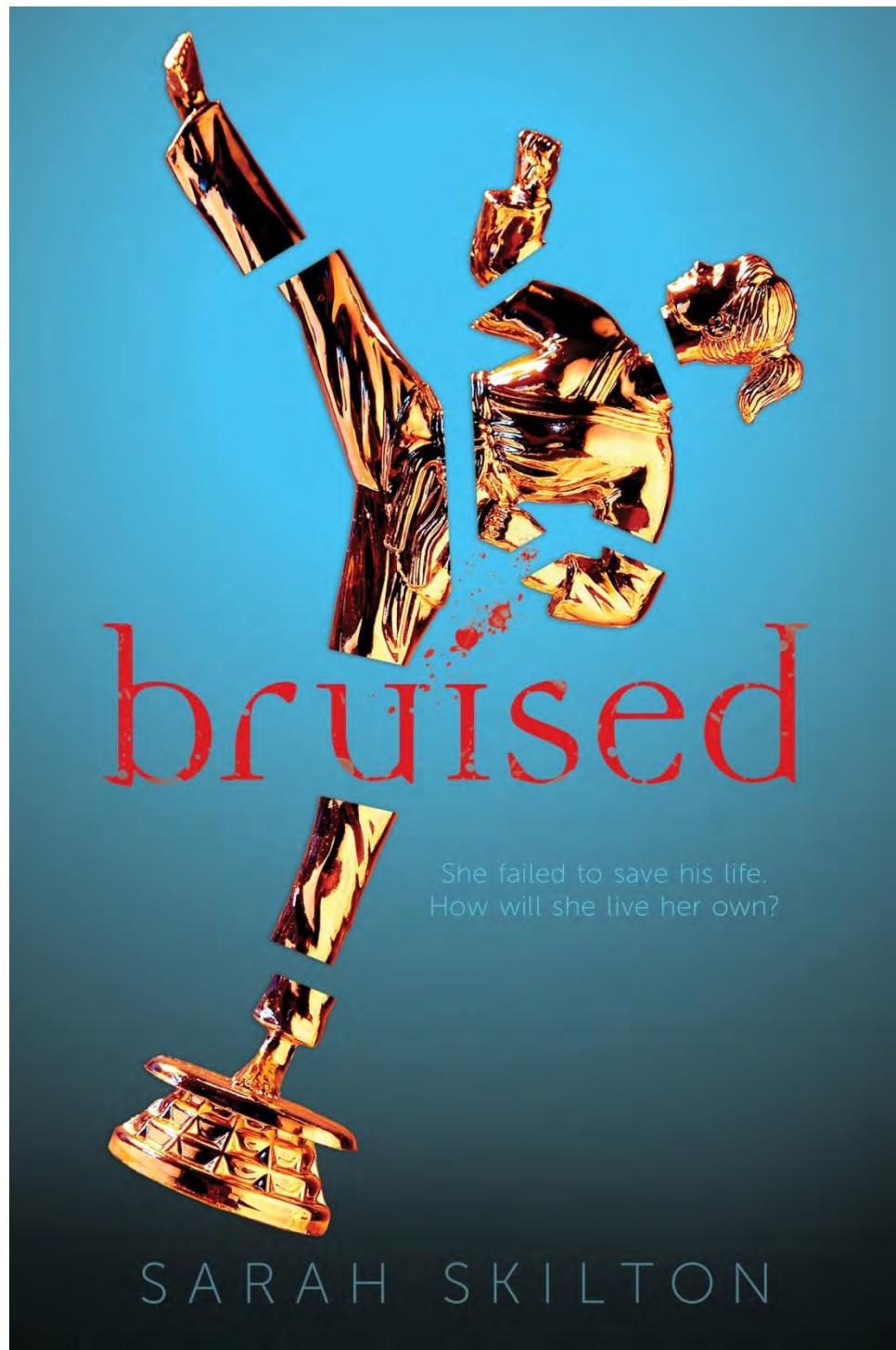


# DISCUSSION GUIDE



978-1-4197-0387-4 • \$16.95 • Ages 12 and up • Grades 7 and up

## Discussion Questions

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1. Imogen has a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Have you ever taken a martial arts or self-defense class? If yes, how has it helped you? If not, did reading about martial arts make you want to try lessons?
2. In her view, Imogen lets everyone down the one time she needs to use her skills. Have you ever witnessed something like a fight, or a classmate being bullied, and been too scared to act? Sometimes the best thing to do is lay low for your own safety. It can be hard to know when to intervene, when to run and get help, and when to stay hidden. Have you ever thought about what you might do in a tense or violent situation?
3. Imogen's friendship with Shelly falls apart because Shelly gets together with Imogen's brother, Hunter. Have you ever had a fight with a friend or a sibling that lasted a long time? How did you finally make up, if you did?
4. Guilt and regret are powerful emotions that can be difficult to overcome. Have you ever regretted doing something, or not doing something? How did you move on from those feelings? Did you have friends, family, or a counselor helping you?
5. Imogen is frustrated that people don't take female fighters seriously. Do you think people still stereotype based on gender? Do you think it's still a "rule" that boys aren't supposed to cry, and girls aren't supposed to get in fights, or do you see that changing? In what other ways do you see gender lines drawn in regards to "correct" behavior from boys vs girls?
6. Imogen's parents try their best to help Imogen but don't always know how. Have you ever felt irritated by your own parents' attempts to help you?
7. Ricky and Imogen decide not to go beyond kissing in their relationship. Do you think this was a good decision for them? Why or why not?

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8. Imogen's friend DJ ditches Imogen after Imogen gets suspended for fighting in school. Have you ever had to distance yourself from a friend because she was acting poorly? Have your parents ever disapproved of any of your friends, and if so, how did you handle it?

9. Imogen's dad has diabetes and moves around in a wheelchair. Does anyone in your family have diabetes or any other health issues? How has their health affected you?

10. Do you think it's fair of Imogen to blame herself for the shooting, or do you think that no one could have stopped it from happening? If you knew someone was a black belt in martial arts but didn't prevent a crime, what would you think of them? Is it ever possible to fight back against someone who has a gun?

