

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

### WHEN IT ALL SYNCs UP

by Maya Ameyaw

**GENRE:** Young Adult Fiction

**THEMES:** diversity; mental health issues; eating disorders; addiction issues; sexual assault; social-emotional learning; tradition; family; identity; self-expression; friendship; hope; coming-of-age; love; loneliness; judgment; racism; suffering

**SUITABLE FOR:** Grades 9+, Ages 14+

**GUIDED READING LEVEL:** Fountas and Pinnell Z

**LEXILE:** HL720L

**COMMON CORE STANDARDS:** RL.9.1,2,3,4,5,6,9  
W.9.1,1a,1b,1c,1d,1e,2,2a,2b,2c,2d,2e,2f,4,5,6,7,8,9,9b,10  
SL.9.1,1a,1b,1c,1d,2,3,4,5,6  
L.9,1a,1b,1c,1d,2,2a,2b,2c,3,3a,4,4a,4b,4c,4d,5,5a,5b,5c,6

#### SUMMARY:

A Black teen dancer with dreams of landing a spot in a prestigious ballet company must learn to dance on her own terms in this explosive debut about the healing power of art and friendship, perfect for fans of *Heartstopper* and *Tiny Pretty Things*.

Ballet is Aisha's life. So, when she's denied yet another lead at her elite academy because she doesn't "look" the part, she knows something has to change—the constant discrimination is harming her mental health. Switching to her best friend Neil's art school seems like the perfect plan at first. But she soon discovers racism and bullying are entrenched in the ballet program here, too, and there's a new, troubling distance between her and Neil. And as past traumas surface, pressure from friends and family, a new romance, and questions about her dance career threaten to overwhelm her. There's no choreography to follow—for high school or for healing. Aisha will have to find the strength within herself—and place her trust in others—to make her next move.

Please remember that the suggested questions and activities within this educator guide are meant to serve as a starting point. Educators are encouraged to select items from each part of the guided inquiry process that work best for their style of teaching and will help them meet their goals when covering the topics in this book. Activities and prompts should be tweaked and/or reformatted to best fit your students, context, and community to ensure equity and inclusion.

## BEFORE READING THE BOOK

These activities build the context, introduce the topic of the book, and establish prior knowledge and interest.

### ACTIVITY #1: The Power of Words

**Goal:** To have students think about bullying and the power that bullies have over others with their words. This activity will help students think about what may occur in the text with Aisha and some of the other characters.

Encourage students to choose any of the quotes below. Have them silently read and think about the quote first:

*“People say sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can never hurt you, but that’s not true. Words can hurt. They hurt me. Things were said to me that I still haven’t forgotten.”*

—Demi Lovato

*“Cyberbullying is bullying. Hiding behind a pretty screen doesn’t make it any less hateful.”*

—Anonymous

*“When people hurt you over and over, think of them like sandpaper. They may scratch and hurt you a bit, but in the end, you end up polished and they end up useless.”*

—Chris Colfer

Once they have had a chance to read the quote, have students break up into groups of no more than four people based on their chosen quote. Then have them discuss the following questions and complete the final steps:

#### Questions:

- What does this quote mean to you?
- Why is it important to think about the power of words and how you can impact someone with your words and actions?
- Has anyone in your life ever said something similar to one of these quotes to you? If so, what did they say? If not, what kind of advice would you like to receive?

- How might this advice help you or a friend?
- If you could create your own quote, would it be something similar to this or would you discuss something else dealing with bullying?

### Final Step:

- Create a visual and your own quote to overcome bullies and those who stand by and witness bullying.
- Be prepared to share your visual and your quote with the class.

## ACTIVITY #2: Practicing Mindfulness—Coping with Stress

**Goal:** To provide students with various strategies and skills that may assist them with anxiety-inducing situations. Additionally, these skills and strategies may help students think about some of the situations and conflicts that Aisha and the other characters encounter and how they might incorporate mindfulness to overcome those conflicts.

Have students view the book’s cover and then choose one of the following mindfulness activities based only on what they see from the visual and what they can get from the summary of the book jacket.

