

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Every Shiny Thing is a timely and relatable novel about friendship, family, and social justice. The book raises big questions that are perfect to discuss with ten- to fourteen-year-old readers. The unique format—alternating prose and verse sections—lends itself to productive and accessible discussions about novel structure, literary devices, and the poetic form. As a result, *Every Shiny Thing* is a great choice for a classroom read aloud, whole-class text, literature circle, book club, or summer reading list.

The discussion questions in this guide are rooted in the Common Core State Standards for language arts. The first set of questions is divided by chapter. Students can think, talk, and write about these questions as they read the book. The second set of questions is intended for use after students have finished reading the novel. Any of the questions can be adapted as analytical or reflective writing prompts. This guide also includes creative writing prompts, extension activities that incorporate research and encourage an application of learning, and just-for-fun activities.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LAUREN • *The Hardest Good bye*

- When we meet Lauren, she is absolutely sure that the Piedmont School is not the right place for her brother, Ryan. What are Lauren’s reasons for believing that Piedmont is wrong for Ryan? Do you agree with Lauren’s reasoning? Why or why not?
- How do you think Lauren and Ryan’s parents feel about leaving Ryan at Piedmont, and how does Lauren think they feel? How do you know?

SIERRA • *Out of Body to Moving Sideways*

- When we meet Sierra, her mother has just been arrested. How does Sierra feel about her mother and about the idea of being separated from her? Find a few lines from the book that support your thinking.
- Sierra’s chapters are written in verse, and some of her poems have striking spacing. Some lines are indented

more than others, and sometimes there is a large space in the middle of a line. Find a place in Sierra’s first section where something about the spacing strikes you. Consider what impact that spacing has on the emphasis or meaning in the poem. As you keep reading, look out for other places where the spacing strikes you.

LAUREN • *What Really Matters*

- Lauren’s parents give Ryan and Lauren shiny new phones and computers. Why do they do this? So far, do you think they seem like good parents? Why or why not?
- At Lauren’s first Worship and Ministry meeting, Mr. Ellis tells her that she has “a strong sense of social responsibility” (25). What does it mean to have “a strong sense of social responsibility”? What are some things that Lauren says, thinks, and does that reveal her growing interest in social justice issues?

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SIERRA • *Crowding to Secret Room*

- Sierra's kaleidoscope is a symbol: a significant object that takes on layers of meaning. Why is the kaleidoscope important to Sierra, and what does it represent to her? Keep paying attention to kaleidoscope and color imagery throughout the novel.

- When Anne and Carl drive Sierra to her foster home, Sierra thinks,

“They can take me
to wherever they live
but they can't make me
theirs” (39).

- Why do you think the word “theirs” is separated from the rest of the passage? What does this passage tell you about Sierra's attitude toward Anne and Carl? Why does she feel this way?
- Carl tells Sierra not to go in the room near hers, but she peeks in anyway. What predictions can you make about this room and why Anne might cry if Sierra went inside?

LAUREN • *The Scheme Team*

- Describe Lauren and Audrey's friendship. How has it changed since Ryan went away to Piedmont?
- What is Lauren's big plan? Does it seem like a good idea? Why or why not?

SIERRA • *Expressions to Gnaws & Wishes*

- Anne, Carl, and Lauren all try to do kind things for Sierra because they want to make Sierra feel comfortable. Describe what each of them does to welcome Sierra. Compare and contrast Sierra's reactions to their kind actions.
- Sierra uses a simile when she thinks about how her worry for her mom feels “like a life jacket made of lead” (72). A simile is a comparison between two things that aren't literally the same but are similar in

some important and revealing way. Similes always use the words “like” or “as.” What does it mean that Sierra's worry is “like a life jacket made of lead”? Why do you think Sierra feels this way about her mom? As you keep reading the book, look out for more similes.

LAUREN • *Costumes for Three*

- Lauren feels distant from her old best friend Audrey but immediately connects with Sierra. Compare and contrast Audrey and Sierra as friends for Lauren. Why does Lauren feel more comfortable with Sierra than Audrey?
- At this point in the novel, Lauren has begun to make some questionable choices that could hurt other people or get her in trouble. Make a list of any of Lauren's actions that make you uncomfortable. How does she convince herself that these actions are okay?

