

5. Described as a magical (with its “miraculously balanced rock sculptures, Greek temples, and Spanish villas,” p.127) and malicious place at once, the city of Los Angeles is a setting in many of the stories in *Girl Goddess #9*. Based on the characters’ reactions to and descriptions of their surrounding city and what you may know about LA, discuss the importance of this city as a setting. Does the LA setting enhance LA-native Block’s storytelling, which combines magic with reality? What elements and conditions of the city—geographical elements, the entertainment industry, climate, social scene—make it an important backdrop? Does LA play more of a role in some stories than others?

6. At the conclusion of “Pixie and Pony,” Pony reassures Pixie that, beyond being best friends, they “are sisters” (p.154). Consider the close, long-term relationship between the two girls and consider your own relationships with your best friends and siblings. In what ways is their relationship like that between sisters? How is it like a best-friend relationship? Can sisters be friends?

7. In “Dragons in Manhattan,” Tuck feels close to Herby and Molly when she visits their home and stays in her father’s bedroom (pp.79-83). How is the loving relationship between Herby and Molly similar to that between Tuck’s moms? How is the way both of these couples treat Tuck similar?

8. Discuss *Girl Goddess #9* as a coming-of-age book. How does the central character in each of the nine stories face and overcome a troubling situation as part of her growing up? Consider also the significance of the increase in the age of the central character in each of the stories—Twee Sweet Pea, in the first story, is a toddler; the narrator in “Orpheus,” the last story, is a college freshman. Does the collection of stories work as a coming-of-age story as well? How so?

9. Lady Ivory and Alabaster Duchess wrote “all about the stuff we love and hate and illustrated it with our sketches and photos” (p.97). La, Pixie, and the narrator in “Orpheus” are also writers. How is writing an outlet for these and other characters as they struggle through girlhood and adolescence? Does the writing process help these girls deal with the ups and downs of adolescence? What other art forms do girls in the collection use to help them understand their life experiences?



photo by Claudia Kunin

**Francesca Lia Block**, nurtured by a painter-father and poet-mother, wrote most of her first novel, *Weetzie Bat*, while she was studying at the University of California-Berkeley. Since *Weetzie Bat*, Block has written four *Weetzie* sequels—*Witch Baby*, *Cherokee Bat and the Goat Guys*, *Missing Angel Juan*, and *Baby Be-Bop*—that, like *Weetzie Bat*, have received high praise and prestigious awards. Ms. Block is also the author of *The Hanged Man*, a 1996 ALA Recommended Book for Reluctant Young Readers.

Named “one of the 100 coolest people” in that town by *Buzz* magazine, Francesca Lia Block lives in Los Angeles, California.

Also by Francesca Lia Block, available from HarperCollins:

**The Weetzie Bat Books**

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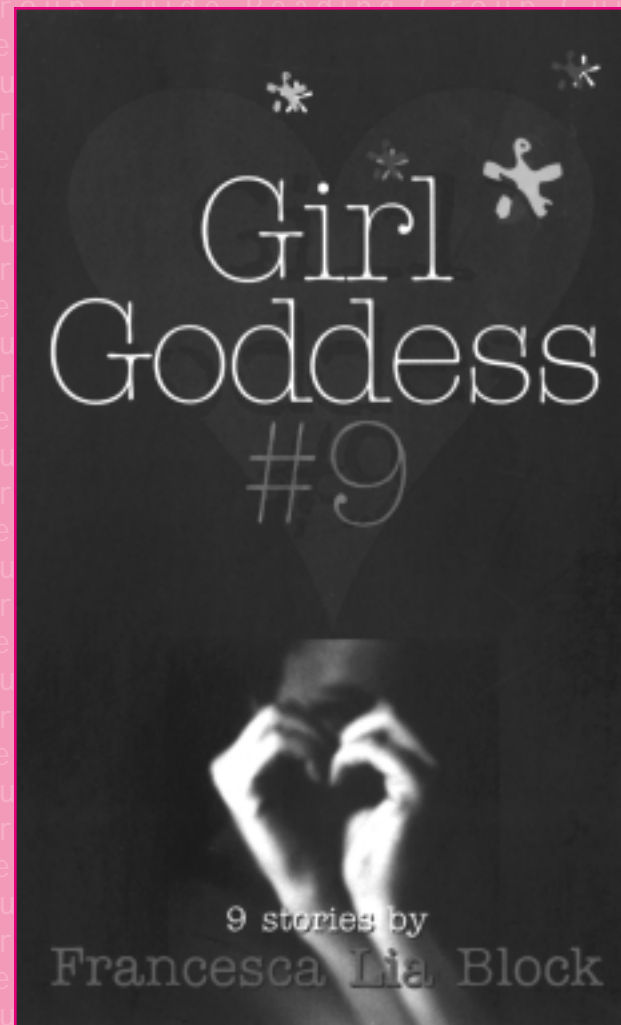
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# Reading Group Guide



