

These Reads ARE LIT!



ACCLAIMED READS
for Your Lit Circles/Book Groups
in Grades 3–8!

DEAR EDUCATORS AND LIBRARIANS,

Finding the just-right book for your book club or literature circle can take work. This guide was made to help you in your search. These four acclaimed novels offer a variety of formats, reading levels, genres, and more to engage all kinds of readers in your class or library! With discussion questions and brief activity prompts, we hope this guide helps bring conversations around these books to life for your literature circle groups or book clubs!

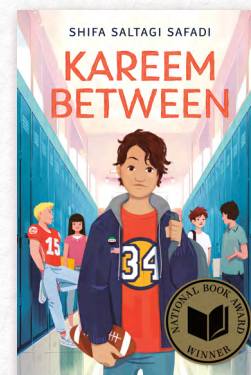
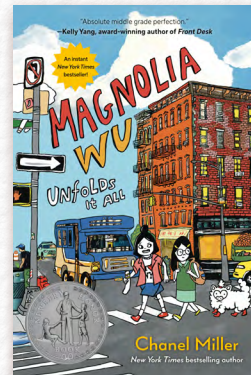
SINCERELY,
PENGUIN YOUNG READERS
SCHOOL & LIBRARY TEAM

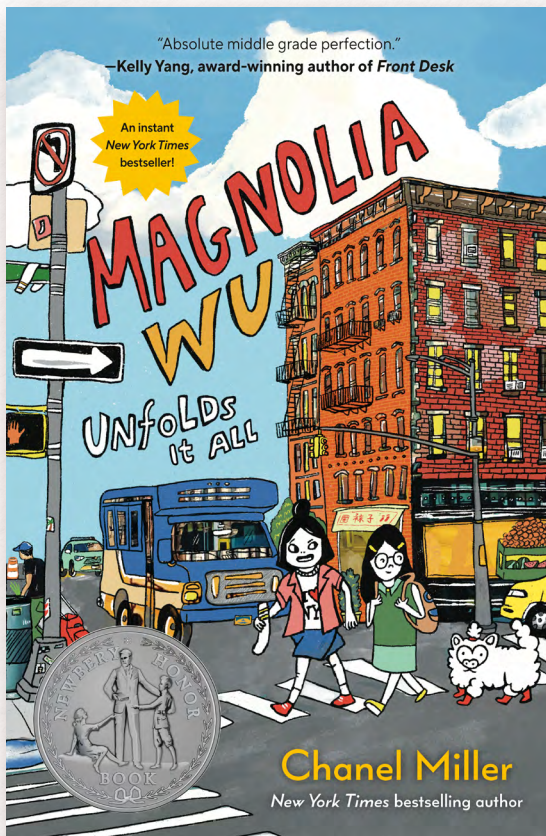


Sock art from *Magnolia Wu Unfolds It All* © 2025 Chanel Miller

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for each book!





MAGNOLIA WU UNFOLDS IT ALL

by Chanel Miller

The story of a ten-year-old sock detective bent on returning all the lonely only socks left behind in her parents' NYC laundromat.

**A NEWBERY
HONOR
WINNER**

**10+ STATE AWARD
READING LISTS
AND COUNTING!**

FOR GRADE 3-5 | LEXILE LEVEL 850L | 9780593624531

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Iris brings in the sock board from the street, saying she wants to help find the socks' missing owners. This idea surprises Magnolia because "it had never occurred to Magnolia to take action to return the socks herself. She thought of life as something that unfolded around her and happened to her while she was content being an observer" (p. 24). Think of times when you watched life unfold around you. Were you content being an observer? Were there times when you took action instead?
2. Magnolia is embarrassed after suggesting the wrong spelling for a word in Lisa's crossword puzzle. However, Lisa says her error was "a creative act" and evidence of how smart she is (p. 36). How might our mistakes show our imagination and intelligence?
3. While searching for the owner of the flamingo sock, Magnolia and Iris run into Aspen, a boy from school. How does Aspen act toward Magnolia and the laundromat? The story about his stuffed animal Otto and Magnolia's father explains the reason for his actions but doesn't excuse his racist taunts and bullying. Why is Aspen's behavior wrong?
4. Spen tells Magnolia and Iris that flamingos are naturally gray but turn pink after eating shrimp. He says, "Flamingos become what they consume," and Iris writes him a note that says she hopes he stays gray (pp. 86-87). What does she mean by this? What are some things you consume, and how have they made you who you are?
5. Magnolia is often self-conscious and embarrassed about her family. However, throughout the story, Magnolia is continuously surprised by the community's perceptions of her parents. How do people such as Zito, Aspen, Jessica, and Anu change Magnolia's understanding of her family?