### Activities:

#### Mindful Word

- Have students think of a word that seems calming or peaceful based on what they just saw and read from viewing the book (it can be “calm,” “peace,” “tranquil,” etc.).
- Next, tell them to think about the word for at least 3–5 minutes. What does this word mean to them? What other words does it bring to mind? What images does the word conjure up?
- Tell students to notice their breathing and how their minds shut off when they think of this word.
- Have them reflect on this activity when they finish and what they gained.

#### Mindful Drawing

- Have students think about what images the cover of this book reminds them of.
- Give them a blank piece of paper, markers or color pencils and then have them draw for 3–5 minutes without thinking about anything else but the book cover.
- Have them share what they gained from this activity and what the drawing activity made them think about the book they are about to read.

#### Mindful Breathing

- After reviewing the book cover and summary, have students think about what the book may be about and what they may experience when reading this book.
- Have students sit up in a comfortable position and close their eyes. Take 2–3 minutes and focus only on breathing in and out.

- Tell them to think about the muscles they use in their stomachs as they breathe and focus on inhaling and exhaling while expanding and contracting their stomachs.
- Next, have them try to stay relaxed and focused on breathing in and out, and if their minds wander, tell them that it's fine, but to slowly bring their attention back to their breathing to focus only on their breaths.
- After the 2–3 minutes are up, ask them what they thought about and if this activity gave them any clarity regarding the book they are about to read.

Have students research other mindful activities and how these strategies can be used to focus, build skills, and limit stress. Allow students to share the other activities that they find.

### ACTIVITY #3: Speed Chatting

**Goal:** Students will be introduced to the text and some of the issues, ideas, and concepts in the text through skimming the book and looking over the cover and jacket copy. Additionally, students will view summaries and reviews online.

This activity is based on the idea of speed dating. Students will work with their classmates (either as a whole group or in small groups) to chat about the book they are about to read based on the summary, what they know about the author, the book cover, and any other information they have learned.

Introduce the book to students and then have them read the summary and research any information about the author. Next, go on a speed chat (30 seconds to one minute), sitting in pairs with their classmates in which they discuss the following:

- Ask students to share what they have learned so far about the book and/or the author.
- Have students look up information on real-life Black ballerinas (such as Michaela DePrince and Misty Copeland. Additionally, students can read the author's note and dedication to gain more perspective on the book.
- What do students know about Black dancers' experiences in ballet companies in Canada or in any other part of the world?
- How much insight do students have on eating disorders and substance abuse?
- What do students think they will gain from reading this text?
- What questions do students have about the book?
- What kind of characters do students think they will be engaged with as they read this text?
- What do students think the plot of the book will be?
- What do students think are the themes that might show up?
- What are students hoping to get from this book?

## Websites to Use:

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/59689787>

<https://www.annickpress.com/Books/W/When-It-All-Syncs-Up>

<https://mayaameyaw.com/>

# WHILE READING THE BOOK

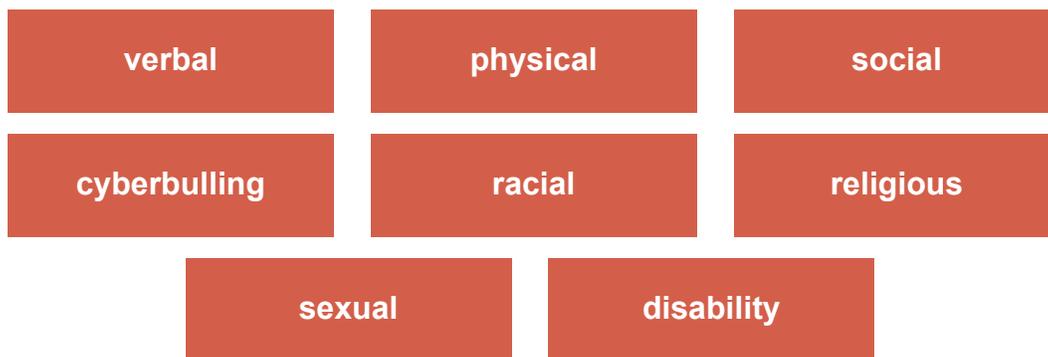
These activities check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

## ACTIVITY #1: The Various Forms and Impacts of Bullying and Discrimination:

**Goal:** The students will come to understand that there are different types of bullying and that all forms of bullying are harmful to those being bullied. Bullying behaviors can also stem from systems of inequality such as racism and sexism that impact people in different ways, depending on their identities and how they experience the world. Additionally, the students will understand that being a bystander to bullying is also harmful and creates an environment that makes it possible for the bully to continue the harassment. Students will also understand how becoming an ally against racism and other forms of discrimination can possibly assist in reducing racist and discriminatory behaviors.