## About this Guide:

In *Girl Goddess #9*, an exciting collection of nine fresh and funky stories, Francesca Lia Block's compelling voice brings to life a range of individual characters who tackle universal challenges of adolescence—love, family, death, beauty, sexuality—and discover that there is more than one way to live. The discussion topics, suggested reading list, and author biography in this reading group guide for *Girl Goddess #9* are intended to spark discussion about the characters and issues raised in this thought-provoking and fascinating book.

## About this Book:

Meet the characters of *Girl Goddess #9*, introduced to us in Francesca Lia Block's signature style—a combination of magic and reality, the zingingly bright and the dreamily dark.

Twetie Sweet Pea is a toddler who may understand more about growing up, life, love, and change than her parents think. Tuck Budd is the daughter of two moms who becomes curious about the identity of her dad, so she embarks on a cross-country search for the life-affirming truth. La faces her mother's death with



the help of an androgynous blue friend and the strength of her own written words, while Winnie, Pixie, Pony, and Désirée face the challenges of adolescence with the help and support of their peers. Meeting their fave rock star teaches lady ivory and alabaster duchess about their own beauty and strength, but dating and meeting lots of rock stars does not affect Rave in the same way.

Confronted with the pressures that everyday life inflicts on them, these girls—of all ages and all lifestyles—discover that unconditional love can come from unconventional sources, and that the world is not always a simple place. Most of all, the girls we meet in this uniquely stunning short story collection discover that in every girl is a goddess...

## Critical Acclaim:

"Refreshing, uplifting, and ultimately empowering, this collection celebrates the strong spirit of young girls and women." —*ALA Booklist*

"Feminist in a quiet way, female characters are at the center of each short story, and, ultimately, each story celebrates the heroism with which these girls/women meet the challenges of their lives." —*The Horn Book*

"The roses, camellias and jacarandas of Block's lush prose style scent these works with a heady perfume." (Starred review) —*Publishers Weekly*

"Well-written stories that radiate empathy, pithiness, and a vibrant irreverence." (Starred review) —*School Library Journal*

"Nine short stories form an author with a gift for creating warmly human characters with widely unconventional exteriors." (Pointer review) —*Kirkus*

"Block's writing is so tenderly intoxicating." —*Spin*

## For Discussion:

1. As she did in her Weetzie Bat books, Block questions the structure of the traditional nuclear family and creates unconventional, extremely loving families from groups of friends. How do peers provide the love and support typically associated with a nuclear family in *Girl Goddess #9*? What kind of support can the characters get from their friends that they may not get from their parents, and vice versa? How does the age of the characters affect the strength of the "peer as parent" relationship? What is the author's comment on the structure of a loving family? You may wish to discuss, but not limit yourself to, the peer-family relationships in "Winnie and Cubby," "Rave," "The Canyon," and "Pixie and Pony." If you have read any of the Weetzie Bat books, you may wish to discuss similarities and differences between the friends-as-family relationships in *Girl Goddess #9* and those in Block's other books.
2. Discuss the significance of Tuck Budd's observation of the girl and her grandmother on the bus (pp.41-42) to continue your discussion of traditional vs. alternative families. As we know, Tuck is raised in an unusual family situation (she has two moms, no dad), yet she receives complete support and encouragement from her parents. How does this specific situation allow Block to comment on loving families?
3. Before she departed on her search for her father, Tuck Budd "was sick of how [Izzy and Anastasia] always tried to understand and explain everything" (p.52-53). Why is Tuck's journey something she must experience on her own? How do the trip and what she learns about her family help Tuck grow up? How does Tuck's trip affect her relationship with her two moms when she returns to Manhattan?
4. At the conclusion of "Girl Goddess #9," lady ivory and alabaster duchess "go back to [their] old names," Emily and Anna, "until [they] can think of something new" (p.112). What is the significance of this name change? What have the two writers of *Girl Goddess #9* learned—about themselves and the world—from their meeting with Nick Agate? How has the experience of writing their zine influenced the name change?