

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

### MAYA PLAYS THE PART

by Calyssa Erb

Educator guide by Sherri Richards

**GENRE:** Children's fiction

**THEMES:** theater, drama, friendship, emotions & feelings, self-awareness, neurodiversity, change, listening, connection

**SUITABLE FOR:** Grade 3–6, Ages 8–12

**GUIDED READING LEVEL:** Fountas and Pinnell T

**LEXILE:** 730L

**COMMON CORE STANDARDS:** RL.5.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9  
W.5.3,3a,3b,3c,3d,4,5,6,9  
SL.5.1,1a,1b,1c,1d,2,3,4,5,6  
L.5.1,2,2a,2b,2c,2d,2e,3,3a,4,4a,4b,4c,5b,5c,6

#### SUMMARY:

Maya lives and breathes musicals. When her chance to finally be a part of the summer musical program at the community theater comes up, Maya is convinced she will get the lead. After all, who knows *The Drowsy Chaperone* better than she does? However, things don't turn out exactly the way Maya's planned, and the summer turns out to be jam-packed with problems: dealing with her best friend's move, her parents' busy jobs, and—since her autism diagnosis—the ongoing puzzle of how to be Maya in Public. But perhaps most important of all, Maya has to figure out how to play the part that truly feels like her own.

Please remember that the suggested questions and activities within this educator guide are meant to serve as a starting point. Educators are encouraged to select items from each part of the guided inquiry process that work best for their style of teaching and will help them meet their goals when covering the topics in this book. Activities and prompts should be tweaked and/or reformatted to best fit your students, context, and community to ensure equity and inclusion.



# BEFORE READING THE BOOK

These activities build the context, introduce the topic of the book, and establish prior knowledge and interest.

1. To gather prior knowledge, ask students if they have ever been to a play production at a theater. Have students identify what parts they can remember from either being in a play themselves or as an audience member (i.e., intermission, Act 1, etc.). Use the information gathered to identify what vocabulary needs to be further explained:
  - overture
  - curtain call
  - act
  - scene
2. Introduce the term “neurodiversity” to students on an anchor chart or in a digital format. Create a brainstorming web to show what students know about neurodiversity. After students have generated at least 5–7 words, such as *autism*, *ADHD*, *dyslexia*, *sensory*, *fidget tools*, *body breaks*, and *spectrum*, ask them to identify what they notice. Are there any common themes in the words identified? Are they or know someone in their lives who is neurodivergent? Take time to note any biases that may emerge and engage students in a discussion about equity in relation to neurodiverse individuals.\*
3. In the beginning of the book, the author writes a letter to the reader. She explains how when she was younger, she really liked performing on stage. The author uses the words “script” and “predictable” when explaining what she liked about performing. A script basically tells the actor or actress what to say and do. You already know how a person will react or what they will say in a script which makes it predictable. Ask students if there has ever been a time where they wish they would have had a script tell them exactly what to say in a situation. Have them explain why. Start a discussion related to their thoughts of how a script would make life easier or more difficult for someone. Have students explain their points of view.
4. What impact did the author’s letter to the reader have on you?
5. This story is told by the character Maya, who is an autistic girl. Form a community circle. Using a sharing (talking) stick or other object, have students share what they know about autism.
6. Imagine that you had a rule book for every part of your day. Think of these rules as being based on everything from what you say to how you act. How do you think this would affect your daily life? Would you feel better or worse having to follow a rule, even when your feelings didn’t match how you were acting? Write down your thoughts in a journal.



# WHILE READING THE BOOK

These activities check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

## OVERTURE

1. During the beginning part of the book, Maya uses descriptive language to outline what it's like to be an audience member while watching someone on stage. She uses a lot of sensory details to describe each part of the experience for someone. Reread this section to identify how your sensory experience might differ from or be similar to Maya's experience of sitting in the audience (either at a movie theater or a performance in a play). Identify if Maya's description of the experience is positive or negative or both. How do you think this relates to her character? Students can share with a partner or in a whole class format.
2. Maya describes the rules her mom teaches her about what to do and what not to do as "instructions in my head, the lines of my script, like the actors do when they're on stage." Relate this back to the author's letter to the reader at the beginning of the book to discuss what it means for an autistic person to "mask." Ask students to think of a time they might have needed to perform in order to feel as though they fit in during different social situations. Discuss further with students how it made them feel, as if being who they truly are wasn't being valued or accepted. Relate this to Maya's description of herself as Maya in Public.

