



Novel Guide for Gifted and Advanced Readers



This guide is appropriate for use with gifted and advanced readers. It addresses their affective and cognitive needs through questions that can be used for discussion. Depending on the length of the book, students should read the entire book before conducting the bibliotherapy lesson, the **Group Discussion** using the higher order questions and the **After Discussion** activities. Students should be given the **Before Discussion** activities to complete during their time while reading the book. If the book is exceptionally long, you may need to modify this lesson plan. See **Novel Guide: Notes for Implementing** for additional procedures and recommendations.

Book Title: *A Mango Shaped Space*

Author: Wendy Mass

Interest Level: Upper Elementary/Middle School

Lexile: 770L

Length: 270 pages (paperback)

Guide developed by: Mollie Bounds

Summary: Mia Winchell experiences the world differently, she is a synesthete. She discovers that she is different during a third grade math lesson. For fear of being labeled a “freak” she hides her ability to see colors and shapes for letters, numbers, and sounds...even from her best friend. As time goes on she struggles not only in school but also with where she belongs in her family and the world around her.

Conceptual Connections

Conceptual Lens: Acceptance

Other Key Concepts: Identity, Belonging, Friendship, Family

Essential Understandings:

- To be accepted or have a sense of belonging, you must be your true self.
- Accepting others doesn't mean you ignore their differences, it means you acknowledge them and/or even celebrate them.
- Friends and family are those that accept you for who you are.

Essential Questions:

- Is true acceptance reliant on the fact that you show all of your identity?
- How do we show others we accept them despite their differences?
- What decisions do we make every day in order to be accepted?

Affective Focus (Bibliotherapy)

Introductory Activity/Hook

Discuss the five senses. What is their purpose? We talk about them as if they are five separate avenues for understanding and making sense of our environment around us. Discuss what it would be like if two or more of those senses became one. What would we name it? What would it be like to have your senses enter at the same time even if only one was used to learn with? (For example: touch and smell might be called tactilorodor or smoutch). What smells would your brain attach to particular touches and why? Spend time discussing all kinds of combinations. What would make each persons' experience different? Is how we perceive the world part of who we are?

Menu of Bibliotherapy Questions

Identification:

1. Why did Mia made a quick decision to hide her difference? Why do you think she did that?
2. How did that choice affect her relationship with her family as she grew up?
3. How different would her life be now if she had stuck to the truth in third grade?
4. How has having this ability shaped her identity? How has hiding it shaped her identity?
5. Why do you think her best friend was so upset with her when she found out that Mia had been hiding the fact she was a synesthete all this time?
6. What negative repercussions came from hiding it? What were the positives?
7. How are Mango and Mia's grandfather connected?
8. When Mango dies, Mia seems to be also grieving the loss of her grandfather again, why is that?
9. What prompted Mia to finally tell her secret? How did her parents react?
10. When Mia finally lets her true identity be known to everyone, how does her behavior change? Is this an effect of hiding it for so long?
11. Mia has to learn to be accepted all over again by her "normal" peers and best friend. How does this make her feel?

Catharsis:

1. How does Mia feel about her synesthesia?
2. How did Mia feel about having to keep her synesthesia a secret from her best friend? How did Mia's friend feel about Mia's secret? How would you feel if a friend kept a secret that large from you?
3. Do you think it was brave of Mia to finally tell her secret? How do you think she felt as people started to learn her secret?

Insight:

1. Do you feel that you have good and bad parts to your identity or personality? What are they?
2. Do you keep any of those parts hidden? Is that good or bad for you?
3. Who do you feel most accepted by? Who do you think least accepts you?
4. Why do you feel some people don't accept you? Have you taken the time to show them your true self?
5. Why do you feel that some people do accept you?
6. What is so scary about showing someone your true self?
7. Why do you think human beings crave acceptance? Some people don't, what do you think about them?
8. How can you balance your need for acceptance and your need to be yourself?
9. Do you feel like you are an accepting person?
10. What can we do to ensure that we are more accepting of others?