6. Iris and Magnolia become friends very quickly. In what ways is Iris a good friend to Magnolia? After their first big fight, Magnolia realizes that she “had never had a best friend and didn’t know the responsibilities of her new position” (p. 105). What are the responsibilities of a best friend? How does Magnolia become a better friend to Iris?
7. To find the missing owners of the socks, Magnolia and Iris roam the city and talk with many folks in their community. What are some ways the community members have helped one another over the years? Who do you know in your community? How can you help or support them?
8. The message “Go Home” is graffitied on the walls of the Salty Muscles fitness studio. This act shocks Magnolia, who can describe times when she herself felt that message through others’ actions, emotions, and words. Why is this message so hurtful?
9. The NYC Sock Detectives were able to track down the owners of the black-and-white checkered sock, the pink knitted sock, the flamingo sock, the ice cream sock, and the coconut-scented sock. Which missing sock adventure was your favorite? Why?
10. Iris had a sock puppet named Mr. Ketchup. Why was Mr. Ketchup so important to Iris? How did Mr. Ketchup help her?
11. Compare the character of Magnolia at the beginning and end of the book. In what ways does she change throughout the story? What important lessons does she learn about herself and others?

ACTIVITY PROMPT

Everyday Mysteries

Watch this classroom activity prompt from author Chanel Miller about coming up with every day mysteries in your life!

[Click to watch the video!](#)



[CLICK HERE
FOR MORE
ACTIVITIES!](#)

The questions for this were pulled from the larger discussion guide written by DR. JOANNE YI.



POPCORN

by Rob Harrell

The beloved author of *Wink* is back with a hilarious and moving story about coping with anxiety on a day when everything is going wrong.

A SCHNEIDER FAMILY BOOK
AWARD WINNER

A NCTE CHARLOTTE HUCK
AWARD HONOR BOOK

FOR GRADES 4-7 | LEXILE LEVEL 610L | 9780593697948

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

NOTE: Throughout this discussion guide the word *anxiety* is capitalized when referring to the disorder that Andrew and author Rob Harrell—and many other people—experience. It is not capitalized when referring to the natural human emotion.

Andrew's relationship with Anxiety

1. What clues does the author give the reader about Andrew's emotional challenges before Andrew explicitly names them?
2. The day begins in an anxious house. How does his mom's anxiety affect Andrew?
3. On page 75, Andrew says, "There's more to me than just the anxiety." What do you think he means?
4. Dr. Cain offers Andrew different coping strategies to use when he is feeling anxious. Andrew draws, uses box breathing, visualizes, and measures his Anxiety on the "Kernel Scale". What evidence can you find that this helps him?
5. In chapter 16, the Anxiety Files illustrations change. What is different about these pictures from the ones in earlier chapters? What does the new style communicate about Andrew?
6. Throughout the book, Andrew expresses his worries about having a panic attack at school. How do those worries compare with the reality of his experience?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Andrew's relationships with other people

7. Andrew describes how different he and Jonesy are from one another, "But somehow, we just fit. The best of best friends," (pg 25) How might friendships with people who are different from us be good for us?
8. On page pages 44–45, Andrew says, "Talking to pretty much anybody other than Jonesy makes me want to crawl out of my skin or hide in a locker." On page 267, Andrew tells Jonesy, "We should absolutely sit with your team tomorrow." What has changed for Andrew?
9. Andrew's relationship with G changes as her memory declines.. How does this new reality impact Andrew?
10. How do different adults support Andrew?
11. How do Mr. Kellerman's own experiences influence how he supports Andrew? How do you think having someone like Mr. Kellerman in his life will impact Andrew in the future?
12. Andrew pushes down difficult feelings he has about G and his dad. How does sharing those feelings with Dr. Cain help Andrew? What does he learn about hard feelings?

Andrew vs. Gene

13. What choices does Andrew make about Gene? What other choices could he have made?
14. Gene causes three of the reasons Andrew is messy. What difference is there between Gene causing Andrew's messes and Danny's sneeze, Kendrick's ketchup rocket, or Carter passing the basketball? Is the intention more important than the impact?
15. Money is tight at Andrew's house. Gene's family is wealthy. How do these socio-economic realities play out in their relationship?
16. On page 27, Andrew says, "The only good interaction with Gene Phillips is a short one, I figure." Later, while waiting to have his picture taken, Andrew initiates a conversation with Gene. What does this say about Andrew?

Reader response

17. How does this book help you understand people's experiences with Anxiety?
18. How does this book help you understand people's experiences with caring for someone with dementia or Alzheimer's disease?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Author's craft

19. Harrell uses a first person narrative in *Popcorn*. How does this choice impact the reader?
20. Typically an author's note is from the author of a book. In *Popcorn*, these asides come from Andrew. How do these notes function in this story?
21. How do the Anxiety Files drawings help you understand Andrew and his feelings?
22. The illustrations that are found at the beginning of most chapters have a different style than the Anxiety Files. Why do you think Rob Harrell made this decision as an illustrator?
23. The book moves back and forth between picture day and events in the past. How does this structure impact you as a reader?
24. In both *Popcorn* and his earlier book *Wink*, Harrell writes about difficult topics with a great deal of humor. How does the juxtaposition of pain and comedy impact the reader?

