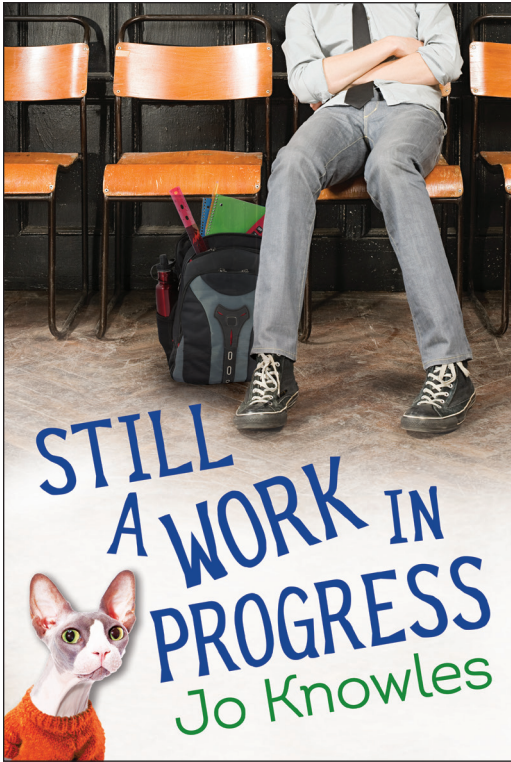


# STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS

Jo Knowles



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## About the Book

Noah is just trying to make it through seventh grade. The girls are confusing, the homework is boring, and even his friends are starting to bug him. Not to mention that his older sister, Emma, has been acting pretty strange, even though Noah thought she'd been doing better ever since the Thing They Don't Talk About. The only place he really feels at peace is in art class, with a block of clay in his hands. As it becomes clear through Emma's ever-stricter food rules and regulations that she's not really doing better at all, the normal seventh-grade year Noah was hoping for begins to seem pretty unattainable. In an affecting and realistic novel with bright spots of humor, Jo Knowles captures the complexities of navigating middle school while feeling helpless in the face of a crisis.

## Discussion Questions

1. Do you think there's anything Noah and his parents could have done to prevent Emma from slipping back into her eating disorder? Is it fair of them to blame themselves for wanting to believe she was better?
2. Why can it be so hard to see when someone is struggling? How can the face we show the world differ from the face that looks back at us from a mirror?
3. Why doesn't Noah's family talk about the Thing They Don't Talk About? Why is it easier for them to pretend it didn't happen? How does ignoring the issue impact Emma's relapse and recovery?
4. Noah is hoping for a normal year in seventh grade. Do you think he realizes, by the end of the book, that there's really no such thing as normal?
5. Imagine if Jo Knowles had chosen to write from the perspective of Emma instead of Noah. The story would still be largely about a family in crisis. How does the point of view affect the story?



6. Do you think Noah and his friends Ryan and Sam are too hard on one another?
7. Why does Noah feel so sick when his family starts eating meat and dairy again once Emma is in the hospital? Is it just a physical reaction to foods he's no longer used to, or is it his guilt over not being able to help Emma?
8. If Emma knew how guilty Noah felt, what would she say to him?
9. Should Emma have been so hard on herself about the beast incident? Is it the kind of silly mistake most people make in middle school, or is it as cruel as she thinks?
10. Why do you think it is so hard for some people to believe mental illnesses like depression or eating disorders are really diseases and not just a kind of weakness? Even Noah says at one point—in anger—that it's Emma's own fault she's sick. Is it easier to blame the person with the issue than to accept that illnesses just happen and it's no one's fault? Why do we always look for someone to blame?
11. How does dealing with Emma's illness at home impact Noah's behavior in school? What does it say about how much we're aware of what other people are dealing with on any given day?
12. If someone is acting out in school because of an underlying problem in their life, should they still be held accountable for their actions? Should the Tank have made Noah go back to school that day? Does sympathy work better than discipline, or should Noah face a combination of both?
13. Do you think Noah is right when he says they should make suggestions for how to fix problems instead of just adding the problems to the Complaint Box? Are problems only worth talking about when there's something you can do to fix them, or is Noah just frustrated at how helpless he is in fixing Emma's problems?
14. Why doesn't Lily want the school to find out she's allergic to Curly? Is it better to avoid bringing up a problem if doing so will hurt someone you love? How does this backfire for Noah's family?
15. Does being a vegan make it easier for Emma to hide her eating problems? What's the danger in associating dietary choices with eating disorders?
16. How do you think Emma will respond when she gets Noah's note and reads "YOU ARE NOT A BEAST"?

## About the Author



Photo by Peter Cahill

**Jo Knowles** is the author of *Read Between the Lines* and *See You at Harry's* as well as several other acclaimed young adult novels. She lives in Vermont with her family.



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