

# Book Club Guide

## SAME PAGE

By Elly Swartz



# Praise for Same Page

“As I read Same Page, I said to myself multiple times: “I wish I were Bess’s librarian. I’m proud of her for standing up for the rights of readers. I’m grateful she cares so deeply and passionately about story and advocates for libraries, librarians, and readers. Thank you for being a Book Warrior, Bess!”

- JOHN SCHU  
TEACHER-LIBRARIAN  
NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF  
LOUDER THAN HUNGER

“Same Page is a powerful, heartfelt story of a brave girl’s campaign against book-banning and other forms of intolerance. Once again, Elly Swartz has written a beautifully crafted novel that readers will find both relatable and inspiring.”

- BARBARA DEE, AUTHOR OF TEAR  
THIS DOWN AND UNSTUCK

“This is the book the world needs now. Fast-paced, relatable, unputdownable...”

- LIZA WIEMER, BESTSELLING  
AUTHOR OF THE ASSIGNMENT

“A timely, and relevant story readers will enjoy and learn from.”

- BECKY CALZADA,  
CO-FOUNDER TX FREEDOM FIGHTERS

## About the Book

**From the beloved author of *Hidden Truths* comes a novel about take-charge sixth grader Bess Stein, who brings together friends and a group of rockstar librarians called the Book Warriors to fight a book ban happening at her middle school.**

Bess Stein is more than ready to be 6th grade class president. She's got tons of ideas—including a book vending machine—and her new friend June is beside her as vice-president. Together, they're unstoppable!

But when the books the girls want included in the vending machine come under fire, Bess is stunned. How can one person believe they have the right to decide what other people can and cannot read? It turns out that June's mom is leading the fight, and now everything's a mess.

Bess misses June—but she wants to make sure kids who might like these books get the chance to read them, even if it means she and June can't be friends. With such different opinions, will they ever be on the same page?

At its heart, this is a story about friendship, allyship, and doing the right thing even when—or especially when—the right thing is hard to do. It asks the questions that I believe kids (and grown-ups) are asking today. What happens when you and your friend are not on the same page? What if it's about something big? Something that goes to the very core of who you are? Can you still be friends?



## About the Author

Elly Swartz is the acclaimed author of six middle grade novels: *Finding Perfect*, *Smart Cookie*, *Give and Take*, *Dear Student*, *Hidden Truths*, and *Same Page*. Swartz's books reflect her commitment to raising awareness about mental health and neurodiversity. Her debut novel, *Finding Perfect*, was named one of the Best Children's Books About Mental Health by the Child Mind Institute, *Dear Student* was recommended by *Parents Magazine* and won the PA State Award for Middle Grade, and *Hidden Truths* has received starred reviews from Kirkus and from School Library Journal, is a Kirkus Best Books of 2023, an Amazon Best Book for November, an Amazon Editors' pick, The Week Junior Book Club pick, a Project LIT Book Club selection, and a winner of a 2023 Nerdy for Middle Grade Fiction.

Swartz travels the country meeting with thousands of students each year to empower their own personal narrative. Swartz resides in Massachusetts. Connect with her at [ellyswartz.com](http://ellyswartz.com), on Twitter @ellyswartz, and on Instagram or Threads @ellyswartzbooks.



# Discussion Topics, Questions & Activities

## SAME PAGE Book Club

### ***Allyship***

- What does it mean to be an ally?
- What are some different ways a person can be an ally?
- Share times when you were or were not an ally.

### ***Bravery***

- Bess says, “Being brave isn’t about doing stuff when you’re not scared; it’s about doing stuff when you are.” P. 130. Do you agree or disagree?
- Share a time when you felt scared and acted anyway or a time when you felt scared and didn’t act. Looking back, would you have done anything differently? Why or why not?

### ***Success***

- Bess’s mom in, *Same Page*, says, “Success isn’t measured by the minds you change, but by the courage it takes to speak your truth.” P. 196. Do you agree or disagree?

### ***Activism and Poetry***

- Come up with a working definition of activism.
- Think of a cause that is important to you or the group. It can be something big that impacts many (making the world safer/kinder/greener) or something small that impacts one (being a good sibling/doing your homework/ spreading happiness). Size doesn’t matter. It simply has to mean something to *you*. Remember, even the smallest of actions can make a big difference.
- As a group or as individuals, write a poem in the style of June’s poem, *Shining the Light*.  
3 paragraphs - each with 4 lines.  
The paragraph can begin with the words: “I won’t” (Like June’s) or “I will.”  
Either way, you are creating a poem about committing to change.