## ACT 1

3. Throughout the scenes that make up Act 1, the reader gets introduced to the theme of listening. Listening is an important part of any friendship or interaction we have with someone. In small groups, analyze how the author portrays points of view on listening to one another in this part of the book. Specific relationships to analyze would be Maya and her mom; Maya and Jules; Maya and Aislinn; and Maya and Irene Brown. Does Maya feel heard? Does Maya listen to the other characters? Why do you think the author chose to include these points of view?
4. Think about a good friend you have. With a partner, brainstorm different adjectives that make someone a good friend. Maya's friendship to Jules is very important to her. She repeatedly expresses how Jules is her best friend. However, by the end of Act 1, the reader can see that their friendship is suffering. Reread the "Calling" sections within Act 1 and identify the issues that Maya has with Jules. Use the list that you created to identify what Maya could work on to help her become a better friend.



## INTERMISSION

5. Knowing what you do about the first part of the book, write a prediction about what you think will happen in Act 2 with Maya in relation to her friendships with Jules and Aislinn.

## ACT 2

6. How does the author continue the theme of listening throughout Act 2, especially as it pertains to the relationships you explored in Act 1: Maya and her mom; Maya and Jules; Maya and Aislinn; Maya and Irene Brown. How do these relationships change positively?
7. What word would you use to describe Maya's sense of belonging that she feels at the end of the book?

## AFTER READING THE BOOK

These activities inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

1. The theater director, Irene Brown, provides Maya with a role in the play that suits her needs. However, during the story, Irene only mentions that Maya's mom wrote on her camp form that she is autistic and that sometimes Maya needs to move her body, as the author points out during Act 2, Scene 3, where Irene "starts to shake her arms and wiggle around." This is a significant scene for Maya as she is encouraged to stim (move her body and wiggle) in ways that she has been taught not to do when she is masking (or, playing the role of Maya in Public). Consider whether Irene is also neurodiverse and recognized elements in Maya that she found to be strengths in her character rather than perceived weaknesses, since there are many times when Irene mentions that Maya reminds her of herself when she was younger. Conversely, how does this scene show Irene as an effective leader or teacher in her acceptance of Maya by allowing Maya to get access to what she needed to feel good and be her best?
2. How does the descriptive detail offered in the text create a visual storyboard in the reader's mind? What scene from the book were you able to see vividly as a picture in your mind?

3. Read the scene that directly precedes each “Calling” excerpt in the text. Identify the juxtaposition that takes place for Maya. There are notes on each one below for convenience:

Preceding Act/Scene	Calling Excerpt
Act 1, Scene 2: Maya meets Aislinn and accepts her offer of friendship but is quick to point out that Jules is her best friend.	Maya calls Jules to tell her about meeting Aislinn at camp and points out that Aislinn won't take the place of Jules. Jules tries to tell Maya that it's okay to have more than one best friend.
Act 1, Scene 3: Maya has a difficult time adjusting to campers, especially when Aislinn speaks up for herself and tells Maya to slow down.	After outlining the mistakes of others at camp, Maya is surprised to learn that Jules is taking swimming lessons. Jules points out that it was Maya who doesn't like swimming, not her. Jules didn't swim because Maya didn't like it.
Act 1, Scene 5: Maya has a difficult time with campers listening to her and not acting like she believes they should. Maya prefers to be direct with people.	Maya doesn't think Jules is listening to her. Jules realizes that Maya telling her what to do all of the time was annoying and directly tells her how she feels.
Act 1, Scene 7: Auditioning for the part of Janet is really important to Aislinn, but Maya fails to acknowledge this.	Talking about her audition during the scheduled phone time with Jules is really important to Maya, but Jules is more interested in her swimming lesson.
Act 1, Scene 10: Aislinn expresses kind words to Maya about her audition performance, prior to learning that Maya isn't cast as Janet. Maya is not kind to Aislinn when they find out Aislinn is cast as Janet.	Jules gets a phone and Maya is upset because this is not what they had planned.