SIERRA • *Fates to Latching On*

- How does Sierra react when Audrey and Lauren get angry? Find specific lines that show how she feels and what she does when other people are mad.
- Why does it upset Sierra when Anne “assumes” and “insists” things? (100). Why does Sierra feel more comfortable with Carl than with Anne? What predictions can you make about how Sierra's relationships with Anne and Carl might change throughout the rest of the book?

LAUREN • *Partners in Justice*

- Describe what happens with the Three Fates Halloween costumes. What does this incident reveal about Audrey? Why does it make Lauren so upset?
- List the new information we learn about Ryan in this chapter. What adjectives would you use to describe Ryan and his relationship with Lauren?
- Explain why Lauren decides to tell Sierra about her plan and ask for Sierra's help. Does it surprise you that Sierra agrees? Why or why not?

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Since Sierra is feeling conflicted about Lauren, she invites Cassidy over but ends up feeling some tension with Cassidy as well. Compare and contrast Cassidy and Lauren as friends for Sierra. In what ways are they different, and in what ways are they similar?

LAUREN • *The Best Person I Know*

- After Lauren’s mom comes home from Thanksgiving with Ryan, she insists that Ryan is doing well at school. Between Ryan’s latest video and Lauren’s mom’s descriptions, we get several pieces of evidence that suggest Ryan might be happy at Piedmont. In your opinion, which piece of evidence is most convincing? Why doesn’t Lauren believe any of the evidence?
- How does Lauren react after she steals in this chapter? Why do you think she feels differently after this theft than she has felt after the others?

SIERRA • *From the Looks of It to Drifts*

- What does Sierra find out about Amy? Does this information surprise you? Why does it make Sierra feel guilty?
- Describe what happens when Sierra gets to see her mom. What emotions does Sierra feel during this visit? What emotions do you think her mom feels, and how can you tell?

LAUREN • *Not OK at All*

- At the Lees’ party, Lauren has a flashback in which she remembers last year’s party, when Ryan played the piano. Why do you think this flashback is important? What does it tell you about Ryan, Audrey, and/or Lauren?
- At the end of the chapter, why isn’t Lauren OK at all? What do you think she should do at this point? What do you predict she will do?

SIERRA • *Dulled to Finding*

- Are you surprised by what Sierra does in the poem “Disappointment”? Do you think this is the right thing to do? Why or why not?
- Explain what Sierra realizes in the poem “Finding.” What does she come to understand about how her mother, Lauren, and her fall on the bike are all related? How does this realization show a big change in her character?

LAUREN • *Restitution*

- Compare and contrast the ways Lauren’s parents react to finding out what she has done.
- Which moments in this chapter make Lauren feel the worst, and why do you think those moments make her feel so badly? What do these moments tell you about Lauren?

SIERRA • *Just for Today to Kaleidoscope*

- How has Sierra changed from the beginning of the novel to now? Find a passage somewhere in this section that shows what she has learned and how she has grown.

LAUREN • *Something Yellow*

- What does Lauren finally realize about her parents, and what does she finally realize about Ryan? Why do you think it was so difficult for her to understand these things before?
- What do you predict will happen between Lauren and Sierra right after the last line of the novel? What will they talk about, and what will they need to do in order to make “something new” together?