Universalization/Follow up Activity

Acceptance can only truly be felt when you are accepted as who you really are. If you hide a part of yourself from everyone...you will never feel truly excepted. Design your name in a way that represents your true identity and how you would want a synesthete (and everyone) to see it if it were spoken aloud to them. Be prepared to present your choices in design. If you don't want to draw it, you may describe it in a detailed paragraph.

Reading Comprehension: Independent Work and Group Discussion

To foster strong reading comprehension, literacy skills, and love of literature, students need to read critically, respond to what they read with text-based evidence, develop a robust vocabulary, and engage in high level discussion with peers. The following activities address these components.

Before Group Discussion (Activities for students to complete independently)

A. Knowledge and Comprehension Questions related to the novel. Students use sticky notes to locate answers in the text as they read. Teacher may use student's answers for a grade.

Knowledge Questions

- Who are the main characters? Secondary characters?
- What is the shape and nature of Mango's eyes? Why is that significant?
- What two senses of Mia's are combined?
- Mia's brother, Zack, has a bright personality, what do you think is special about him?
- Where did Mia's sister, Beth, go over the summer?
- How does Mia's best friend, Jenna, receive a birthday present from her dead mother every year?
- What is a syntesthete?
- Why did she name her cat Mango?

Comprehension Questions

- What is Mia's relationship like with her brother? What text evidence shows this?
- What is Mia's relationship like with her sister? What text evidence shows this?
- Why does Mia hide her exceptionality?
- Why does Mia believe that a piece of her grandfather's soul is in Mango?
- How do Mia's relationships change after she finally reveals her secret?
- Why does Mia think it is her fault that Mango died?

B. Vocabulary Study: Students will complete the following activities with vocabulary from the novel. The activities may be used for a grade, but should also be included in the discussion.

- Students look up the word in the dictionary or online, noting the definition that best fits how the word is used in the passage. Also, determine possible synonyms and evaluate the author's use of the word in the passage.
- Students will complete a graphic organizer provided by the teacher.

Vocabulary Words (choose 10 to complete the graphic organizer with)

- dearth (pg. 26)
- posterity (pg. 75)
- valiantly (pg. 91)
- controversial (pg. 138)
- listlessly (pg. 144)
- resign (pg. 150)
- enthralled (pg. 150)
- mesmerized (pg. 150)
- vehemently (pg. 162)
- nonchalantly (pg. 172)

- muster (pg. 172)
- scrutinizes (195)
- brimming (pg. 200)
- engrossed (pg. 216)
- torrent (pg. 229)

Group Discussion: Teacher-facilitated small group discussion. Teacher may choose to provide students with a set of the questions prior to the discussion. Students should also be encouraged to create their own questions.

Higher-Level Questions (using Bloom's categories):

1. Application

- Mia makes a quick decision to lie and hide her difference after the math lesson that day (pg. 4). Would you have made the same decision if you were in her place? Why or why not?
- Mia's father told her that the eyes were the windows to the soul (pg. 25). What do you think this means? Do you think it is true?
- Jenna does not react the way Mia thought she would after revealing her secret (pg. 77). Why do you think Jenna acted so strongly? Do you think she over reacted? Why or why not?
- Mia can always tell when it is about to rain (pg. 26). Do you think that this ability is connected to her synesthesia?

2. Analysis

- A recurrent theme through the book is rain. What do you think the significance of the rain is to the story?
- Mia is unsure of Adam's true identity and demands some proof (pg. 128). Is she right to do this? Why should you be cautious about online relationships or communication?
- As the story moves forward you find out more about Adam, what type of person was he?
- At one point, Mia snags her friendship bracelet and a string breaks (pg. 159). How does this symbolize Jenna and Mia's relationship?
- Mia cheats on an Algebra test by using her synesthesia to her advantage (pg. 143). Is this really cheating? Why or why not? She mentions that she was so happy that she forgot to feel guilty. Have you ever cheated on something? How did you feel?
- Mia mentions that she is no longer close to her sister. What do you think has happened to pull them apart?
- Jenna states that Mia doesn't know what a best friend is. Do you believe a best friend should be told absolutely everything? Or, is it okay to keep some things from them. If so, what is okay to keep secret?

