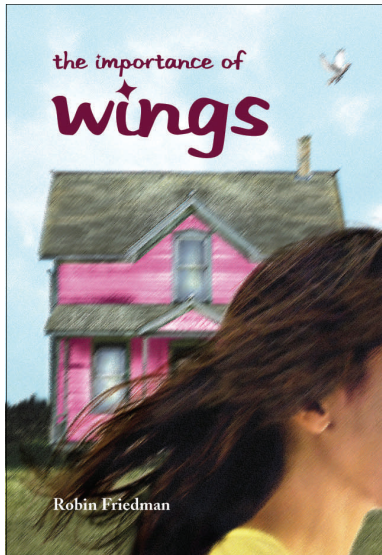


the importance of wings



Discussion Guide

With their mother caring for relatives in Israel and their father driving a cab all hours of the day, Roxanne and her sister, Gayle, spend a lot of time watching television reruns of *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Brady Bunch*, and *Wonder Woman*—perfect examples of perfect Americans. Roxanne is desperate to be like them.

When Liat, a fellow Israeli, moves into the “Cursed House” next door, things begin to change. Roxanne realizes that maybe real life isn’t like TV—maybe it’s even better. The novel is set on Staten Island, New York, in the early 1980s.

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1. Why is being from Israel difficult for Roxanne? Have you ever felt the way Roxanne does—different and not “normal”? What made you feel this way?
2. Were you, or any of your friends, born outside the United States? If so, where did you/they live and when did you/they move here?
3. Are there special customs, foods, languages, that your family has? Share some of these with your friends.
4. When Roxanne and Liat discuss their names, Liat says that her father’s name is Joseph, but he likes to go by “Yossi.” Roxanne feels guilty when she hears this. Why do you think she feels this way?
5. Throughout the book, Roxanne’s mother is in Israel taking care of her sister. How does her mother’s absence affect their family? Has anyone in your family needed to be away for an extended period of time? What were the circumstances and how did this make you feel? What did you do to make the situation easier for those involved?
6. Why is the title of this book *The Importance of Wings*? When Liat says to Roxanne, “Some things are more important than wings,” what does she mean? Does Roxanne’s perspective on “wings” change throughout the book?
7. At the end of *The Importance of Wings* the author notes that this story takes place in the 1980s. Did you realize this when reading it? What was the reason the author did this? Could the story take place today? What themes resonate with the current times?



Robin Friedman

“I’ve wanted to be a writer since I was little—I wrote tons of stories when I was younger about talking squirrels and girls with pigtails.”

Robin Friedman was born in Israel and first came to the United States when she was five. Her family moved from Brooklyn to Staten Island, and finally settled in Marlboro, New Jersey, where she graduated from high school and learned to make Big Macs at the local McDonald’s. Although she still lives in New Jersey, she no longer works at McDonald’s “And believe it or not, I have never once been tempted to reveal the secret sauce recipe.”

Growing up, Robin knew she loved to write, but there weren’t many “writing role models” in her life. She thought that being a writer meant you worked for a newspaper or magazine, so she became interested in journalism. She wrote for both her high school and college newspapers, and held internships at newspapers during the summers. By the time she graduated from Rutgers University, she’d had enough of journalism, and began looking for other career paths.

It wasn’t until after earning a master’s degree in education from Princeton, attending a year of law school, and working as an editor at Walker and Company that she finally tried writing as a career. Working as an editor meant she had to read a lot, and every time she read a good manuscript she’d say to herself, “I should have written that!” For the next two years she wrote picture books that kept returning to her mailbox rejected. So she decided to try writing something else—novels.

In 2000 Robin’s first novel, *How I Survived My Summer Vacation* (Front Street Cricket Books), was published. Subsequently she has published three more books, *The Silent Witness* (Houghton Mifflin), *The Girlfriend Project* (Walker and Company), and *Nothing* (Flux/Llewellen Worldwide).

Robin is currently a newspaper editor in New Jersey, where she lives with her husband, Joel, and their cats, Peppercorn and Peaches.