BIG-PICTURE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the significance of the book’s title? Can it mean different things? Can you think of any other titles that might also fit the book well?
- What are the big messages or themes of *Every Shiny Thing*? Find evidence in the text to support your ideas.
- Why do you think the authors chose to use regular, prose-style narration for Lauren’s chapters and verse for Sierra’s chapters? In what ways does verse fit Sierra’s character and prose fit Lauren’s? What was it like for you as a reader to shift between these two types of storytelling?
- Because the book has two point-of-view characters, readers get to see Lauren and Sierra from each other’s perspectives. What things did you realize about Lauren from Sierra’s sections that you might not have known or appreciated if you’d only gotten Lauren’s point of view? What things did you realize about Sierra from Lauren’s sections that you might not have known or appreciated if you’d only gotten Sierra’s point of view?
- Sierra’s kaleidoscope is an important symbol: a significant object that takes on layers of meaning. Think about the times she refers to the kaleidoscope and its colors throughout the novel and what happens to the kaleidoscope by the end. What does the kaleidoscope reveal about Sierra, the way she sees the world, and the way she grows? What other objects in the novel might be symbols?
- What does it mean to be a good friend? In what ways are Lauren and Sierra good friends to each other? In what ways do they let each other down?
- It’s important to Lauren to be a good sister to Ryan, and it’s important to Sierra to be a good daughter to her mom. In what ways is Lauren a good sister, and in what ways is Sierra a good daughter? Are Lauren’s and Sierra’s ideas about what it means to be a good sister and daughter misguided in any ways? If so, how?
- Lauren makes some pretty bad decisions because she is determined to do something good. Which of her actions made you most uncomfortable and why? Is it ever okay to break rules if you have good intentions and might be able to do something positive? Why or why not?
- Consider the messages about addiction in this novel. What is an addiction? Which characters struggle with different kinds of addiction? What does the novel suggest about what a person should do if they are close to someone who has an addiction?
- Consider the roles of parents and foster parents in the novel. Are Lauren and Ryan’s parents good parents, in your opinion? What do they do to support and show their love for their kids, and what mistakes do they make? Are Anne and Carl “excellent foster parents,” as Sierra’s caseworker tells Sierra? What do they do to support and show their love for Sierra, and what mistakes do they make? Even though Sierra’s mom and dad have made big mistakes, they have also shown their love for her. What positive things have they done for Sierra?

CLASSROOM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

English Language Arts

Creative Writing Prompts

- *Every Shiny Thing* includes Lauren’s and Sierra’s points of view, but are there any other characters whose perspectives would be interesting to read? Write your own chapter from the perspective of any character other than Lauren or Sierra: Ryan, Anne, Audrey, Jake . . . or any other character you’d like! You can choose an event that happens in the book and consider how another character might experience it, or you can write about an event that isn’t included in the book.
- Write your own short story that alternates between two different characters’ points of view.
- Choose one of your favorite poems in one of Sierra’s sections and write a poem inspired by Sierra’s style. You can try to use some of the techniques that appear in Sierra’s sections, such as striking spacing, similes, metaphors, and symbols.
- Write a letter to Lauren and Sierra in which you offer them advice about how to be good friends to each other as they try to build a new kind of relationship after the book ends.

Character Education

Social Awareness

- *Every Shiny Thing* takes place at a Quaker school, also known as a Friends school. Do some online research about Quaker education and the Quaker testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship (sometimes referred to as the SPICES). Lauren and Sierra’s school focuses on simplicity, but which of the SPICES do you think is most important for middle school students to learn about? If you had to create an initiative at your school based on one of the SPICES, what would your initiative be?

Character Education

Autism Awareness

- Ryan’s school, the Piedmont Therapeutic Boarding School, is a fictionalized place, and his former occupational therapist, Jenna, is a fictionalized person. However, the references to the school’s techniques and Jenna’s therapies are inspired by the neurodiversity movement.
- The word *neurodiversity* means that people’s brains are diverse; they work in different ways. People who are part of the neurodiversity movement believe that every different kind of mind is equal, valuable, and healthy. They don’t believe that there is one right, healthy, “normal” way for people’s brains to work, so they don’t believe that people with autism should be “cured” or trained to act “normal.” The therapies that Jenna and the Piedmont School use are based on the idea that teachers and occupational therapists should help autistic people develop the skills they are really good at and figure out strategies to deal with things that are challenging for them.
- Make a list of Ryan’s strengths and a list of the things that are challenging for him. Then list the activities and techniques that Jenna, the faculty at Piedmont, or his family members use to help him develop his strengths and figure out strategies for handling difficult things.
- Next, consider your own learning strengths as well as the social or academic things that are challenging for you. Can you design an activity or project you wish you could be assigned in school that would let you use your strengths while also working on something that is difficult for you?

CLASSROOM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES [continued]

The Arts

Creative Project

- There are some other wonderful middle grade novels about kids who are in foster care, including *Greetings from Witness Protection!* by Jake Burt; *Forever, or a Long, Long Time* by Caela Carter; *Three Pennies* by Melanie Crowder; and *One for the Murphys* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt. Read one or more of these novels and then create a video, essay, or art project in which you compare and contrast Sierra's foster experience with the experience of one or more of these other characters.

