

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

In this follow-up to the Newbery Honor–winning and Walter Award–winning *Red, White, and Whole*, Rajani LaRocca’s novel in verse follows identical twin sisters who do everything together—until one day, they break.

These identical twins might see eye to eye now, but the challenges of seventh grade threaten to tear them apart. Maya is the pragmatic twin. She’s part of a matching set, and it’s her and her twin against the world. But when her sister threatens to reveal her secret anxiety to their parents, she feels completely betrayed.

Chaya is the outgoing twin. With Maya shutting her out, she decides to make a drastic change to help give her twin space. But that’s the last thing Maya wants, and they just drift further apart.

The once-close sisters can’t seem to find their rhythm, but they know that they can’t go on like this. So they make a bet: whoever can pretend to be the other for longer at their summer camp will get to decide where they attend high school—one of the sources of their arguments. But stepping into each other’s shoes isn’t as easy as it sounds. Will these twins find their way back together?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe Maya's personality and her approach to life. What does she love? What is she good at? What is difficult for her? What are some of the problems she faces? Why does she keep pressing her fingernail into her hand? Why doesn't she want her parents to know that she does that?
2. What is Chaya like? What are some of her strengths? What parts of her life present problems for her? Compare Chaya and Maya, noting how they are alike and how they are different when the novel opens.
3. Chaya and Maya are sisters but they are also identical twins. How do they interact as sisters? Describe their game and the various reasons they play it. What effect does being twins have on their lives and on how people treat them? Discuss the last poem and why it includes both their voices. Talk about the role of mirrors in the story, both as physical objects and as symbols.
4. Maya says, "*Be careful*" is Mom's refrain" (p. 24). What does that tell you about her mother? Talk about Mom's emphasis on perfection, such as telling her daughters, "*The biggest help would be / to get perfect grades this year for me*" (p. 27). How does Maya react to her mother's expectations?
5. In contrast, their father praises Maya's piano playing even when it isn't perfect, saying, "*Mistakes are just the beginning / of getting things right*" (p. 176). Why is it hard for Maya to adopt that philosophy? Discuss Chaya's reaction to Dad's advice to "Be bold" (p. 23). How do the differences between the parents affect their marriage?
6. How do Maya and Chaya know Jay and his family? What happened to his father? How do they feel about his mother? Why does Maya like Jay? Why do you think Chaya doesn't like him? Discuss the scene at camp where Chaya sees Jay crying and thinks, "I've thought of Jay as a terrible person, / but maybe I'm the terrible one" (p. 281).
7. How did Chaya become good friends with Anisa? How does Maya feel about their friendship? Anisa is the only person Chaya confides in about Maya and her anxieties. What does Anisa suggest for Maya, and why? When does Maya start feeling friendlier toward Anisa?
8. Why do Chaya and Maya switch roles at camp? What was their bet? While switching roles, what does Chaya learn about Maya's life? Analyze Chaya's comment, "I get an inkling / of what it's like to be Maya, / to have the world expect so much of you / to expect so much of yourself" (pp. 255–56).
9. What are some of the results for Maya of switching roles at camp? How does she feel about being in the musical? Discuss her observation during breathing lessons: "I'm surprised / that I like what I'm doing as Chaya / I don't feel the need / to press my palm. / Maybe because I don't expect to be / perfect" (pp. 258–59).
10. Transformation is a recurrent theme. In part 2, "Switch," Chaya deliberately transforms herself to be different from Maya. What steps does she take? Why does she do it? How does she feel about it and how does Maya react? The girls also switch places at camp. Compare each girl at the end of the book to what she was like at the beginning. What are the similarities and differences in how each has changed?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

INTRIGUING TWINS

Do research on an aspect of twins such as different cultural, religious, or historical attitudes toward twins, including superstitions; twins in mythology and folklore; psychological research about twins; research about twins who grew up separately; misunderstandings about twins; rise in birthrate of twins; and so on. Prepare a multimedia presentation to share with the class, relating the presentation's content to the novel if possible.

POETIC IMAGERY

Poems are full of figurative language and imagery, but some poems called concrete poems also echo an image in their format. Reread and discuss concrete poems in the novel on pages 13–14, 107, 179, and 229. Then write your own concrete poem related to something in *Mirror to Mirror*. Create your best copy of the poem and display it with those of your classmates.

THE WHAT-IF GAME

Chaya introduces “The What If Game” (p. 28), which she and Maya play a few more times (pp. 51 and 92–93). The phrase “what if” also comes up in other poems. Working in pairs, write a version of the What If game that Chaya and Maya might play at the end of the novel. It should reflect how they’ve changed and how they feel about themselves and each other. Perform the poem for the class.

“IDENTICAL WITH HEAVEN”

Composer Gustav Holst described music as “identical with heaven.” Chaya and Maya often refer to composers. Choose one of those composers and listen to their music. Pick a piece that you like and share part of it with the class, explaining why you like it. Composers mentioned include Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Debussy, Haydn, Holst, Mozart, Pachelbel, Arvo Pärt, Scarlatti, and Sibelius.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RAJANI LAROCCA was born in India, raised in Kentucky, and now lives in Massachusetts, where she practices medicine and writes award-winning books for young readers, including the Newbery Honor–winning novel in verse, *Red, White, and Whole*. She’s always been an omnivorous reader, and now she is an omnivorous writer of novels and picture books, fiction and nonfiction, in prose and poetry. A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Medical School, she lives outside Boston with her family. Visit her at rajanilarocca.com.

The guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean, a former children’s librarian who now gives workshops for educators on new books for young people. She also chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee.