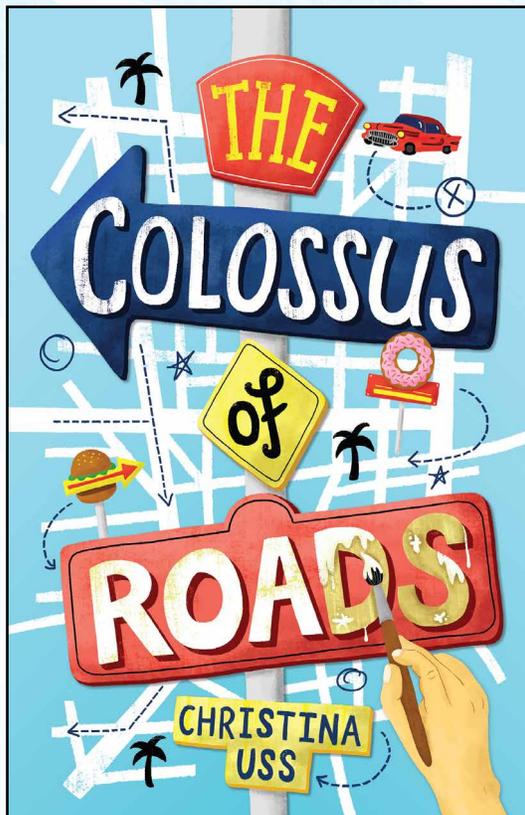


# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Grades  
3-7



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MARGARET FERGUSON BOOKS

## *The Colossus of Roads*

by **Christina Uss**

★ “Unabashedly  
feel-good . . . tale.”

—*Booklist*, Starred Review

### ABOUT THE BOOK

From the author of the acclaimed *The Adventures of a Girl Called Bicycle* comes a tale of traffic jams, secret plans, and one eleven-year-old boy's determination to save his family's livelihood.

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- Rick suffers from motion sickness. How does this rule his life? What does it mean that Rick's condition is “intervention resistant”? Discuss how his parents deal with Rick's condition. What steps do they take to make his life easier? In Rick's old school, he was labeled “Carsick Rick.” In his new school, Rick doesn't want his classmates to know about his condition. Discuss the measures he takes to keep his condition a secret.
- Contrast Rick's family with the next door neighbors, the Herrera family. Rick stays after school with Mrs. Herrera while his family runs Smotch, a catering service. Describe his relationship with Mila Herrera. Chart how their relationship changes as the plot progresses. Explain her anger when he steals her signs. How do they resolve the conflict?
- Rick's parents suddenly decide that he should stay alone after school. They say that it will test his “Pre-Teen Responsibility.” Debate whether Rick is a responsible person. Why don't his parents tell him that their business is in trouble, and they can no longer afford to pay Mrs. Herrera? How does Rick learn about his parents' financial situation? Explain how this knowledge contributes to his desire to use his Snarl Solutions to make the traffic situation better for his parents and other drivers.
- Rick is a loner. What is the difference between being a loner and being lonely? How does he combat loneliness? Discuss the steps he takes to fit in at his new school. How does the kid nicknamed “Tennis” try to help Rick fit in? Explain what Mrs. Herrera means when she tells him, “Kids aren't supposed to figure everything out. You're supposed to try things, mess up, then try other things” (pp. 38–39). How does he better understand what she means by the end of the novel?



- Mila’s Girl Scout Troop is painting old road signs with reflective paint to be displayed all over Los Angeles. Discuss Rick’s motive when he asks if he can participate. Anna Diamond, a street-art legend, tells them, “I want you young creators to feel empowered to make art everywhere you go, and find art everywhere you look” (p. 51). How does Rick see art in road maps? Explain how his interest in traffic patterns is naturally linked to the project.
- Rick has the idea to steal signs from Ms. Diamond’s house and install them with duct tape on Balboa Boulevard. How does he justify stealing the signs when he knows that it’s wrong? What other dishonest thing does Rick do to carry out his plan? Discuss what he learns about controlling traffic from his test run on Balboa. He discovers that someone had messed with his signs. Explain what he means when it says, “Someone messing with his signs felt like someone messing with his skin” (p. 98).
- Discuss SPLAT, the bicycle organization to which Dr. and Mrs. Herrera belong. How is the purpose of this organization in direct opposition to what Rick wants to accomplish? Explain how Mila uses Girl Scout Law to explain SPLAT. Discuss the following metaphor: “Meeting SPLAT—or whatever they wanted to call themselves—had deflated the tires of his heart” (p. 120). What are the “tires of his heart”? Abuelita belongs to a secret organization that has a plan to calm traffic. How does her organization have a drastically different approach to dealing with traffic than SPLAT and Snarl Solutions?
- Discuss Ms. Diamond’s reaction when Rick confesses that he had falsified the orders directing where to place the signs. How do his parents react when he confesses to them? Colossus of Roads causes a fight between Ms. Diamond and Mrs. Torres, her sister who works for the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. Discuss what Ms. Diamond means when she says, “Sometimes it [art] leads in unexpected directions” (p. 168). Discuss the final act that causes Mrs. Torres to listen to Rick’s ideas. How might this be considered “an unexpected direction”?
- Explain the following quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams” (p. 132). Explain how the quote could apply to Rick’s efforts to calm traffic issues in Los Angeles. Make a prediction about Rick’s future.
- Explain the title of the novel. Why does Rick sign his road signs, “The Colossus of Roads”?



Photo Credit: Robert Charles Photography

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Christina Uss** is the author of *The Colossus of Roads*. Her debut novel, *The Adventures of a Girl Called Bicycle*, was selected for the Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List, the Maine Student Book Award list, and Vermont’s Dorothy Canfield Fisher list and was a *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of the Year. It received starred reviews from *Shelf Awareness*, *Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Publishers Weekly*. Christina lives in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