ACTIVITY PROMPT

Drawing it out

Think about something in your life that you deal with by drawing (or writing) what could be your Anxiety File. Think about what you'd call it and draw or write what your first file entry would be.

The questions for *Popcorn* were written by Mara Rosenberg, a teacher-librarian at St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School in Washington, DC. She, too, experiences Anxiety and finds that breathing, journaling, and a great support network are all helpful.





THE ORDER OF THINGS

by Kaija Langley

A heart-rending novel-in-verse about a girl beginning to learn it is possible to go on even after a great loss.

**3 STARRED
REVIEWS!**

**A BLACK CAUCUS AMERICAN
LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BEST OF THE BEST 2023 PICK**

FOR GRADE 5-9 | LEXILE LEVEL NP | 9780593530924

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the start of the story, April says, "Mama sleeps most of the day, works most of the night, and we live in the quiet moments in between." What do you think she means by that? How do you think April feels about it?
2. April says, "It's a small comfort to hear music all around me as I near school. A woodpecker in a tree, the construction worker across the street, beats everywhere." Try listening to the "music" around you in everyday life. What do you hear? Are there consistent beats, patterns? Is the music you hear different in your neighborhood or at school?

3. At school, April is paired up with Asa to answer these three questions:

What do you like about your name?

What's your favorite food?

What is one thing you want to accomplish this year?

How would you answer each of these questions?

4. Zee's solo violin performance is "Let's Go Crazy" by Prince. Part of the lyrics are "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to get through this thing called life . . . If you don't like the world you're living in, take a look around—at least you got friends . . . We're all excited, but we don't know why. Maybe it's cause we're all gonna die. And when we do, what's it all for? You better live now, before the grim reaper come knocking on your door."

Why do you think Zee chose this song? How can friends help us through hard times? How do you think the lyrics of the song connect to the whole story? Do the lyrics remind you of anything that happens to April or the other characters?

5. Zee asked April not to tell Papa Zee or Mama that he wasn't feeling well. After he dies, April feels sad and guilty for keeping his secret. What do you think about April's decision? Do you think it's ever okay to keep a secret like that? Why or why not?
6. After Zee dies, April starts helping Papa Zee deliver the mail because "Papa Zee is the closest thing to Zee I have left, and I'll do whatever I can to help him until he's feeling better." One day, she finds out why Asa hasn't been coming to school, and this time she decides to speak up. Do you think losing Zee changed the way April feels about Asa or the way she sees her own life? Why or why not?
7. The title of this book is *The Order of Things*. After Zee dies, someone says, "It's not the natural order of things." What do you think "the order of things" means in this story? What do you think it means to April, Mama, Papa Zee, and Asa?
8. At the beginning of the story, Mama likes having a quiet home, so April can only play her drums at Zee and Papa Zee's house. But by the end, Mama lets April keep the drums in their apartment and play them there. Why do you think Mama changed her mind? Do you think her relationship with Robin had something to do with it?
9. In the story, April looks up to a group of amazing female drummers she calls the "Drum Mavens." They inspire her to keep playing and believing in herself. Is there someone you look up to like April looks up to the Drum Mavens? It could be a musician, athlete, writer, family member, teacher—anyone! Why do you admire them? What makes them special to you?
10. Mama says, "Time changes a lot of things." As you read the story, you see how some of the characters grow and change. Which character do you think changed the most? What happened that helped them change?

ACTIVITIES

Who are the Drum Mavens?

Here are the real-life drummers April admires:

- **Cindy Blackman (pg 89)**
- **Nikki Glaspie (pg 118)**
- **Terri Lyne Carrington (pg 118)**
- **Sheila E. (pg 129)**
- **Cora Coleman-Dunham (pg 260)**

Explore some of these drummers by watching videos or listening to their music. Make your own playlist of the ones you like best!

As you listen, think about:

- How are the drummers similar?
- How are they different?
- Which one is your favorite and why?