### 1a: What is Bullying?

- Have students define the word bullying using a web cluster with the word “bullying” in the center.
- Have students use a chart like the one below and come up with as many examples as they can think of from the book to show the various types of bullying. This can also include discriminatory behaviors that stem from racist or sexist beliefs. For example, when Aisha’s classmate, Kevin, tries to ask her out when she begins attending Neil’s school. When she turns him down, he says “I don’t usually even go for darkskins, you know.” This is an example of racial and sexual bullying.



- After students come up with the various examples, have them discuss the questions below in their groups.
  - What is bullying? How would students define the term?
  - Now that they are in a group and they have discussed examples of bullying, does that change their definition of bullying?
  - Thinking about the various types of bullying that occur in the book, what instances of bullying do they see in their school or in their daily lives that mirror what Aisha and her friends endured?
  - When thinking about the types of bullying, do they see any types that have been left out that students may experience at school?
  - Which type of bullying do they think is the most harmful and why?
  - Specifically, think of the racial bullying that Aisha endures. What instances of racial bullying is seen on a daily basis in schools?
  - How can bullying be stopped?
  - What can students do to help end bullying at their school or elsewhere?
  - What about racial stereotyping and bullying? How can students work to end this type of discrimination?
  - Thinking about the mindfulness coping strategies discussed in the pre-reading activities, which strategies might help when dealing with bullies and why?

### Resources and Websites to Use:

<https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/types>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/bullying.html>

### 1b: Extra, Extra, Read All About Allyship!

**Goal:** Students will learn about the role of bystanders and how this can make bullying behaviors worse. Students will understand what can be done as a bystander to stop bullying behaviors. Additionally, students will understand how becoming an ally against racism and other forms of discrimination can possibly assist in reducing racist and discriminatory behaviors. Lastly, students will identify which characters in the book were bystanders as well as which characters behaved as allies and how they either assisted as an ally or they could have helped end bullying behaviors.

- Have students break up into groups with no more than four people.
- Tell them to brainstorm two lists in their groups. First, have them create a list of what it means to be an ally (this can include, but is not limited to someone who helps, provides assistance in times of crises, someone who stands up for those who are targeted, etc.). Have them create a list of bystander behaviors (this should include, but is not limited to standing by and letting bullies tease without interjecting, staying silent, laughing while

bullies are being mean or making their jokes, passing on text messages or inappropriate images online, etc.)

- Have students go through the text and identify individuals who are allies and those who are bystanders.
- Have them create a newspaper article or social media post where they first call out those who are allies, and then on the other hand call out those who are the bystanders. Tell students to relate both the allies and bystanders to how issues can be stopped. The article or post should include:
  - the definition of an ally and a bystander
  - how issues of racism and bullying can be stopped (this should include what bystanders can do instead and what allies are doing, such as standing up for what is right, helping those that are targeted, seeking assistance from an adult, not laughing or participating in the bullying behavior, etc.)
  - at least one image of an upstanding person helping someone being bullied.

After completing this activity, students can answer the following discussion questions:

- What does it mean to be an ally? What about a bystander?
- Why is it important not to stand by when someone is being bullied or discriminated against?
- Why is it important to stand up for those who are targeted?
- What is the best way to stop a bully?
- What are some characteristics of a strong “upstander” or someone who stops a bully?
- How did you and your team come up with your newspaper article/post?
- Do you think you could institute these strategies if you see someone being bullied?

