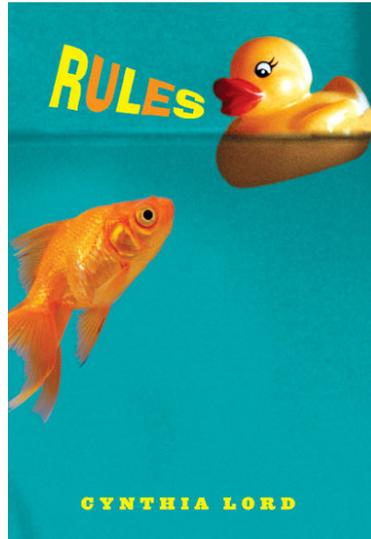


Discussion Guide



RULES

Written by Cynthia Lord
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The Book *(text taken from the book jacket)*

Twelve-year-old Catherine just wants a normal life, which is near impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability. She's spent years trying to teach her brother, David, the rules from "a peach is not a funny-looking apple" to "keep your pants on in public"—in order to head off David's embarrassing behaviors.

But the summer Catherine meets Jason, a surprising, new, sort-of friend, and Kristi, the potential next-door friend she's always wished for, it's her own shocking behavior that turns everything upside down and forces her to ask: What *is* normal?

Filled with humor and warmth, Cynthia Lord's debut novel takes a candid and sensitive look at feeling different and finding acceptance—beyond the rules.

Themes: friendship, honesty, acceptance, and diversity.

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Rubber duck detail (c) Gary Doak/Photonica. Goldfish detail (c) G.K. & Vikki Hart/Iconica*

Discussion Points

Pre-reading

What expectations do you have from the book cover?

When you hear the word “rules,” how do you feel and what comes to your mind?

Are rules necessary in some situations? What good purposes do they serve?
When can rules be a negative thing?

Name some rules in your own life. What rules do your parents have for you?
Are there rules in your classroom or library?

Do you have some rules for yourself?

If you could create a set of rules for your sibling, what would those rules be?
Some examples might be related to borrowing your things or how to act when you have a friend visiting.

The beginning of the book—a story begins with a character and a problem.

A main character usually has an outer problem and an inner problem that creates the conflict in the book. What does Catherine want that is outside herself?

What does she want within herself?

What has kept Catherine from achieving those “wants” before the book begins?

Describe Catherine’s relationship with David.

How does David stand in the way of what Catherine wants for herself? What has she done to try to resolve that?

Do your siblings ever stand in the way of what *you* want? How? What have you done to solve that?

How are Catherine’s rules good for David? How do her rules hold him back?
How do Catherine’s rules hold *her* back?

What are Catherine’s feelings about Jason when she first meets him?

If you were drawing word cards for Jason, what would you have drawn for “gross?” “Awesome?” “Stinks a big one!!!”

Pick three words to describe Catherine. Choose three for David, Jason, Mom, and Dad.

The middle—in a story, conflict escalates.

What are Catherine's strengths? What are her weaknesses?

How do her weaknesses cause events to worsen in the story?

What contradictions exist in Catherine? In Jason? In Kristi?

Name at least three characters who exhibit prejudice in RULES. What do they say or do which shows that prejudice?

How do Catherine's feelings change toward Jason as the book continues? What causes that change?

What do you think would've happened if Catherine had been honest right away with Kristi and told her about Jason? Why wasn't Catherine honest? What do you think she was afraid of?

Catherine is not the only character in the story who is not always honest. How do the other characters avoid dealing with problems or act in ways that are not completely truthful?

Do you think it's true that "Leaving out isn't the same as lying?" If not, is it *ever* true?

Some of Catherine's rules are what we might call "unwritten rules," comments on how people behave, such as "Sometimes people don't answer because they didn't hear you. Other times it's because they don't *want* to hear you." How do people learn these rules? Why do we have them?

When Kristi has David dance in Catherine's room, is she being mean? Since *he* wasn't upset by it, should Catherine have stopped the music?

The ending—a story leads to a climax and a resolution.

What choices does Catherine make near the end of the book that show growth on her part?