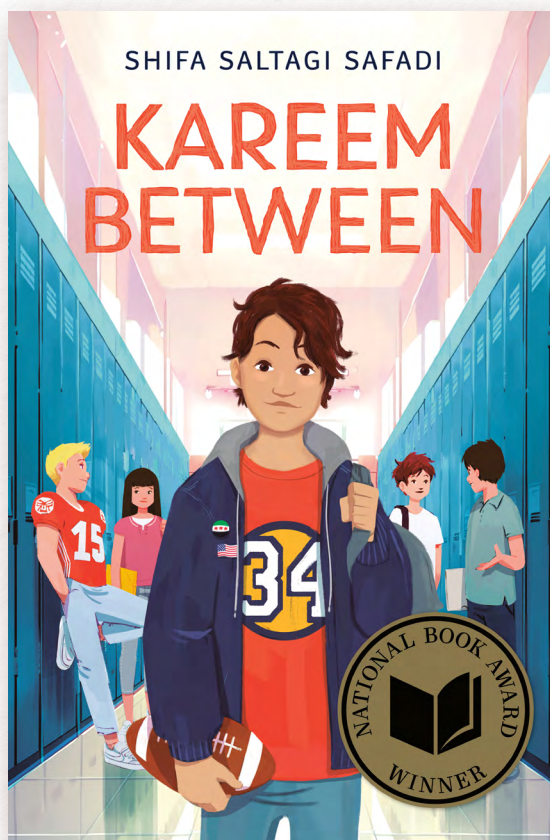
Maybe you'll discover a Drum Maven you love listening to, just like April! You can learn about female African American drummers and musicians by visiting: <https://libguides.uky.edu/AAWP/Drums>

Black-out poetry

One of the activities that April's class participates in is black-out poetry, which is also known as erasure poetry. Try making your own black-out poems following the steps below.

YOU WILL NEED:

- **Discarded newspaper or discarded books (visit your school or local library) or a printed story/article**
 - **A black marker**
1. Start by skimming the page and circling or underlining words that resonate with you or that feel like you could create a poem out of them
 2. Read the words you have circled and try to see if they fit a theme or come together as a poem
 3. Once you've chosen your circled words, take a marker and black-out the rest
 4. You have successfully made your own black-out poem



KAREEM BETWEEN

by Shifa Saltagi Safadi

This novel in verse tells the powerful story of a seventh-grade Syrian American boy and his struggles, big and small, as he navigates middle school.

**NCTE
NOTABLE
NOVEL IN
VERSE**

**WINNER OF THE
NATIONAL BOOK
AWARD FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE'S
LITERATURE**

FOR GRADE 3-7 | LEXILE LEVEL NP | 9780593699287

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Kareem's conflict at the beginning of the book? How do you think this changes throughout the book?
2. How does Kareem feel when he watches Austin spot his name on the roster? What clues do we learn about Austin's character?
3. Why do you think Kareem gets upset when Adam suggests he is moving on from being a fan of the Bears?
4. Does Kareem like the nickname "K" that Austin gives him? Why are names important?
5. Why do you think making the team is important to Kareem? How does this decision affect his emotions?
6. How does Kareem's struggle with learning Arabic make him feel?
7. Kareem loves that his mother helps Syrian refugees. But when she asks him to help new kid Fadi out at school, what does Kareem do? And why?
8. When Mama announces she is going to Syria, Kareem experiences multiple emotions. What are they? What is going on in Syria?
9. Is Fadi a Muslim? Why do you think Kareem makes this assumption?
10. How does the current news and his mother going away affect Kareem and his family?

11. How do Kareem's actions affect his family-more specifically, his mom and Jido?
12. How does Executive Order 13769 make Kareem feel? What exactly does Executive Order 13769 say and what are the impacts on people?
13. How do Kareem and Jameelah act to protest the "Muslim Ban"?
14. What happens to Kareem after he hears the news? Does he still have interest in football? Why do you think this change happens to him?
15. When Kareem hears Mama is in danger, he stops asking questions. How does this feeling of helplessness contribute to his state of sadness? How does it impact his relationships in his family, his friends, and classmates?
16. Kareem admits to Baba his full scope of emotions, and his guilt with everything that happens. How does this conversation change how Kareem feels? How can leaning on loved ones and trusted grownups be healing?
17. What call does Baba get? How does Kareem react to this news? Is this reaction different than how he would have reacted in the first half of the book?
18. How does having hope, and friendship, help Kareem face new challenges?
19. What happened to Mama? What do courts rule about the "Muslim Ban"? How does this make Kareem feel?
20. Kareem is between a lot of things in the novel. Between countries. Between friends, between football, between parents—and between right and wrong. How does Kareem navigate this? Is Kareem the only character in the book stuck in between? Do you ever feel stuck in between?
21. What does being "All-American" mean to Kareem at the end of the book?
22. Does Kareem still feel stuck in between at the end?

WRITING ACTIVITY

Poetry can be a powerful way to use words and language to write how you feel. Write about a time where you felt "between" like Kareem. Use figurative language to describe your emotions. Remember: free verse has no rules. The only requirement is writing in stanzas and lines (which can look however you like). For extra art points: Make your poem into a specific shape! (for example, see pages 138, 318, 324)

FIND MORE
QUESTIONS
AND ACTIVITIES
HERE!