## ***Shining the Light***

*By June Myer*

I won't be quiet  
Silent no more  
I will shine the light  
And open the door

I won't be idle  
Let hate take hold  
I will shine the light  
And dare to be bold

I won't pretend  
Ignore what's true  
I will shine the light  
And speak up for you

### ***Communication***

- What does it mean to communicate effectively?
- Explain how the following can be used to communicate effectively or ineffectively.
  - Actions
  - Written Words
  - Silence
  - Speeches
  - Active Listening
  - Assumptions
- Below are some examples of ways Bess and others in the story communicated their feelings and messages in *Same Page*. Do you think these means were effective? Why or why not? In your opinion, what could they have done differently?
  - Leaving books around town with blue sticky notes in them
  - School board meeting speeches
  - Bess's text to June after the volleyball incident: Hope your head is ok. (with sad hurt emoji), p. 168
  - June and the girls in the bathroom p. 227:  
"You guys, stop," I hear June say.  
I hold my breath. Waiting.  
Then, "Stop? Are you kidding me? Shut up, June. You finally did something smart by ditching that loser. Don't ruin it now."  
My body's shaking.  
The door to the bathroom opens and I hear them leave."

***What's on your page? Are you on the Same Page as your friends? Do you have to be?***

- In the story, Bess says, “How could someone I like, someone I care about, someone I thought was my friend, not be on the same page about this? How could she think things that are so hurtful, so wrong, and so opposite of anything I could ever believe?” Pp 87-88. Discuss this quote.
- Then consider...
  - Are you and your friends always on the same page?
  - Can you be friends with someone who is not on the same page as you? Explain in what circumstances it would matter to you if someone was or was not on the same page.

**Quotes**

- Discuss some or all of the following quotes:
  - “I thought hate was loud and scary, like monsters. Turns out I was wrong. Hate is quiet and wears a cardigan.” P. 1, prologue
  - “The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.” —Elie Wiesel” P. 91
  - “I mean, if people don’t want to listen, then information can’t inform, and the truth can’t educate. So how do I change people’s minds?” P. 143
  - “Does loving someone who does bad things make you a bad person?” P. 178
  - “Bess, we’re not here to persuade others to think the way we do....We’re here to persuade them to respect our right to think differently.” P. 186

***Mindfulness***

- In *Same Page*, Bess practices kindness meditation. Hers goes like this: “May I be happy. May I be healthy. May I be safe. May I be peaceful. May I be strong.” P. 45. Why do you think Bess does this? Explain your answer.
- Take a moment. Create your own kindness meditation or create a book club kindness meditation that you can do each time you come together as a group.

## **Contributors**

This guide was written by author Elly Swartz and educators Anna Kontos and Dr. Rayna Freedman.

As an educator for over twenty-five years, Anna Kontos has served in both public and independent schools as a classroom teacher, literacy coach, English department head, and learning specialist. She has spoken at a number of conferences on a variety of topics ranging from conducting successful student-led conferences, to reimagining the hero's journey through literature, to designing comprehensive, school-based word study programs that enhance all students' reading and writing. Anna holds a B.A. in Psychology from Dartmouth College and M.Ed. in Language and Literacy from Harvard Graduate School of Education. Anna currently supports and consults with individual students, families, and schools to promote positive outcomes for children both inside the classroom and beyond.

Dr. Rayna Freedman is a 5th grade teacher at the Jordan/Jackson Elementary School in Mansfield, MA. She has taught grades 3-5. Rayna has a B.S. in Education from the University of Vermont and a M.Ed in Educational Technology from Lesley University. She received her doctorate through Northeastern in teaching, learning, leading, and curriculum. She is a Google for Education Certified Trainer, Google Level 1 and 2 certified educator, an Ed Tech Teacher consultant, BrainPOP certified educator, Magic School AI Pioneer, Trainer, and Certified Educator, Flip Ambassador, Fablevision Ambassador and Wakelet Ambassador. She is also a member of the Reynolds Center TLC faculty. Rayna has presented for ISTE, Ed Tech Teacher, MassCUE, Vietnam Technology Conference, CUE Nevada, NYSCATE, Tech and Learning, Medfield Digital Learning Day, FETC, BPLC, and BLC. She believes in student agency and the power of building relationships and community.