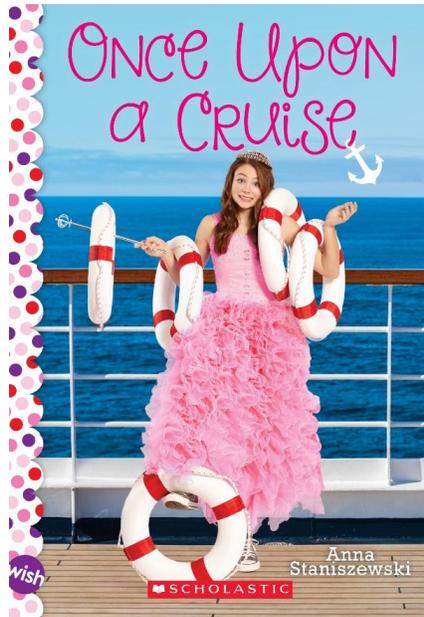


# *Once Upon a Cruise* Discussion Guide



## About the Book

Ainsley never wanted to spend her summer on a fairy tale cruise—especially since, instead of lounging by the pool, she's running around the ship doing favor after favor for her cruise director mom.

Things aren't all bad—it's good to see her mom acting confident again after the divorce, and she's learning a lot about obscure German fairy tales and how to fold towels into entertaining shapes for little kids (um, yay?). There's also a guy who's super cute, even in a dorky dwarf costume—if only Ainsley could get Prince Handsome to stop babbling about himself long enough for her to say more than “hi” to the cute dwarf!

But once the cruise starts, things start to go wrong: the laundry turns pink, the kitchen runs out of food, the guy playing the Pig King is always in Ainsley's hair, and her mom expects her to be in a hundred places all at once. Is this fairy tale cruise under a wicked curse? Or can Ainsley stand up for herself and make the cruise end happily ever after?

## Meet the Author!

Anna Staniszewski is happy to offer free in-person or Skype visits with book clubs that have read her books. Contact her at [anna@annastan.com](mailto:anna@annastan.com) for more information.

## Discussion Questions

1. Which character in the story is most like you and why?
2. Does *Once Upon a Cruise* remind you of any other novels you've read? If so, which ones and why? If not, what makes it unique?
3. Why do you think Ainsley has such a hard time saying no to people? How does this personality trait get her into trouble in the story?
4. How do things between Ainsley and her mother start off in the book? How do they end? What might their relationship be like a year from now?
5. Ainsley dislikes "Piggy Ian" from the moment she meets him. How do her feelings about him change over the course of the story? How did you as the reader feel about him at the beginning vs. at the end?
6. Ainsley spends much of the cruise taking pictures, either on her own or at the photo kiosk. How does her hobby both help and hurt her? Have any of your hobbies ever gotten you into trouble?
7. How did the fairy tale characters on the cruise compare to Disney characters you know? Did you have any favorites?
8. Were you surprised that Ainsley stayed on the cruise at the end of the story? What other adventures do you imagine she'll encounter during the rest of her summer on the ship?

## About the Author



Anna Staniszewski is the author of the *My Very UnFairy Tale Life* series, the *Dirt Diary* series, and the *Switched at First Kiss* series, as well as the picture book *Power Down, Little Robot*. She lives outside of Boston with her family and teaches at Simmons College. When she's not writing, Anna reads as much as she can, eats lots of chocolate, and enters "Belly Flop Like an Ogre" competitions. Visit her online at [www.annastan.com](http://www.annastan.com).

## An Interview with Anna Staniszewski

Q: What inspired the idea for *Once Upon a Cruise*?

A: Normally, I come up with story ideas on my own—and those ideas can come from absolutely anywhere—but this one actually came from my editor. She approached me wondering if I'd be interested in writing about a girl who spends her summer working on a Disney knock-off cruise, and I completely fell in love with the idea! Not only am I a big fan of fairy tales—my first book series was based on them!—but I had also long wanted to write a story set on a cruise ship. Once I started writing the book, I loved the process of taking my editor's general ideas and making them my own.

Q: Is there any of you in Ainsley's character?

A: I always write a little bit of myself into my characters, and like Ainsley, I have a hard time saying no to people. In fact, when I agreed to write *Once Upon a Cruise*, I was hugely pregnant and already on deadline for two other books. It was crazy of me to say yes, but it was such an exciting project that I couldn't turn it down! As I was developing Ainsley's character, I decided to explore that particular personality trait, not only because I could relate to it but also because it would make for a fun story—imagine all the trouble Ainsley might get into if people kept asking her for favors and she couldn't turn them down! I'm happy to report that I'm getting better at saying no. Of course, I think it's important to help people when you can, but it's also important to know when saying yes might actually be hurting you (and others) more than helping.

Q: What did you most enjoy about writing this book?

A: I loved writing about Ainsley's attempts at teaching the towel-folding class. Surrounding her with a pack of crazed little kids, day after day, led to a lot of hectic, over-the-top scenes that were really fun to create. We authors really enjoying pushing our characters out of their comfort zones and then watching what happens!

Q: Did you know the ending of the book when you started writing it?

A: Yes and no. I knew how I wanted Ainsley's relationship with her mother to end up, and I also had some ideas about the romantic thread in the story, but I wasn't sure how it would all play out before I actually wrote it. I do like to plan my overall story before I start writing, but for me, it's more fun to figure out the details as I go along.

Q: What is your favorite fairy tale?

A: I would have to say "East of the Sun, West of the Moon," which is about a girl who goes on a journey to find her prince and rescue him. I like that the traditional story is flipped on its head and that it's the prince who needs to be saved! I have a feeling Ainsley would approve.