

## About *FIFTEEN POINT NINE*

No one at school knew that fifteen-year-old Aggie and her mother were hoarders until the Idiot Boys. That made her even more a target of bullies than she was before.

At home, aka The Dump, her loneliness and despair are further punctuated by her mother's alcoholism, neglect, and paranoia.

But Aggie is a warrior and she devises a plan to fight back — a plan that enlists a few of the other misfits at school. The plan isn't an easy one, though, and when she is beaten by a group of girls, she finds strength and encouragement from some unlikely sources.

Will it be enough to turn her life around? And will she somehow be able to save her mother, who continues a downward spiral of neglect?

“Holly Dobbie has drawn from years of teaching high school for this debut novel, and she tells the story convincingly. For those living through bullying, parental neglect, peer suicide, dejection, or isolation, the authenticity of *Fifteen Point Nine* will hit hard, particularly in its harshness and near hopelessness. Still, the author makes it clear that for those who do suffer at the hands of others, every day of survival is a victory – and making it past age 15.9 is a triumph.”

— *Quill & Quire*

## About HOLLY DOBBIE

**Holly Dobbie** is a former high school teacher with a heart for the underdog. Her teaching experiences and volunteer work with at-risk youth through the Red Cross Child Abuse Prevention Program have taught her that change is needed at almost every level of the middle and high school environments. She lives with her family in Langley, BC.

## Curriculum

Grade 9, 10, 11, 12 English (Reading and Literature Studies)

Grade 9, 10, 11, 12 Health and Physical Education (Healthy Living — Personal Safety and Injury Prevention, Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours)

Grade 10 Technological Education (Health Care — Health Care Fundamentals)

## Student Objectives

After reading *Fifteen Point Nine*, students should be able to:

### Grade 9-10:

- Demonstrate the ability to make connections that relate to health and well-being – how their choices and behaviours affect both themselves and others, and how factors in the world around them affect their own and others' health and well-being
- Respond to challenges involving substance use or addictions – use of living skills
- Respond to bullying/harassment (including sexual harassment, gender-based violence, homophobia, racism).
- Describe factors that affect personal health and well-being
- Describe types of abuse that affect children and adolescents, and the community resources available to help victims of abuse

### Grade 11-12:

- Make connections between substance use, addictive behaviour, and physical and mental health
- Identify risk factors and supports available for students struggling
- Develop skills for dealing with stressful situations, and strategies for making safer choices
- Identify warning signs and prevention strategies for suicide
- Identify the effects of and responses to harassment, violence, and abuse
- Use living skills and supports to reduce vulnerability to harassment, violence, abuse

## Getting Started

1. Define what abuse looks like (verbal, physical) and the ideal reactions to it, outlining support systems in your community.
2. Discuss with students what knowledge they may already have of hoarding.

## Discussion Questions / Essay Questions

1. How do you identify a 'safe' adult to discuss your problems with?
2. Should Susan have threatened to tell Miss Strand about Aggie's self-harm if Aggie didn't stop?
3. What impact would telling someone about Jane have had for Aggie? What were Aggie's expectations for telling someone?
4. Why was Aggie hurting herself? Discuss the factors that resulted in her self-harm.
5. Discuss Aggie's evolution throughout the story.
6. Should Carson be trying to kiss lonely girls? Discuss Carson's approach to romantic relationships.
7. How has Aggie's behavior differed from your prior knowledge of people who hoard, self-harm, or are bullied?
8. What examples of 'good' relationships exist in this book, and how can you tell?
9. What does junk food represent to Aggie?
10. What skills does Aggie use to avoid Jane?
11. What form does sticking up to bullies take in the novel? Are there other options available to Aggie and her friends?
12. Compare Aggie's experiences with bullies to another novel about bullying (*Thirteen Reasons Why*, *The Outsiders*, etc). How do her experiences differ or remain the same?
13. What is the significance of the rainbows?
14. Does Michelle's asthma represent a struggle of her own? How does Dobbie intend us to feel about Those Girls, or even Jane?
15. In what ways is Aggie an unreliable narrator?
16. Compare and contrast Aggie's and Susan's relationships with food and their mothers.
17. Discuss the presence of magic and magical thinking in the novel and its significance to the plot.
18. Compare and contrast support groups and their effectiveness: The Pig Mask Chronicles, AA, and Alateen.