

# The Way I Say It

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

An  **INDIES** pick  
Introduce *KIDS*

“A reminder to us all to keep pushing; it does get better.”

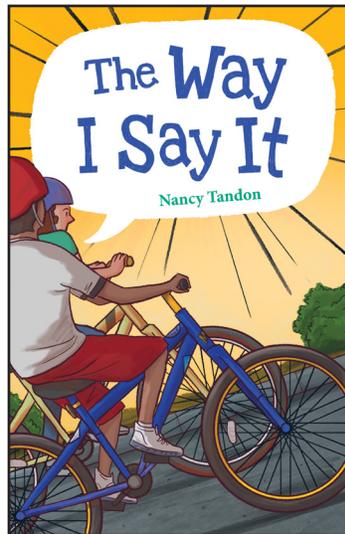
—Cliff Helm, Left Bank Books, St. Louis, MO

“[A] sensitive, engaging, realistic story with characters that ring true to life as a sixth grader.”

—Shirley Mullin, Kids Ink Children’s Bookstore, Indianapolis, IN

“Tandon’s debut is a celebration of all the things we love—and hate—about ourselves! This book is a total triumph and filled with so much love!”

—Laura Graveline, Brazos Bookstore, Houston, TX



Nancy Tandon  
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e-book available

### About the Book

Rory is in sixth grade, and he still can’t say his *r*’s, but that’s just the beginning of his troubles. His ex-best-friend Brent starts hanging out with the mean wrestling kids and joining in when they bully Rory—until a terrible accident takes Brent out of school entirely.

Rory and his new speech teacher put their heads together on Rory’s *r*’s (as well as a serious love of hard rock and boxing legend Muhammad Ali), but nobody seems to be able to solve the problem of Rory’s complicated feelings about Brent. Brent’s accident left him struggling with a traumatic brain injury, relearning how to think, speak, control his body, and manage his emotions. Should Rory stand up for his old friend at school—even after Brent failed to do the same for him?

### About the Author

Nancy Tandon has been a writer since fifth grade, when her school ran a program to “publish” books. She has worked as an elementary school teacher, a speech-language pathologist, and an adjunct professor of phonetics and child language development. Nancy lives in New England with her husband and two children. This is her first book.



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## Discussion Guide

Use these questions to kick off classroom discussion, guide pre-thinking and post-reading responses, or inspire a writing assignment!

### About Feelings & Friendships

- Why do you think Mr. Simms sets up a game of darts with the letter “R” as the target for Rory? What are some other ways Rory expresses his feelings about his speech impediment?
- What led to the end of Rory and Brent’s friendship? Who do you think is at fault (if anyone)?
- How does Rory cope with being bullied at school, both in confrontations and between confrontations? Have you ever used similar coping mechanisms?
- Rory’s parents don’t know that Rory is being bullied at school. Why do you think Rory keeps it a secret from them?
- After Brent’s accident, Rory notices a dramatic shift in their classmates’ attitudes toward him. What are some of the changes we see? What do you think of their classmates’ reactions to Brent, both directly after the accident and after Brent returns to school?
- In Chapter 26, Rory thinks, “Back when Brent and I were friends, I never noticed or thought about [the way Brent treated Jett and Tyson]. I was always either with these guys or with Brent—never both, though I hadn’t kept them separate on purpose.” (122) Have you ever had a similar friendship dynamic? Do you think it’s necessarily a bad thing, to have friends that aren’t close or don’t get along with each other? Have you ever had to resolve a conflict between your friends?
- Discuss Valentine’s Day. Why do you think this one day covers multiple chapters? How does the author build and release tension over the course of the day?
- Why do you think the book ends without fully resolving whether or not Jenna and Rory are in a romantic relationship?
- Would you say Rory and Brent have reconciled at the end of this book? If yes, why? If no, what do you think it would take for them to fully reconcile?
- Throughout this book, many characters offer apologies—with varying degrees of sincerity and completeness—for their actions. Do you have a favorite apology? A least favorite apology? What do you think makes an apology successful or unsuccessful?

### About Speech & Brain Injuries

- Read Rory’s description of speech therapy in grade school on pages 12 and 13 and discuss. How has his experience with speech therapy changed as he’s aged? How have the social and academic pressures on him changed?

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- As a group, try the taffy exercise described in Chapter 14. What do you notice about the way your mouth forms the /r/ sound? Have you tried other activities that make you conscious of the way you form phonemes (singing in a choir or learning a foreign language, for example)?
- What did you know about concussions and traumatic brain injuries before reading this book? How has your understanding changed (if it has)?
- Compare and contrast Rory's visit to Brent in Chapter 15 with his visit in Chapter 22. How has Brent changed between the two visits? How would you describe Rory's feelings at each visit?
- Compare Rory's internal narration of his feelings and reactions in Chapter 22 to his conversation with Mr. Simms about the Salmon Brook visit in Chapter 24. Is there anything Rory left out that you think he should have explained or asked about? Do you think Mr. Simms did a good job of counseling Rory in this conversation? Why do you think the author chose to write this conversation with Mr. Simms and not one of Rory's parents?
- Discuss Brent's appearance at the winter dance in Chapter 30. Do you think it was a good idea or a bad idea to reintroduce him to the school at that event? Why?
- How does the author foreshadow Brent joining Rory in speech therapy? How does Rory's anticipation match or differ from reality?
- Read and discuss the author's note at the end. Why do you think the author appended this note rather than working the information into the story? What are the benefits and drawbacks of presenting information in an author's note?

## About Music

- What do we know about Rory's neighbor, Mr. Garland? Why do you think we never meet him in person? What is significant about Rory's connection with Mr. Garland?
- Why is Rory a fan of hard rock and heavy metal? Are you familiar with the bands he cites at the start of Chapter 7?
- When he first meets Rory, Mr. Simms recommends a particular album: Metallica, 1991, aka the black album. Listen to the album (or a few songs from it) as a group and discuss. How would you describe the sound of this album? What are some of the overarching themes in these songs?
- Several rhymes by Muhammad Ali are quoted in this book. Do you have a favorite verse? Why do you think the author chose these verses? Is there another verse by Muhammad Ali that you think the author should have included? If you were writing a book that included verses by a contemporary rap artist, which verses would you pick and why?