Preceding Act/Scene	Calling Excerpt
Act 2, Scene 1: Maya is trying to communicate with Aislinn, but Aislinn is ignoring her. Maya doesn't understand why Aislinn would be mad at her.	When Maya calls Jules, she isn't home at their planned time. Her grandmother tells Maya that she won't be home until tomorrow.
Act 2, Scene 2: Maya has some difficulty getting Gio to listen to her regarding his part in the play, but near the end of the scene she has a breakthrough with him.	Maya calls Jules at their assigned time and her grandmother answers again to say that she isn't home.
Act 2, Scene 8: Maya is beginning to find her voice as Assistant Director.	Jules isn't being honest with Maya when asked about her feelings.
Act 2, Scene 9: Maya gives advice to Gio and Aislinn which helps them perform a scene better. She feels good that they listened to her.	Jules tells Maya that she doesn't want to be friends anymore because she thinks Maya isn't a very good listener.
Act 2, Scene 11: Maya feels noticed and appreciated by the campers and Irene Brown.	Maya calls Aislinn. They both give each other compliments and make plans for mutually enjoyed activities after the play.

4. There are no phone calls to anyone between scenes 3–8 in Act 2. Explore how this pause or silence between Maya and Jules affects the story. How does it uncover different aspects of the characters for Maya and Jules?
5. Who do you think becomes a better listener over the course of the story, Maya or Jules? Explain why and support your opinion with evidence from the text.
6. What do you think the novel would be like without the “calling” sections? What would it change about the story?



7. In the final phone call between Jules and Maya, Jules explains that her new friends think Maya isn't a good friend. The book ends with Maya being included and accepted by a group of peers from camp. Do you think Maya was actually a bad friend to Jules? Would you argue for or against Maya continuing a friendship with Jules?
8. What do you think the author's message is for this book? How do the parts of the story make this message prominent for the reader?
9. Maya labels herself often throughout this story. "Maya in Public," "Maya the Assistant Director," and then just "Maya." How do these labels relate to the title of the book, *Maya Plays the Part*? Explore how the labels that are used by Maya and other characters in the story alter their view of Maya.
10. During "The Curtain Call," Maya talks about how she envisions the end of "Maya in Public" at the end of the *Maya Plays the Part*. How does Maya's acceptance of herself allow her to just **be** Maya?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

These activities are only a start. They are designed to support the goal of helping students explore the story and their own creativity.

1. Many neurodiverse people need help in social situations. There are tools that are often used to help people with autism understand different rules for social situations, such as when Maya finds comfort in scripts for a play. They are generally referred to as "Social Stories" and they often give concise rules for what to do or how to act during certain situations. Maya receives many rules from her mom about how to act socially with others. She learns that the rules don't always apply which poses challenges for her. Choose a specific part of the book where Maya is interacting with someone and write a simple social story outlining how she might have handled the situation better. Conversely, write a social story from the perspective of the character that Maya interacts with on how they can learn to socially interact with someone who is neurodiverse.



2. Maya's love of all things theater is intertwined throughout the novel. She makes references to her t-shirts that she has created with her mom that showcase different musicals she likes. With a partner or in a small group, research one of the play titles from the following list that has been mentioned in the book: *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Billy Elliot: The Musical*, *Wicked*, *Into the Woods*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Annie*, *Mamma Mia!*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Avenue Q*, and *Hairspray*. Create a marquee poster (using blackline master attached) that adequately displays at least three things that are relevant to the chosen musical. Present this information to classmates.
3. Maya keeps trying to connect with campers, with Jules, with her mom, etc. but she has a really difficult time. How does this relate to the relationships we have in life? Why is connection so important? What does Maya learn about herself in terms of how to connect with the people in her life?
4. Maya is given a lot of rules in this story. These rules are what she uses as her script for being "Maya in Public."

**Maya's Rules for being "Maya in Public."**

1. Keep my hopes realistic.
2. Be reasonable.
3. Don't monopolize the conversation.
4. Dance inside my head.
5. Be more independent.
6. Don't hog the conversation.
7. Don't be rude.
8. Make a good first impression.
9. Stay composed.
10. Introduce myself and hold out my hand.
11. Accept my differences.
12. Grown-ups really like it when you look them in the eye.
13. Practice what I want to say to people.
14. Think before I speak.
15. Fix my face and don't get too emotional.
16. Be gracious and respectful.
17. Apologize when you hurt someone's feelings.



