

BRACE FOR PRINCIPAL IMPACT

A MEMOIR

GABE MONTESANTI



BOOK CLUB KIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. *Brace for Impact* is so much more than a “roller derby memoir”; Olympian Abby Wambach called it “a universal story of healing and triumph.” There are many entry points to Gabe Montesanti’s story: body image, trauma, community, family, being a member of a team, and the intersection of physical and emotional recovery/well-being. What themes resonated with you and why?
2. Besides the author, which character did you most relate to and why?
3. Discuss Montesanti’s relationship with her mother. Which scenes or memories stood out to you? How do relationships with our mothers or parents inform our understanding of ourselves and the world? Did you identify with the complexity of the relationship, which encompassed both pain and tenderness?
4. When Montesanti describes why she wanted to be a part of roller derby, she says: “I was looking for a community, but I also wanted to feel pain. . . . The unpredictability and violence of the sport were magnetic in their appeal.” What do you make of this statement, and why do you think she felt that way?
5. Other than the pure physicality of roller derby, what other things do you think the title *Brace for Impact* refers to?
6. Early in Gabe and Kelly’s relationship, the author felt a bitter class resentment “from little things, like the fact that [Kelly] rarely noticed prices at the grocery store and sometimes went weeks without checking her bank account balance.” Why do you think class issues are so fraught, especially within a relationship?
7. How much did you know about roller derby before reading *Brace for Impact*? What surprised you about the sport?
8. Ninja Sass’em, Taryn ItUp, Bruise Almighty, Stormin’ Norma, Cruella Belle-Ville, Bricktator, Nanny McWhee, and of course, Joan of Spark. What would your roller derby name be, and why? The punnier the better!
9. What do you think is the best part of being in the roller derby community? The competition, the support, the camaraderie, the validation, the creativity? Which would you appreciate, and why? One skater tells the author: “Nobody joins roller derby if they have a perfectly happy life.” After reading *Brace for Impact*, do you believe in this sentiment? Why or why not?
10. Weight and body issues are a major theme throughout *Brace for Impact*. The author says: “It was the lens through which I saw myself: my body as a vehicle to win, my body as something of which there literally needed to be less.” How did the author’s view of her body change over the course of the book?
11. How did you feel when Kelly and Gabe’s mother got into a fight at the hotel after Gabe’s accident? Do you think Gabe should have gone home with Kelly? Why do you think she stayed at the hotel with her mother and sister? After that intense scene, the author’s mom tells her: “You’re still one of us.” What do you think she meant by this?
12. If you were directing the movie version of *Brace for Impact*, who would you cast in the roles of Gabe, Kelly, Gabe’s mother, and Taryn?

DERBY TERMS



Bout:

a game or match

Blockers:

players whose goal it is to stop the jammer

Counter-hitting:

if an opposing skater is barreling toward you, prepare to fight back. "Don't just stand there and let it happen!" Tutz shouted. "Pretend you're getting mugged! Pretend some bitch is trying to take your money!"

Crossing Over:

the process of leaning into a fall from which you catch yourself at the last minute

Derby mom:

a mentor

Derby mom:

tucking in your limbs as you hit the ground to avoid personal injury or tripping teammates

Fresh meat:

new recruits

Hip check:

a bump to a player with said body part

Jammers:

the only skaters who can score points for their teams

Mins:

minimum skills test

Target zone:

the places on opponent's body that would most safely and effectively impede their ability to continue skating: upper thigh, hip, chest

Whip:

a move in which one skater uses another's momentum to propel herself

Zebras:

nickname for skating referees

PLAYLIST



HOOSIER LOVE
MU330

COUNTRY
GRAMMAR
Nelly

GLORIA
Laura Branigan

MEET ME IN
ST. LOUIS
Judy Garland

IT'S GETTIN'
HECTIC
The Urge

IN SAINT LOU
7 Shot Screamers

THE CHEATER
Bob Kuban

RESCUE ME
Fontella Bass

MUMBLES
Clark Terry

GUILTY
Gravity Kills

ST. LOST
Tonina

LOVE ME THROUGH
THE PAIN
Marquise Knox

HERE COMES
THE KING
Steve Karmen