What does Catherine risk in inviting Jason to the dance? Do you think that risk was worth it? Why or why not?

What does Catherine give up at the dance? What does she give up in the final chapter with David?

Look back at the three words you chose to describe the characters near the beginning of the book. Do those words still fit? What adjectives might you add for each character now?

If Catherine were to write a rule at the very end of the book, what do you think it would be?

What do you think might happen next for Catherine with Kristi? What choices does Catherine have?

Have you ever had a conflict with a new friend? How did you resolve it?

Have you ever had to choose between two friends? What did you do?

Imagery

Can you list the ways water is important in the story?

Name the different modes of communication in the book.

How does art figure into this story? Music? Books? How do those create a connection between the characters?

Name the ways wishing and magic play a part in the story.

Booklist

Novels to compare and contrast:

Al Capone Does My Shirts by Jennifer Choldenko. 2004. Putnam Juvenile.

Set on Alcatraz Island in 1935, this poignant novel is told from the viewpoint of Moose, a boy both frustrated by and fiercely committed to his sister with autism. A Newbery Honor Book, 2005.

A Corner of the Universe by Ann Martin. 2002. Scholastic Press.

Twelve-year-old Hattie develops a sensitive friendship with her Uncle Adam, a man challenged by schizophrenia and autism, during the remarkable summer he comes to live at her family's boarding house. A Newbery Honor Book, 2003.

Tru Confessions by Janet Tashjian. 1997. Henry Holt and Company (BYR).

Told through diary entries, twelve-year old Tru creates a film documentary highlighting the life of her developmentally delayed twin brother.

Me and Rupert Goody by Barbara O'Connor. 1999. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Set in the Smoky Mountains, eleven-year-old Jennalee's world is turned upside down when a man with developmental delays arrives in town, claiming to be the son of the grocer Jennalee looks up to as her best friend.

The Summer of the Swans by Betsy Byars. 1970. Viking Juvenile

Fourteen-year-old Sara Godfrey and her developmentally delayed brother Charlie love to watch the swans on a local lake, until Charlie disappears one day and Sarah must reach past herself to find him. Winner of the Newbery Award, 1971.

Nonfiction:

Views From Our Shoes: Growing Up With A Brother or Sister with Special Needs by Donald J. Meyer. 1977. Woodbine House.

This book is a collection of honest, small essays written by siblings of children with a broad range of special needs.

Websites and Links

Author's website: <http://www.cynthialord.com>

Please visit my publisher <http://www.scholastic.com> for more ideas on using books in the classroom.

Helpful links about disabilities:

The Autism Society of America: <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer>

For parents of disabled children:

http://www.parentlink.act.gov.au/parentguides/parentg_disabilitybrothersister.htm

Lesson Plans For Teachers:

"Understanding disability" by Gill Chesney-Green

http://www.schoolzone.co.uk/resources/articles/GoodPractice/classroom/Special_needs/Understanding_disability.asp

Understanding Kids Who Are Different: Activities for Teaching About Disabilities
http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson115.shtml

Lesson plans from The Disability Rights Commission: <http://www.drc-gb.org/citizenship/lessonplans/talkvideo/index.asp>

Guinea Pig Web-quest created by Maggie Johnson, Santa Ana Unified School District
<http://can-do.com/uci/lessons98/Guinea-pig.html>

Just for fun:

Guinea Pig Fun <http://guineapigfun.com/>

Rubber Duck Tic-Tac-Toe: <http://www.getodd.com/duck/fun2/f2b.html>

About the author

Cynthia Lord has been writing since high school. A mother of two children, one of whom has autism, she says, “I wrote RULES to explore some of my own questions about living with someone who sees the world so differently than I do, but also to show a full experience of family life with a child with autism: the happy moments, the heartbreaking ones, the ones that make me laugh.”

She lives with her husband, children, and a Bichon Frise in an old house in coastal Maine. A former teacher, behavioral specialist, and bookseller, she now enjoys writing for children.



Additional information about RULES and Cynthia Lord can be found at the author's website: www.cynthialord.com.