This is a good resource to use for help:

<https://www.stompoutbullying.org/bullying-bystanders-become-upstanders>

## **ACTIVITY #2: This is a Cry for Help—Public Service Announcement or Brochure**

**Goal:** The students will understand how important it is to be involved in making everyone aware of mental health issues and substance abuse amongst their peers. They will create public service announcements or brochures to demonstrate the importance of not being silent when they realize their friends and peers are struggling.

Have students work in groups of no more than four to create a public service announcement (PSA) or brochure where they highlight instances in the book when it was clear that Aisha or her friends were in trouble, such as Neil and his struggles with substance abuse or Aisha and her long battle with her depersonalization disorder. Also, students will include what signs people can look out for when trying to help their friends, and who they can go to when seeking help.

Please include the following in this activity:

- Decide whether the group would prefer to create a PSA or a brochure.
- Use examples from the text that demonstrate struggles with mental health and substance abuse.
- Refer to instances where characters did not do the right thing (such as Aisha not confronting Neil about his drinking)
- Use examples of what people can do when trying to help their friends who are struggling with mental health issues and substance abuse.
- Cite examples of who and where people can turn to for help.

As a group, your students should include the following in their PSA or brochure:

- Overall goal or message of their video/brochure
- Important research and statistics to back up their message (research should include examples from the book as well as other sources)
- Images and other visuals
- Key message and ideas related to their overall goal should be clear to the audience.
- A clear call to action for the viewer/audience

Groups should be encouraged to share their PSA or brochure at the end of this activity.

Some sites and resources students can use for this activity:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9791-depersonalizationderealization-disorder>

### **ACTIVITY #3: Let's Talk About It!**

**Note:** Feel free to change this activity into format that you see fit. For instance, you may want to have students make this a podcast or YouTube episode.

**Goal:** The students will understand plot and character development throughout the course of the book, including character choices and relationships.

Have students break up into groups of no more than four people. In each group, students will create their own talk show in which they will highlight the book's characters and plot developments. Use the following "cue cards" and provide each group with the cue cards that they will focus on. Tell them they can create their own script and use whichever characters from the book that they would like to for the given card. One member of the group should act as the talk show host. Give the groups at least one planning session to create their talk show and then plan for at least two class periods for presentations and follow up discussions. You can use the discussion questions provided or feel free to create your own.

## Talk Show Cue Cards:

Sexual Assault of a  
Male

Eating Disorders in  
the World of Dance

Pressures of Black  
Females in the  
World of Dance

Being a Heterosexual  
Male in the Ballet  
World

Sexual Identity  
Development

## Discussion Questions:

- What was it like coming up with their talk show script and creating talking points around their topic/cue card?
- How did they pick the characters from the book that would be in the talk show?
- Why did they decide on those characters?
- Do they think these characters could have also worked well on another show/with another topic?
- What does it mean to have intersectionality?
- Did they relate to these characters when working on the talk show or watching another group?
- Which talk show did they feel like they connected with the most and why?
- Did they see themselves wanting to do another activity like this? Why or why not?
- What topic do they think could have/should have been added to this activity? Why or why not?

## AFTER READING THE BOOK

These activities inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

### ACTIVITY #1: Character Autobiography

**Goal:** The student will understand the character development of Aisha, Ollie, Neil, and/or any other character of their choosing throughout the course of the book.

Have the student write the jacket copy and summary (two to three paragraphs) from the perspective of one or two of the main characters from the book. The student should think about what those characters experienced throughout the course of the book and what they would write about in their “life story.” Consider the following questions to help with the autobiography:

- What were some of the main events that happened during this time period?
- Who were some of the significant people that they had relationships with during this time?

- How would this person describe their experiences?
- Why are some experiences more important than others?
- What are some of the hobbies that should be mentioned in their autobiography?
- How did bullying, abuse, or assault play a role in the character’s life?
- How did the character overcome issues with abuse, bullying, or assault?
- Does the character deal with mental health issues? How do they deal with them?
- What advice would the character give to others based on their experiences?

After writing the autobiography, have the student either draw a picture or find an image that the character would use on the front of their book.

To further this activity, encourage students to present to the class the image for the book cover and a quick summary of the autobiography.