## Interview with Sarah Skilton

### 1) When did you decide you wanted to write books for young adults?

In early 2009 I joined a Young Adult book club. We met once a month and I absolutely loved the books that were selected (books by Gene Yang, Josie Bloss, Rebecca Stead, Patrick Ness, Rob Thomas, Meg Rosoff, Laurie Halse Anderson, KL Going, and MT Anderson). I think I read over 100 that year beyond the ones for the club. At the time, I was querying literary agents with an “adult” book, but I realized my newest idea was most compelling when it was told by a young protagonist, who would see the world differently from someone with more life experience. I don’t think it would’ve worked at all with an older narrator. I come from a screenwriting background—and I read scripts as my day job—so while I was mainlining so many titles I began to see similarities between screenplays and YA books. YA books tend to be fairly fast-paced and dialogue-focused, and that format really appealed to me and my writing style. That’s how *BRUISED* was born!

### 2) What is your process for getting in the teen mindset?

Luckily I kept lots of ratty old notebook journals during all four years of high school, so it wasn’t too difficult for me to transport myself to that mindset. I vividly remembered feeling helpless a lot of the time as a teenager—unable to do what I wanted when I wanted, either because of an inability to drive, or the need to ask for permission. I was a fairly quiet, well-behaved teenager but I think inside I was simmering over with emotion and occasionally anger. It’s been fun to tap into that POV with my books.

### 3) Tell us about your writing process. Do you have a favorite spot to write? Is there one thing you can't write without?

I do like my coffee rituals in the morning, and I need to be surrounded by my notebook and iPhone, where I’ve inevitably jotted down or recorded thoughts when I was out and about. I tend to believe that if I forget to add something from a separate brainstorm, it wasn’t meant to be added, though.

### 4) How did you celebrate when you found out *Bruised* was set for publication?

Two of my close friends, whom I actually met at the YA book club in 2009, are also writers. They took me out for Japanese food, burgers, and sake, and we’re all debuting in 2013! Amy Spalding’s *The Reece Malcolm List*, about musical theater and long-lost mothers, came out in February, and Kristen Kittscher’s *The Wig in the Window*, a comedic middle-grade mystery, comes out in July. It’s been wonderful having them by my side during this whole journey.