Crafts

- **MAKE A KALEIDOSCOPE.** There are lots of sets of instructions online for homemade kaleidoscopes. Find a method that appeals to you and create a kaleidoscope of your own.

Baking

BAKE A BLACK FOREST CAKE

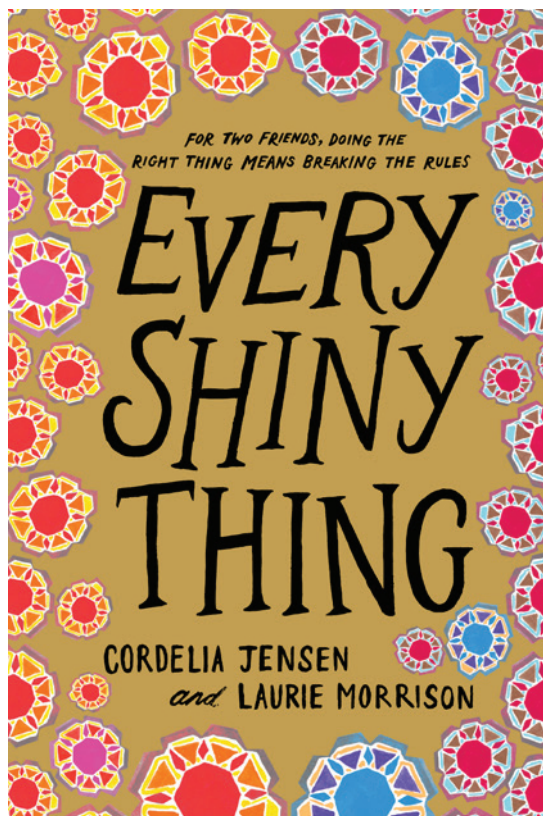
Start with your favorite chocolate cake recipe or make a chocolate cake from a box mix. Bake the cake in two cake pans so that you end up with two layers. For the filling and icing, you'll need:

- 3 cups of heavy cream or whipping cream
- 1 can of cherry pie filling
- 1/4 cup of confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 4 ounces of grated chocolate

Use a hand mixer or stand mixer at medium or medium-high power to whip the cream. As you whip, slowly add in the sugar and vanilla. Keep going until the cream forms stiff peaks.

EVERY SHINY THING

By Cordelia Jensen and Laurie Morrison



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Ages 10 to 14

PRAISE

“Rich and descriptive. . . . The contrasting narratives tell a touching story about friendship, loyalty, and resilience.”

—Booklist

“A lot to like here—sadness, suspense, even humor.”

—School Library Journal

“This middle grade novel will find a ready audience in most libraries.”

—VOYA Magazine

ABOUT THE BOOK

Lauren has always been a good sister. Sierra has always taken care of her mom. Both girls feel lost when the person they love most isn't with them anymore. Lauren's brother Ryan goes to a therapeutic boarding school for autistic teens, and Sierra has to leave her mom to live in foster care in Lauren's wealthy neighborhood. Both girls feel a little less lost when they become friends. But when Lauren recruits Sierra to help with a Robin Hood scheme to raise money for those in need, Sierra has a lot to lose if the plan goes wrong. Lauren and Sierra have good intentions, but that might not matter as much as they think. How far will they go to do what they think is right?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Cordelia Jensen and **Laurie Morrison** both live in Philadelphia and received MFAs in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. *Every Shiny Thing* is their first middle grade novel. Cordelia is also the author of two YA novels-in-verse: *Skyscraping*, a 2016 ALA Best Book for Young Readers, and *The Way The Light Bends*. She is a writer in residence at Big Blue Marble Bookstore in Philadelphia, where she runs the *Mt. Airy Musers*, a kids' literary journal. Laurie taught middle school English for ten years and is also the author of the forthcoming middle grade novel *Up for Air* (2019). You can learn more about Cordelia and Laurie by visiting their websites: www.cordeliajensen.com and www.lauriemorrisonwrites.com.