

In conversation with Andrea Beatriz Arango, author of *IT'S ALL OR NOTHING, VALE*



It's All or Nothing, Vale is your third novel in verse.

What inspired you to use the medium of poetry to tell your stories?

I love telling stories in verse because I think they are a lot more accessible for kids who have low reading stamina or are learning the language. A 250-page novel doesn't seem nearly as scary when there is so much white space on the page! When it comes to stories like Vale's, it also helps readers immerse themselves more in an experience that is foreign to them. Pain and feelings are hard to explain to others, but poetry can achieve a lot in just a few words.

Vale is hardworking, determined, and talented. Is she modeled on anyone from your real life?

I am lucky to be surrounded by many people who fit that description, though I think my family sometimes struggles with knowing when to rest. Valentina is a competitive perfectionist—she has a hard time believing things are worth doing if she's not giving 110 percent. And I think a lot of readers will relate to that. There is more and more pressure on kids every day, and the list of things they need to accomplish in order to be successful keeps getting longer.

Fencing is Vale's thing. What did you know about the sport before writing this book? Why did you decide to feature fencing instead of soccer, softball, or another mainstream sport?

My sister was a gifted fencer! She tried out a class around age fifteen, and within a year had qualified to be on Puerto Rico's national youth team. She ended up representing PR in many international competitions before ultimately deciding she didn't want to pursue it as a career. Still, I would say my knowledge of the sport was pretty superficial. I asked my sister a LOT of questions while writing this book!



Vale struggles to find her new “normal.” What do you hope readers will take away from her journey?

I hope readers will walk away from the story with an example of someone whose world did not end when she had to change course. Sometimes our plans for the future change; that doesn't mean we stop being who we are. Valentina is more than her fencing talent. And I hope readers are able to remember that if and when they find themselves struggling with school, sports, or anything they have used as an identifier in the past.