



Story Summary

Lauren and her family drive to a farm in North Dakota to visit relatives and celebrate her Aunt Joss' wedding. But Lauren finds to her dismay that she is expected to do more than meet adults who hug her and invade her personal space. Lauren is going to be—horror of all horrors—a flower girl.

Lauren has Autism Spectrum Disorder, and she sees the world a little differently from other kids. What makes her comfortable are her routines and her coping mechanisms for her anxiety, which can get out of control in no time. So it is a challenge to deal with her rambunctious cousins, try on scratchy dresses, and follow impossible directions about going down aisles slowly-but-not-like-a-sloth and tossing pretend flowers around. So is it any surprise that Lauren flips her lid more than once? But while having an extended family seems like a lot of trouble at first, she's about to learn just how much they can care for one another.

Sara Leach hails from Whistler, BC, where she loves to ski, hike, and bike. Her middle grade novel *Count Me In* won the Red Cedar Book Award for 2012/13. In addition to being a children's author, she is also an elementary school teacher-librarian. She has had the privilege of teaching several amazing students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and her experience working with them inspired *Slug Days* and *Penguin Days*.

Author-illustrator **Rebecca Bender** is best known for her award-winning Giraffe and Bird books. Her other publications include *Slug Days*, *How Do You Feel?* and *Peach Girl* (illustrations). Rebecca graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design with the Medal for Illustration and is now an art director and designer. She lives in Burlington, Ontario, with her husband and two children.

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Conflict Resolution, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Family, Emotions, Self-Regulation, New Experience

BISAC Codes

JUV039150 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Special Needs

JUV013020 JUVENILE FICTION / Family / Marriage & Divorce

JUV039050 JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Emotions & Feelings

JUV013000 JUVENILE FICTION / Family / General

Reading Level

Fountas & Pinnell: M | Lexile measure : 620L



BOOK CLUBS

This guide has been developed for use in classroom book clubs/literature circles. Book clubs support and develop the love of reading as well as help students build comprehension and support the development of collaborative learning and critical thinking.

In book clubs, students:

- meet in small groups (4–8) to discuss a book they are reading
- take turns assuming a leadership role within the group
- meet regularly and set the pace for their reading
- take ownership for their learning by:
 - selecting the book they will read (usually from a predetermined list provided by the teacher)
 - prepare for and run their discussions

Prior to beginning with book clubs, teachers:

- take time to develop and nurture whole-class discussions about books while modeling the skills and behaviors needed to collaborate and work together as a book club
- provide guidance, modeling, and support
- become familiar with all texts prior to making them available to students

During book club discussions, teachers:

- develop a schedule for book clubs ensuring they provide time for reading and discussion
- provide mini-lessons for any needs that may arise
- monitor through observation and conferring as well as supporting student self-assessment

Key elements:

- Groups meet on a regular basis, with time provided in class to read and discuss their book
- Students use a “reader’s notebook” to write notes, comments, insights, and questions while they read
- Students bring their reader’s notebook to each meeting to support their discussion
- Discussion topics may emerge from the students as they read; however, the teacher provides discussion topics and provocations to help students engage in rich discussions (suggestions are provided in this guide)
- Group meetings are collaborative, with each group developing a set of norms for their group
- The teacher serves as facilitator
- Assessment is grounded in teacher observation, student conversations, and student self-assessment
- Book clubs promote a love of reading

Thinking about Assessment...

This guide offers a range of prompts, tasks and provocations to support Book Club discussions. While using this guide in the classroom, teachers have a number of opportunities to use observation, conversation, and products to assess student thinking and learning. The tasks and prompts offered in this guide are designed to support discussion, sharing, and student thinking while providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate comprehension, extension of thinking, and critical literacy. Assessment can include self-assessment and peer assessment, conversations with students through teacher/student conferences, group discussions, and products created by the students.

For the teacher and student to have a clear, common understanding of the expectations and criteria to achieve success while reading the novels, educators develop learning goals based on curriculum expectations and share them with the students in language they can understand. Then together, the educator and students co-create criteria to make the path to success visible and clear.

These success criteria are posted in the classroom, are visible to all students, and may be revised and edited based on the learning and understanding of the students.

As the Book Club meetings are collaborative and begin with the groups developing a set of norms for their group, it is suggested that all groups open each meeting with a reflection of the previous discussion. These reflections can highlight what went well during the discussions, what needs to improve in these discussions, and considerations for the current discussion.

Discussion Guide:

This discussion guide will offer a variety of tasks, discussion prompts and questions to provoke thinking and deepen comprehension before, during, and after reading the novel. These are suggestions only and it is certainly not necessary to complete the entire list of suggested activities/questions. Educators are encouraged to make choices based on the strengths, needs, and interests of the students.

Highlighted Curriculum Expectations

Ontario Ministry of Education Language Arts Curriculum K–8

Oral Communication

- 1.2 Active Listening Strategies
- 1.3 Comprehension Strategies
- 1.4 Demonstrating Understanding
- 1.5 Making Inferences / Interpreting Texts
- 1.6 Extending Understanding

Reading for Meaning

- 1.4 Making Inferences
- 1.5 Extending Understanding
- 1.8 Responding and Evaluating Texts
- 4.1 Metacognition



Before Reading

1. Big ideas to explore with the group: friendship, belonging. Discuss the meaning of these two words. In partners, have the students create mind maps of the big ideas. The mind maps will include words and pictures to describe each of the big ideas. Display and share the mind maps. Have students share experiences where they have experienced friendship and a sense of belonging. Partners may share with the larger group.
2. Lauren, the main character in the story, has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The inside flap of the text provides a very short description of Lauren's personality traits as a child with ASD. Take time to read this description and discuss as a class what the students know and understand about a person with ASD. The author's note at the end of the text also provides a personal connection. This is a good time for the teacher to do some research or extra reading in order to provide more information to the students about this disorder.
3. There are times when we all feel upset, anxious or sad. Discuss the ways in which you cope with these feelings. Encourage the group to discuss strategies they use to help them deal with feelings of sadness, anxiety, worry, etc. Record the strategies shared by the group. These will be referred to later during a post-reading task.
4. Throughout the story, the main character Lauren sometimes feels upset, sad and angry. Record the times Lauren feels these ways, and beside each, record the strategies she uses to cope with her feelings of anger, sadness, etc. The students will be asked to record these strategies and will refer back to them in a post-reading task.

