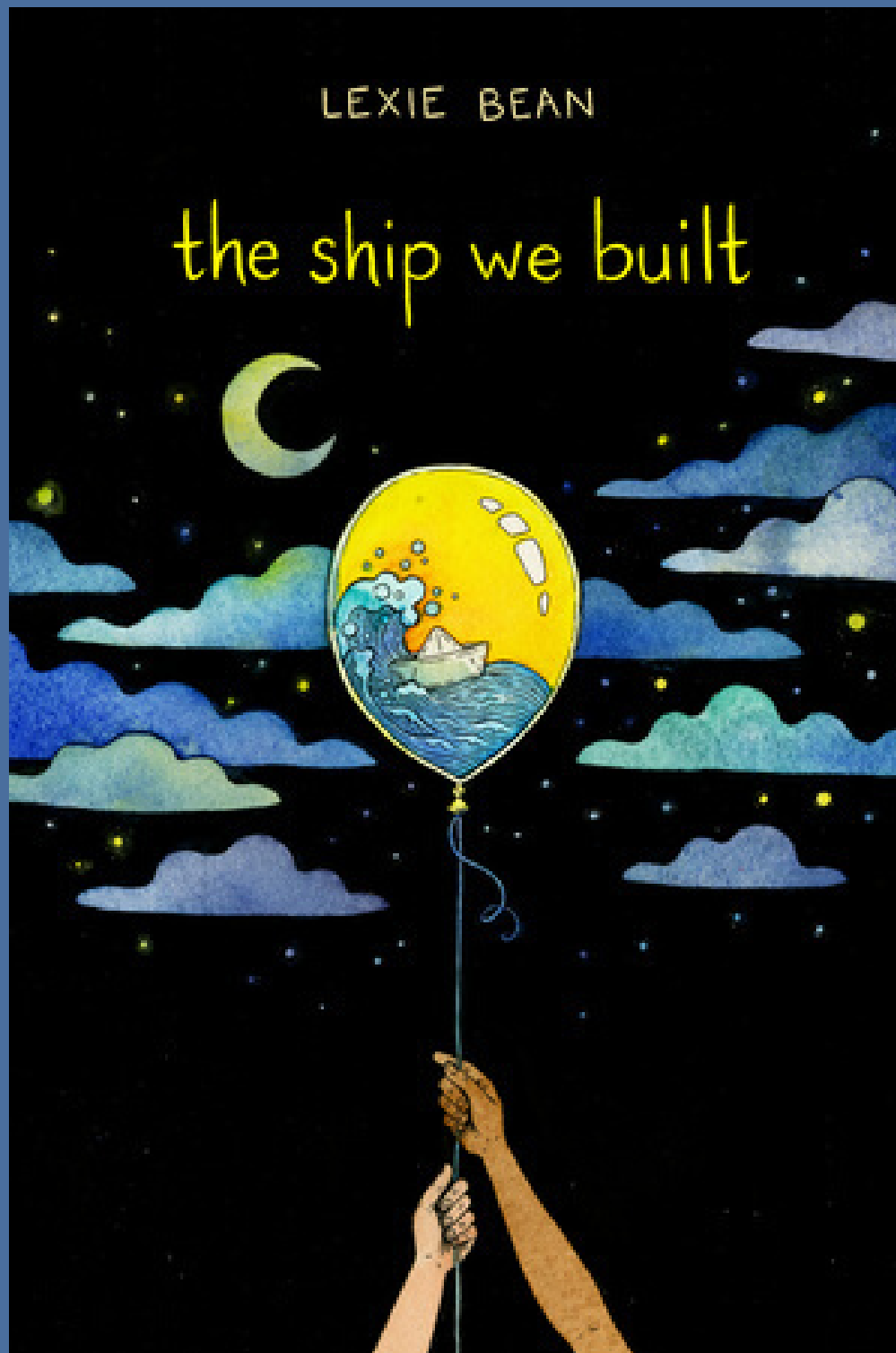


A Discussion Guide to...



