



Discussion Questions

Calyssa Erb, Author

Questions by Sherri Richards,
Neurodivergent Elementary Educator

- This story is told by the character Maya, who is an autistic girl. What do you know about autism?
- Imagine that you had a rule book for every part of your day. Think of these rules as being based on everything from what you say to how you act. How do you think this would affect your daily life? Would you feel better or worse having to follow a rule, even when your feelings didn't match how you were acting? Write down your thoughts in a journal.
- Maya describes the rules her mom teaches her about what to do and what not to do as "instructions in my head, the lines of my script, like the actors do when they're on stage." Relate this back to the author's letter to the reader at the beginning of the book to discuss what it means for an autistic person to "mask." Think of a time when you might have needed to perform in order to feel as though you fit in during different social situations. How did that make you feel? Relate this to Maya's description of herself as Maya in Public.
- How does the author continue the theme of listening throughout Act 2, especially as it pertains to the relationships you explored in Act 1: Maya and her mom; Maya and Jules; Maya and Aislinn; Maya and Irene Brown. How do these relationships change positively?
- How does the descriptive detail offered in the text create a visual storyboard in the reader's mind? What scene from the book were you able to see vividly as a picture in your mind?
- There are no phone calls to anyone between scenes 3–8 in Act 2. Explore how this pause or silence between Maya and Jules affects the story. How does it uncover different aspects of the characters for Maya and Jules?
 - Who do you think becomes a better listener over the course of the story, Maya or Jules? Explain why and support your opinion with evidence from the text.
 - What do you think the novel would be like without the "calling" sections? What would it change about the story?
- Maya labels herself often throughout this story. "Maya in Public," "Maya the Assistant Director," and then just "Maya." How do these labels relate to the title of the book, *Maya Plays the Part*? Explore how the labels that are used by Maya and other characters in the story alter their view of Maya.
- During "The Curtain Call," Maya talks about how she envisions the end of "Maya in Public" at the end of *Maya Plays the Part*. How does Maya's acceptance of herself allow her to just be Maya?
- What word would you use to describe Maya's sense of belonging that she feels at the end of the book?

SHERRI RICHARDS is a neurodivergent elementary school educator in southeastern Ontario. In her 16-year career, she has taught neurodivergent students in both public and private school settings for 15 years and is also a parent to a neurodiverse child. Sherri has written education courses that support teaching neurodiverse students.