role models for adult masculinity: his dad, Alex, Poppy, and Jesús. What kinds of skills, values, images, and attitudes do they model? How are they like or unlike masculine role models from your own life?
- What are the actions and qualities that Will's dad names when he calls Will "a good man" in their conversation in chapter 36? What does this tell you about Will's dad and his attitudes about gender and masculinity?