3. Evaluation

- Mia took the death of Mango very hard. Why do you think it hurt her more than it should have? How do you think it relates to her grandfather?
- Would you want to have synesthesia? Why or why not?
- There are several deaths in this novel: Roger's dog, Mango, Jenna's mother, and Mia's grandfather. How do these deaths play into the personality of the people they affect?
- Mia makes exploring her synesthesia and getting to know other synesthetes a priority in her life and lets other things go. Living so many years in hiding, was she right to behave this way?

4. Synthesis

- What type of profession do you think Mia would be best at, why?
- How would Mia's story be different if she lived in a large city, such as New York or Chicago?
- How could Mia's life have changed if she had stuck to the truth in 3rd grade?
- What if Mia had never found Mango?

After Group Discussion: Activities for students to complete with a partner, in a small group, or individually. Activities may be used for a grade.

A. **Connections to the Curriculum:** Students will make connections to a curriculum area (math, science, social studies, language arts, art, or careers) using one of the concepts from the story. The product should reflect creativity as well as critical thinking.

- **Math:** How many combinations of synesthesia could there be? There are five senses and synesthesia is usually a combination of two or three of them. Create a table to show all the possible combinations of two and three senses that could be made. Then highlight the one you would most like to have and write a paragraph as to why.
- **Science-** Research how to create a concept map: <http://www.udel.edu/chem/white/teaching/ConceptMap.html> and what we know about synesthesia so far. A great place to start some research is <http://www.apa.org/monitor/mar01/synesthesia.aspx>. Compile all that you have learned about synesthesia in a visual concept map. You may use a computer to create the concept map or you may draw one out. Be as creative and as detailed as you can.
- **Social Studies-** Mia's group must research a time in American History that we would rather forget. Though these events are painful and even sometimes embarrassing they are also sometimes precursors to positive change. Choose an American historical moment that fits this description and either draw a comic strip to detail the positive change that came from it or write an essay to describe the cause and effect.
- **Language Arts-** Mia sees colors with textures and patterns for sounds, letters, and words. Sometimes you can tell how she feels about the person by the way she describes their name. Read *Hailstones and Halibut Bones*. This poetry book describes the connections and feelings the author assigns to each color. Choose three of the names that Mia describes in *A Mango Shaped Space* and write a comparative essay detailing the similarities and differences of how each author handled the description or feeling of that color(s).
Alternate activity: After reading *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* write a color poem about yourself describing how your name looks but simultaneously describing your personality.
- **Art-** Mia relates to the artist Kandinski because his paintings reflect similarly to what she sees for sounds. Research types of artwork and find one that really speaks to you. Create a self-portrait that emulates that style.
- **Career:** Research famous people with synesthesia. <http://www.listal.com/list/famous-people-with-synesthesia> What careers do most of these people enter into? What other careers might a synesthete be good at with two of their senses combined?

B. **Creative Reading:** Using the following list of creative products, students will complete a project reflecting their personal connection with the novel (students may determine their own creative product with the approval of the teacher):

1. Create a puppet play based on a favorite scene in the story
2. Create a poem based on the novel, a character, or favorite scene
3. Illustrate a favorite scene(s) from the story
4. Create a story board of the plot of the story
5. Write a screen play based on the story
6. Create a new ending for the story
7. Create a map of the location(s) of the story
8. Create a mural representative of the story and characters
9. Extend the story into a sequel
10. Rewrite a portion of the story from another character's perspective
11. Rewrite the story in another time or culture
12. Create an online product: infographic, video, character blog, etc.
13. Write a song that one or more of the characters might sing
14. Create an interpretative dance for the story
15. Student idea for a creative product related to the story