

Reading Guide
HOW TO BE BRAVE

by E. Katherine Kottaras
St. Martin's Press/Griffin Teen

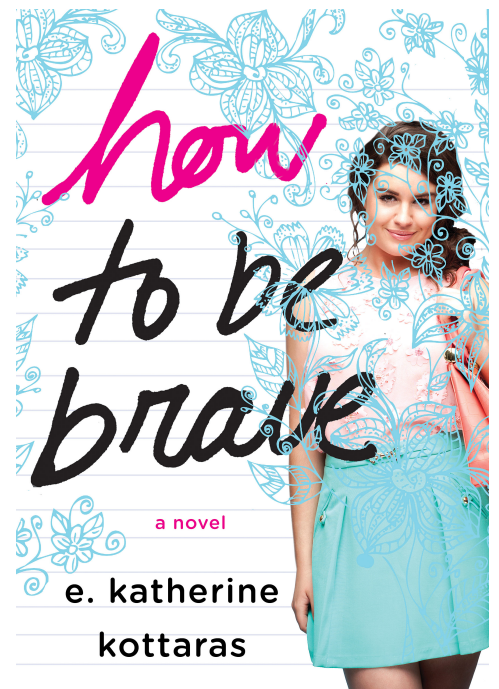
“A perfect book for anyone trying to figure out what they want their life to look like, and how to be brave enough to make that life a reality.”

— *Booklist*

“How to Be Brave is a celebration of life, from the captivating open page to the emotional ending.”

-Dahlia Adler, author of *Behind the Scenes*

“A thoughtful exploration of grief and life.” -Kirkus Reviews



Please be aware that this guide may contain minor spoilers.

Opportunities for discussion and/or journal writing:

1. Georgia Askeridis begins her senior year anxious, her mom having died over the summer. Before her death, her mom commanded her to live differently—to try everything at least once and to never be ruled by fear. Before you read the book, or at the beginning of your group discussion, make a list all of your fears. Where do these fears stem from?
2. Watch the interactive book trailer at www.howtobebravebook.com. For which items did you choose yes vs. no for Georgia's bucket list? Why? How do you define courage?
3. Georgia's dad is lost in grief (plus, he's Greek and old-fashioned and doesn't know how to talk to her), so she enlists her best friend, Liss, to help her create a Do Everything Be Brave List.
 - Thinking back to the list of fears you created in response to the first question, what items would you put on your bucket list? What fears would you like to overcome? What fears have you already overcome in your life?
 - Georgia's list includes: tribal dancing, skinny-dipping, flambé, skydiving of course, learning how to draw like her mom, and yes, cheerleading (#YOLO). Why do you think Georgia chose these items? Which of the items on her list are most appealing to you? Are there any items you think she shouldn't try? Why?
4. In *How to Be Brave*, Georgia feels uncomfortable in her body that's deemed "overweight" by society's standards, and part of her storyline is that she her journey to find confidence in her body, as it is – in the first chapter, Georgia's best friend, Liss, reminds her that losing weight does not equal being brave. *Booklist* noted, "Georgia's struggles with weight and body image are also handled with care." How did you respond to these sections?
5. Georgia's parents are both Greek, and her father is an immigrant having come from Greece in 1972. Georgia often expresses frustration at her father's inability to understand her. How does this book reflect the immigrant experience in America? Is this lack of understanding between parent and child unique to the immigrant family? What specific issues do immigrants and their children face?
6. How would you describe Georgia's relationship with her best friend, Liss? What about compared to their new friend, Evelyn? What does Georgia learn about friendship in the book? Georgia also makes a conscious effort to stand up to Avery, who has bullied her for years. How does Georgia resolve this conflict? What does she come to understand about Avery by the end?