## ACTIVITY #2: Story Map

Students can use any outlet for their Story Map; however, Google Slides, PowerPoint, or Prezi may be good tools to help them add more information. Their Story Map should include the following elements:

**Book Title:**

**Author:**

**Publication Year:**

**Main Characters & Cultural Information:** (what are the most important characteristics about the main characters? Include passions, what they want to “be” and any diversity/equity/inclusion information).

- Protagonist (hero):
- Antagonist (villain):
- Other Characters (including short descriptions of each character—be as specific as possible regarding culture & physical characteristics):

**Setting:** (make sure to include time and location—any important locations should be included with descriptive details that are significant to the story)

**Point of View/Perspective:** (is the story told from first person, third person, etc.):

**Plot Diagram:** (include a plot diagram—this might not be included until you finish the entire novel): The plot diagram should show the various rising actions, climax, falling actions, and the resolution.

**Theme(s):** What themes did they find in the book?

**Symbolism:** What symbols, metaphors, similes, etc. did they come across in the novel?

**Favorite Quotes and Page Numbers:** Pick their favorite quotes from the book that support their thoughts and ideas.

### ACTIVITY #3: Rewriting History

**Goal:** The student will understand how an individual's gender, race, sexual orientation, and ability impacts how others view them and how these social constructs can be a hinderance or obstacle. Have students choose one of their favorite scenes and rewrite it as if the main character Aisha, (and any other characters that they would like to include) is a different gender, race/ethnicity, age, has a different sexual orientation, and is possibly not able-bodied.

- Answer the following discussion questions: How does changing these elements impact the overall scene?
- Do they view Aisha or any other characters in a different way?
- Do they think the book would be different if these elements were completely changed?
- How would they view themselves or their friends if they were not the person they were or are?
- What did they gain from this activity?
- How might they think about others after completing this activity?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

These activities are only a start. They are designed to support the goal of helping students explore the story and their own creativity.

### ACTIVITY #1: After the Fact . . .

Ask students to consider what has happened to the main characters in the book (they can choose Aisha and Ollie, Aisha and Neil, or just Aisha, etc.) and write an epilogue as if it has been included in the book. What do students think happened to these characters after the last chapter? Are they living happily ever after? Does Aisha try out for the National Ballet School? Is she still seeing her therapist and working on her mental health? Are Aisha and Ollie still dating? What about Neil and his substance abuse? Is Neil taking care of himself and seeking counseling? How are the characters' relationships with their parents? Have students consider all of these questions and any of their own to write their epilogue.

### Activity #2: Retelling the Story

Have the students retell the story in a different format. They can rewrite what happens to the characters in a poem, play/movie, or a short story. Encourage students to focus on elements such as discrimination and mental health and come up with ways and strategies to overcome those issues in their retellings. Have students present and share their retellings to the class.

### Activity # 3: Debating the Issues

Have students break up into groups (no more than four people in each group). Give students topics such as bystanders or bullies, seeking help when they know a friend is abusing substances, seeking help for mental health issues, etc. Each group should be given a stance on the topic, such as seeking help for a friend who is abusing a substance is something you **MUST** do versus not seeking help for a friend who is abusing something. Each group should come up with four to five points to support their position. The groups will be given time to debate their viewpoint. They can add more or take-away topics. This activity should be connected to the relevant issues in the text, such as substance abuse, bullying, racism, discrimination, bystanders, sexual assault, eating disorders, etc.

### Activity # 4: Letter to the Author

Write to the author from the perspective of either as a student or one of the characters in the book. Ask questions about the book related to their own experiences. Have students share what they gained from reading the book and what they would like to know more about. If they are writing from the perspective of one of the characters, ask the author questions related to that character's storyline and motivations.

### Activity # 5: Eating Disorder Round Table

Invite speakers from community organizations that are experts on eating disorders. Websites such as the one below is a good resource for engaging qualified individuals to either conduct virtual visits or come into the class and share experiences, as well as answer questions students may have.

<https://www.hopewell.ca/community-education>

## FURTHER RESOURCES

<https://sheenasplace.org/>

<https://www.wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA>

<https://www.prevnet.ca/>

<https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/treatment-for-eating-disorders/international/canada/canadas-eating-disorder-organizations-charities>