ABOUT THE BOOK

Tender and wise, *The Ship We Built* is about the bravery it takes to stand up for yourself—even to those you love—and the power of finding someone who treasures you for everything you are.

Sometimes I have trouble filling out tests when the name part feels like a test too. . . . When I write letters, I love that you have to read all of my thoughts and stories before I say any name at all. You have to make it to the very end to know.

Rowan has too many secrets to write down in the pages of a diary. And if he did, he wouldn't want anyone he knows to read them. He understands who he is and what he likes, but it's not safe for others to find out. Now the kids at school say Rowan's too different to spend time with. He's not the "right kind" of girl, and he's not the "right kind" of boy. His mom ignores him. And at night, his dad hurts him in ways he's not ready to talk about yet.

But Rowan discovers another way to share his secrets: letters. Letters he attaches to balloons and releases into the universe, hoping someone new will read them and understand. But when he befriends a classmate who knows what it's like to be lonely and scared, even at home, Rowan realizes that there might already be a person he can trust right by his side.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lexie Bean is a queer and trans multimedia artist from the United States' Midwest whose work revolves around themes of bodies, homes, cyclical violence, and LGBTQIA+ identity. Lexie is a Lambda Literary Award Finalist and passionate about creating honest and complex trans narratives that "transition and grow" alongside them. Their writing has been featured in *Teen Vogue*, *Huffington Post*, *The Feminist Wire*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Them*, *Logo's New Now Next*, *Bust Magazine*, *Autostraddle*, and more. *The Ship We Built* is their Kirkus Starred debut novel supported with residencies at the Sundress Academy, Paragraph New York, and the Santa Cruz Bookshop.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Each chapter in *The Ship We Built* are letters attached to a balloon. Why do you think Rowan communicates this way? How do his reasons change over time?
2. At the beginning of the school year, Rowan is afraid to spend time with Sofie at school. Why is this? What makes him braver in doing this over time?
3. Many chapters end with different names. Why? What do you notice in the chapters that end with Ellie? What's different about the name Rowan?
4. In what places does Rowan feel the safest? Where does he have the most doubt?
5. What's hard for Rowan about being a boy? What's hard for Rowan about being seen as a girl?
6. Who are Rowan's masculine role models? What do each of them offer him? Are they all good?
7. What are the similarities and differences between Sofie's dad and Rowan's dad?
8. Why do you think Rowan keeps interest in Dylan even when he bullies Rowan? How is he different from Sofie?
9. Throughout the second half of the book, Rowan goes to a "Doctor" every Sunday. What parts of Rowan's experience gets ignored by her and his parents? What do they pay attention to instead? How does this relate to Rowan's moment with the recycling bin on Valentines Day?
10. Sofie and Richard are absent throughout a majority of the second half of the book. Why are they gone? How does this impact those who know and love them?
11. What makes Rowan decide to call the number Mr. B left him? What changes does he need for a happier and safer life?
12. In the Afterward, Rowan receives a letter from Nathan Lucas. What has Rowan assumed about Nathan Lucas throughout the book? What do they have in common?

PERSONAL RESPONSES

1. What are things you can do for yourself when you're lonely? Who are your Emergency Contacts?
2. Make a map to a favorite place.
3. Find a rock that means something to you. Write a story about it.
4. Write a response to one of Rowan's letters.
5. Who are the people in your life who you don't have the right words for? Those who mean so much to you that there isn't a label for them?

RESEARCH & ESSAY PROMPTS

1. Are there any queer or transgender people in your own community? If so, in what ways are they a part of your community? If not, why do you think there might not be any queer people that you know of?
2. How has industry-loss and poverty in the Rust Belt impact other parts of life? You can focus on addiction, politics, LGBTQIA+ issues, family structures, religious life, etc.