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- 5) Tae Kwon Do plays a big part in *Bruised*. How did your experience with this martial art inspire you to write the book?**

I used to read *X-men* comics and watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* because of the strong young women who were featured. At the same time, I couldn't get past the fact that everyone in those stories had special powers to help them fight. With Tae Kwon Do, *regular people*—even a scrawny girl from suburban Illinois—could learn self-defense if they trained hard enough, and I loved that. I enjoyed feeling like a real-life equivalent of a superhero, with the added bonus of honor and respect and meditation. I earned my black belt in my mid-20s, but with *Bruised*, I wanted to explore what having a black belt might mean when you're very young, when you have abilities that other kids or your parents don't have, and how that would color your view of yourself and your responsibilities. Once I'd earned my black belt, I felt enormously accomplished but also at a bit of a loss; I felt there was still a lot I didn't know how to do, and a lot of situations I wouldn't necessarily be able to get out of. I didn't want to gloss over that realization in the book.

- 6) Did you ever experience a moment of freezing up, like Imogen?**

I've never encountered someone with a gun before, thank goodness, but when I was around 19 I was staying in a motel en route to college and I heard a disturbing, violent fight going on in another room. Unfortunately, I think there's an ingrained fear of "getting involved" that can hold people back sometimes, and it almost held me back. I pushed it aside to call the cops, who barged into my room to determine where the noises were coming from. Apparently the couple was arrested and the next morning the incident was the talk of the breakfast area, according to my parents. I didn't want to show my face.

- 7) I learned a lot about Tae Kwon Do while reading the story! If there's one thing about the martial art that you want your readers to take away, what is it?**

Respect for other people: other students, instructors, adults, and the art. There's a reason we bow and keep the studio clean and remove our shoes and acknowledge the flags and tenets. It sets a tone that can help you in all aspects of life.

- 8) On top of the holdup, Imogen is dealing with a lot of changes with her family and friends. Do you have any advice for teens going through similar issues?**

I think finding an outlet in any kind of exercise is always helpful, be it sports, riding a bike, martial arts, running . . . anything that will give you that adrenaline boost and help you sleep. I also advise talking things through with a trusted relative, teacher, friend, or therapist. That's easier said than done, but above all, know that you're NOT alone.

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**9) It's been said before: Boys in books are better. Is Ricky based off of anyone you know?**

It's interesting because while I agree that boys in books do tend to be the best version of boys, I've also found that I happen to know a lot of great guys in real life. My husband, my father, and my father-in-law are three of the kindest people you'll ever meet. I definitely drew some aspects of Ricky's personality from my husband, but otherwise he's an amalgamation of movie crushes and boys I've known throughout my life. (FYI, Ricky would be played by a younger Jay Hernandez if I were casting him.)

**10) Last question: if you were to visit Hunter at the Dairy Delight, what would you order?**

Heath Bar chunks in vanilla bean swirl! Unlike Imogen, I don't mind crunching or chewing when I eat ice cream 😊.

## About the book

When Imogen, a sixteen-year-old black belt in Tae Kwon Do, freezes during a holdup at a local diner, the gunman is shot and killed by the police, and she blames herself for his death. Before the shooting, she believed that her black belt made her stronger than everyone else—more responsible, more capable. But now that her sense of self has been challenged, she must rebuild her life, a process that includes redefining her relationship with her family and navigating first love with the boy who was at the diner with her during the shoot-out. With action, romance, and a complex heroine, *Bruised* introduces a vibrant new voice to the young adult world—full of dark humor and hard truths.

## Praise for *Bruised*

★“Offering psychological drama and an introduction to martial-arts code of behavior, the book has a meaningful message about power, control, and the internal bruises carried by victims.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Here is a writer to watch who handles complex issues with sensitivity in the vein of Deb Caletti and Sarah Dessen.” —*Booklist*

“Her story is compelling, and readers will stick with her as new insights bring about a believable shift in her behavior... This distinctive debut will be appreciated by fans of contemporary fiction.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“This layered first novel explores the aftereffects of the trauma, convincingly depicting why Imogen blames herself for a situation over which she had no control. Skilton also sensitively depicts the bond and tentative romance that develops between Imogen and Ricky. Nuanced and honest.” —*Horn Book*

“This is a useful exploration of the difference between fantasy-style omnipotence and the complexity of real-life human strength.” —*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

“Poignant and emotionally raw at times and humorous at others, this debut novel adeptly portrays a shattered life in the wake of an unexpected act of violence and the road back to normalcy.”

—*School Library Journal*



## About the author

**Sarah Skilton** lives in California with her magician husband and their son. By day she works in the film and TV business. She is a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, which came in handy when writing *Bruised*.

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