



Book Club Book of the Month August 2021

***Stars in Their Eyes* by Jessica Walton and Aśka (Fremantle Press)**

Summary

Stars in Their Eyes follows the story of Maisie and her Mum, Jo, as they travel to Maisie's first FanCon to see her hero, Kara Bufano, an amputee actor who plays a kick-arse amputee character in her favourite show. Maisie is a queer, disabled teenager with chronic pain, and while the story doesn't shy away from the challenges Maisie faces (particularly in terms of accessibility), *Stars in Their Eyes* thoughtfully celebrates diverse experiences. Maisie's relationship with her Mum is portrayed richly, and while there is a lot to be discovered about all the characters in this book, a good amount of time is committed to exploring Maisie and Jo's relationship and the role it plays in Maisie's life.

While at FanCon Maisie meets Ollie, a cute volunteer with whom she forms an instant connection. The story follows Maisie and Ollie's burgeoning relationship as they share and celebrate common interests, all while navigating delightfully embarrassing parents and new experiences. Packed with cheeky pop culture references, a great cast of characters, and emotive and energetic illustrations, *Stars in Their Eyes* is a great graphic novel that will delight readers young and old.

About the author

Jessica Walton is a picture book author, teacher, parent, daughter of a trans parent, and proud queer, disabled woman. She wrote *Introducing Teddy: A Gentle Story About Gender and Friendship* to help explain gender identity in a simple, positive way to her kids.

Introducing Teddy began as a Kickstarter project, but has now been published in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia by Bloomsbury. It has also been translated into nine other languages. Jess lives in Pakenham, Victoria, with her wife, kids and cat.

About the illustrator

Aśka is an energetic illustrator, storyteller and science communicator who is a passionate advocate for visual literacy. She has illustrated ten published books and is a regular contributor to *The School Magazine* and other children's publications. An active member of the local literature sector, she is part of many creative organisations and the Illustrator Co-ordinator for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators – Australia West. She is also a recipient of several government Arts grants, prizes, and the May Gibbs Fellowship.

Aśka believes visual literacy is one of the most important skills in today's world and she loves projects which explore new ways of communicating and presenting ideas with images. She has made comics, dabbled in animation, ran an animated film festival, held a solo art-science exhibition and been featured in an ABC arts documentary. She delivers engaging talks and workshops about her work, as well as developing her own visual story-telling ideas.

In addition to an Arts degree, Aśka holds a Physics degree and she still finds time to share her love of science and explosions with kids big and small.

Questions for discussion

1. Throughout the book, fan culture and fan spaces (like FanCon) are presented as mediums and places where both Maisie and Ollie can explore their identity and community. What do you think the book is trying to say about these spaces? Why do you think they are important?
2. As well as being an important space for Maisie and Ollie, fan culture is important to Maisie's Mum, Jo. How is Jo's engagement with fan culture different from Maisie's?
3. Discuss the graphic novel format. How do you think the choice to present this story through such a visual medium affected your experience of Maisie's story?
4. The book uses Maisie and her Mum's travel to point out instances where everyday amenities and services aren't created with accessibility in mind (the shower on p. 40, the chairs at the panel on p. 102). Is this something you have experienced or empathise with? How did the way the book articulated these things make you consider the environments we move through and objects we use on an everyday basis?
5. The book uses a lot of visual references to other media, often in a playful way. When Maisie first meets Ollie (pp. 72–73), a lot is conveyed through the artwork, as opposed to the text. How did this frame your perception of Ollie as a reader?
6. Having finished the book, what do you think the book's title is trying to communicate about its cast of characters?
7. At the hotel, Maisie has an uncomfortable encounter with another guest at the pool (pp. 32–38). The artwork in this passage also illustrates Masie's feeling and experience of being 'observed' as a disabled person by the other swimmers. How did this passage make you feel as you read it?
8. On page 134, Ollie says, "I guess we can be whoever we want, in our imagination." Maisie replies, "Maybe we can be in real life too, if we find people who get us." The book clearly articulates the importance of diverse representation in media, but what

do you think it's trying to say about the importance of supportive relationships for young people?

9. The book ends with Ollie and Maisie's relationship in a positive but bittersweet place. Is this different or similar to other books you've read in similar genres?

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The Boy from the Mish by Gary Lonesborough (Allen & Unwin), 2021

Heartstopper: Volume One by Alice Oseman (Hachette Australia), 2019

Meet Me At the Intersection edited by Rebecca Lim and Ambelin Kwaymullina (Fremantle Press), 2019

Peta Lyre's Rating Normal by Anna Whateley (Allen & Unwin), 2020

Growing Up Disabled in Australia edited by Carly Findlay (Black Inc), 2021

Kindred: 12 Queer #LoveOzYA Stories edited by Michael Earp (Walker Books), 2019

The Family Law by Benjamin Law (Black Inc Books), 2010

Invisible Boys by Holden Sheppard (Fremantle Press), 2019