7. One of the items on Georgia's list is asking out Daniel, the boy she's had a crush on since freshman year. How does the pursuit of love require courage? What did Georgia have to discover about herself before she could feel confident in this pursuit?
8. Many of the chapters open and close with short poems. What purpose did the verse serve? Why do you think Kottaras chose to write these sections as poems rather than prose?
9. Georgia creates the list to honor her mother. Review the [stages of grief](#) outlined at a site like WebMD. How does Georgia experience these stages? When does she feel isolated, angry, and/or numb? How does she deal with these various emotions? Does she find acceptance?
10. Georgia is often plagued by self-doubt. She has an inner monologue that is both funny and honest. At one point she says, "My mom, she saw something in me. Something no one else ever has. I'm trying to see it, too." Where does this self-doubt stem from? Why do you think Georgia can't see that something in herself? How does her desire to be an artist help Georgia find confidence?
11. Georgia makes some problematic choices along her journey to complete the list. How did you respond to these choices?
12. Evelyn's suicide attempt forces Georgia to reconsider her understanding of both courage and friendship. How did you respond to this section?
13. Where do you think the characters (specifically Georgia, Daniel, Liss, Evelyn, and Georgia's father) will end up in a year? Five years? Ten years?
14. Georgia realizes that "Being brave isn't about living every minute exhilarated. It's about waking up and knowing that despite the worry and the sadness and the deep, dark fear, you're going to go forth anyway. That you're going to try anyway. That you have a choice, and you're going to choose to live, today, bravely." Do you agree? After reading *How to Be Brave*, how do you define bravery?
15. In her bio, Kottaras states that "she is interested in the stories we tell, the stories we are given, and the ways we can redefine our worlds by discovering which stories are true." How does *How to Be Brave* fulfill this interest?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Grief and loss

The Dougy Center, the National Center for Grieving Children and Families, www.dougy.org

Body image and self-identity

Bust Magazine: <http://bust.com>

Beauty Redefined: <http://www.beautyredefined.net/>

Healthy is the New Skinny (Katie Wilcox): <http://healthyisthenewskinny.com>

Eff Your Beauty Standards: <http://effyourbeautystandards.tumblr.com>

Suicide prevention

National Suicide Prevention Hotline: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

By calling **1-800-273-TALK** (8255) you'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area, anytime 24/7.

Mother-daughter relationships

The Mother-Daughter Project: <http://www.themother-daughterproject.com/>

Institute for Girls' Development: <https://www.instituteforgirlsdevelopment.com>

Bring E. Katherine Kottaras to your readers!

Background:

Katherine holds a B.A. in English Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and an M.A. in English from the University of California, Irvine. She has worked as a middle, high school, and community college teacher for more than fifteen years. She currently teaches creative writing, composition and literature full-time at Pasadena City College. As a certified yoga instructor, Katherine also leads classes and retreats that involve yoga and the creative process. In 2004, she was the recipient of the Music Center's Bravo Award in Los Angeles for creativity and innovation in teaching. Katherine is a member of NCTE and SCBWI.

She is the author of the YA contemporary novel, *HOW TO BE BRAVE* (2015) and the forthcoming *THE BEST POSSIBLE ANSWER* (2016), both from St. Martin's Press/Griffin Teen.

Click [here](#) for more information.
Or contact her directly at ekatwrites@gmail.com.

www.ekatwrites.com
twitter.com/ekatwrites
facebook.com/ebkottaras

Testimonials

"I wanted to thank you again for taking the time to visit with our girls today. Many returned to class and shared how much they enjoyed the presentation. I'm sure they'll reflect on your important message and hopefully experience some peace where none existed prior to your visit."

**Cathy Blackler, English Teacher
Santana High School, La Puente, CA
A California Model Continuation School**

"Katherine will guide teachers through activities and discussion that enable them to transform Georgia's journey into meaningful classroom dialogue designed to facilitate teens' discovery of their own voices, their own persistence, and ultimately, their own bravery in a world that requires thoughtful, reasoning adults."

**Vanessa Goodwin
Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education
California State University, Northridge**