During Reading

**Please check in with your book club at the suggested points in the novel.

Chapter 1

1. The author starts the story explaining how Lauren and her family are on a road trip to visit her Aunt Joss, Uncle Raymond, and cousins for an upcoming family wedding. They are traveling to Lincoln, North Dakota. As a class, locate Lincoln, North Dakota on a map. As a class, calculate the distance from where you live to Lincoln, North Dakota.
2. Describe the countryside Lauren sees as the family travels to North Dakota. Compare this to where you are living.
3. We are introduced to the main character, Lauren. As you read the story, record Lauren's character traits. What is she interested in? Who is her best friend? What do they have in common? What makes Lauren feel happy, confused, anxious, or sad? What are some of the strategies Lauren has learned to help her cope when she is feeling upset, angry, or confused?
4. We are getting an idea of what the author means by "Lauren sees the world differently from other kids." Describe times in this first chapter when Lauren is seeing things differently. What sorts of things confuse Lauren?

Chapters 2–3

- Lauren continues to explain the strategies she has learned to help her cope when situations are uncomfortable or difficult for her.
 - Describe and record a few of these strategies as presented by the author.
 - Compare these strategies to what you have recorded during the discussion before reading.
 - Are there any new strategies that may be helpful to you, the reader?



5. In Chapter 3, we learn more about Lauren's friendship with Irma.
 - What have you learned about Lauren?
 - What interests do Irma and Lauren share?
 - Do you have a friendship with someone where you share the same interests?
 - Write a letter to this friend thanking them for their friendship and highlighting what you enjoy about this friendship.
6. Why do you think Lauren appears not to be interested in getting to know her cousins Kevin, Zoe, and Sophia?

Chapters 4–7

1. Why do you think Lauren was so upset about her two cousins being flower girls in the wedding as well? Explain your thinking using evidence from the text.
2. Using your record of Lauren's coping strategies, record times during these chapters when Lauren is having difficulty understanding words or phrases used by her family and relatives. Why do you think this is confusing for Lauren?
3. In chapters 5 and 6, Kevin tries to help Lauren. Do you think he was successful? Explain your thinking.
4. How does Uncle Charlie show understanding and compassion when meeting Lauren for the first time?
5. We learn more about Lauren's friendship with Irma. Record and share what you have learned.
6. In chapter 7, we read about other strategies Lauren has learned to use when she is not coping well with her feelings of anger and sadness. Record these strategies in the list created from your pre-reading discussion. Would some of these strategies be helpful to you? Add to your own personal list of strategies.
7. How does Lauren's mom help her to resolve her feelings about not being the only flower girl in the wedding? Do you agree with this solution? Why or why not?

8. Discuss how the big ideas of friendship and belonging are being represented at this point in your reading.

Chapters 8–10

1. Why do you think Lauren instantly liked her Uncle Raymond? Share these ideas with a partner. Connect this to a time when you instantly knew you liked someone you had just met.
2. Lauren has difficulty understanding the words and phrases used by some of her relatives. Share one of these situations with a partner. Discuss why these might be confusing for a child with ASD.
3. Sometimes children have a difficult time understanding and relating to someone who acts and reacts differently. How do we know Kevin, Sophia, and Zoe are having difficulty understanding Lauren? Describe what you think Kevin, Zoe, and Sophia are feeling. Share your thoughts with the group.



Chapters 11–13

1. Discuss how the big ideas of friendship and belonging continue to be developed in the novel. Identify a time when Lauren found friendship and/or felt like she belonged. Who helped Lauren discover and feel each of these feelings?
2. Using your record of Lauren’s coping strategies, add to your list of ways Lauren is finding it difficult to cope with her surroundings.
3. In chapter 12, Lauren says, “My lizard brain was too busy setting off fireworks inside my head.” What do you think she means when she says this? How do her cousins help her?
4. Do you like the ending of the story? Why or why not?

After Reading

1. The illustrator of the story included various pencil sketches throughout the story. Were these sketches effective in helping you understand and enjoy the story? Were they effective in helping you understand the characters and what they were experiencing?
2. Name and describe a friendship that is very important to you. With a partner, discuss what you like about this person, what interests you share, and how you and your friend help each other when you are sad, anxious, or confused. As a class, create a friendship wall. Using index cards, students write down important words to describe what is necessary in order to be a caring, kind, true friend.
3. Belonging is a theme in the story. We all have a need to belong: in our class, in our family, with friends, and so on. Illustrate your favorite time in the story when Lauren felt a sense of belonging. Connect to a time when you felt like you belonged.
4. Review the various coping strategies discussed while reading this book. Consider both the personal strategies shared by the students and those used by our main character. Create a class book that

depicts each of these coping strategies. The book can be kept in a prominent place in the classroom for all students to use whenever they feel they need help in coping with feelings. Have the students brainstorm a good title for this book and encourage them to use creative ways to present all of the coping strategies they have included. This task focuses on the mental health and well-being of the students in the classroom.



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