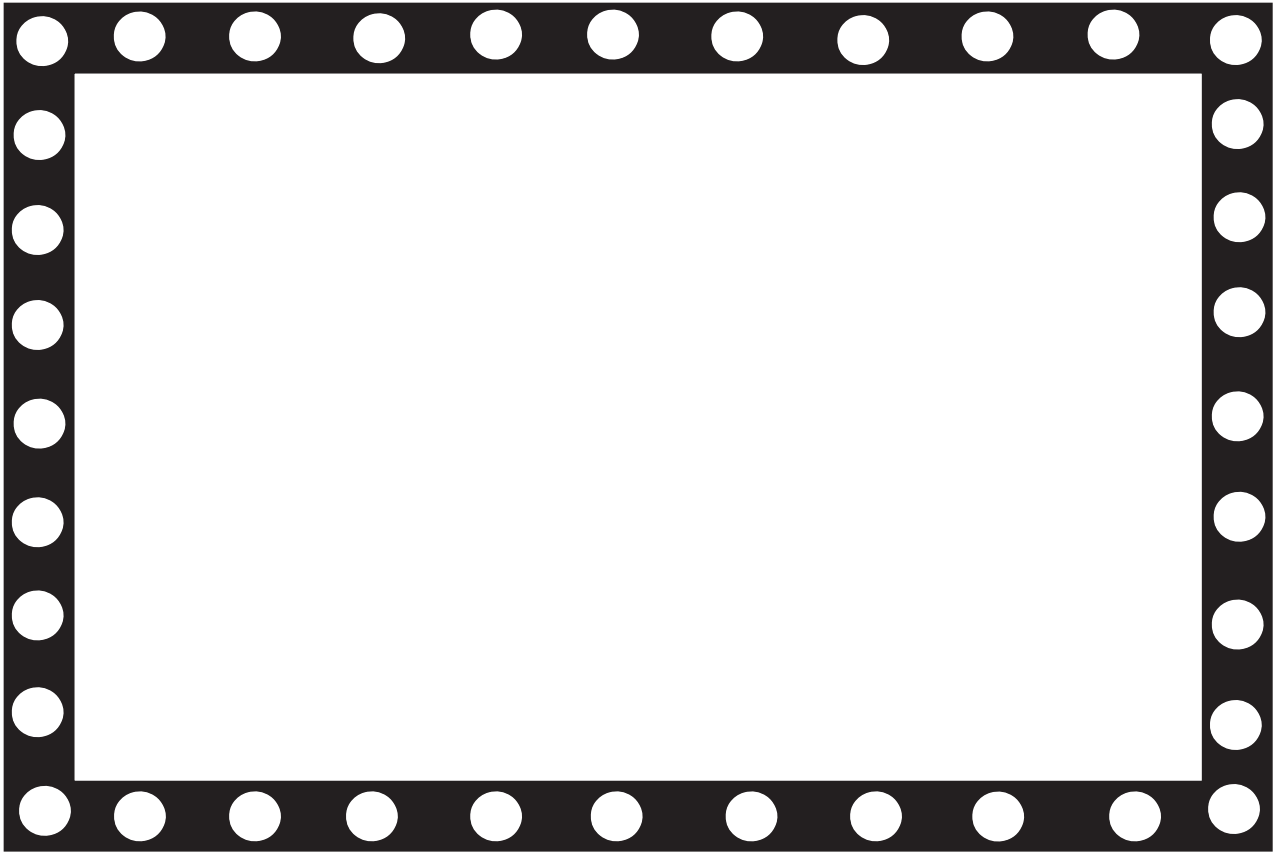


18. Don't get too worked up.
19. Not hearing something isn't a good enough reason to lie.
20. Don't be too much.
21. Don't walk away from someone when they are talking to you.

In "The Curtain Call," Maya wants to add her own rule to her list: "Make sure I listen to what's important to other people too."

Looking at this list of Maya's rules for being "Maya in Public," what rules in the list can change after Maya realizes she can just be herself?

# Marquee Musical Research



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2. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. \_\_\_\_\_

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