



Leggings Revolt

Monique Polak

Reading level: 4.8

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Book Summary

Eric and his buddies have left behind their all-boys school to attend high school with girls. Eager to find his place in this exciting new world, Eric joins the student life committee, unaware that he is expected to enforce the school's strict dress code. The dress code is particularly harsh on the girls he is keen to get to know. Eric finds this awkward, but it's nothing compared to the position he finds himself in when the whole school revolts.

Author Biography

Monique Polak has written many award-winning novels for youth, including the Orca Currents title *Hate Mail* and *Passover: Festival of Freedom*. She lives in Montreal, Quebec, where she teaches English and Humanities and also works as a freelance journalist.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Theme

To engage students with the main characters in *Leggings Revolt*, use the following questions as large group discussion topics, individual novel study, or paragraph-writing exercises:

1. Daisy tells Rowena that Eric doesn't view Daisy "as some kind of object" (ch. 3), and Eric promises to fight the dress code once he's on the Student Life Committee.
 - ◆ Do you think Eric really cares about the dress code, or is he more interested in impressing Daisy? (Eric often focuses on Daisy's clothes, smile, legs, bra straps.)
 - ◆ Later, Eric criticizes Martie, Rory, and Theo for treating girls like objects (ch. 14). What changed his mind?
2. At his first meeting with the Student Life Committee (ch. 8), Eric is told that "newbies...don't usually say much." The Committee appears to mostly enforce Mr. Germinato's rules. In what ways has the Committee changed by the end of the novel?
3. In chapter 9, Eric has to enforce the dress code in gym class. He's torn between doing what he's told to do by Mr. Germinato and impressing Daisy. He feels "trapped." Do you think it's fair that Daisy is angry with him for saying her shorts aren't "regulation"?
4. Miss Aubin says, "Sometimes the best way to effect change is from the inside" (ch. 8). How does Miss Aubin do this?

Prompt: She supports Eric; she sneaks fashionable clothes into the lost-and-found bin; she wears leggings at the Leggings Revolt.
5. An emerging theme in the novel is rules. How do different characters feel about rules?
 - ◆ Mrs. Fung said, "It does not matter whether the rule makes sense. What matters is that it is a rule" (ch. 13). Why do you think she feels this way?
 - ◆ In chapter 9, Eric asks, "isn't it easier to go along with the rules and not fight over every little thing?" How did Eric's feelings change through the rest of the novel?
 - ◆ In chapter 13, we learn about Marie Gérin-Lajoie, the namesake of Eric's high school. How did she feel about the rules around women voting (suffrage)?
 - ◆ Mr. Germinato said that all rules are "arbitrary" (ch. 12). Look up the definition of "arbitrary." Are the rules at your school arbitrary? Do they have purpose? Are they relevant?

The Writer's Craft

1. Rory, Phil, and Daisy are introduced in chapter 1. Ask students about their first impressions of these characters. Even though their descriptions are brief, what do we know, or sense, about them? Can we tell how Eric feels about them?
 - ◆ Rory: *Rory started weight lifting over the summer, and he is always looking for opportunities to show off his pecs.*
 - ◆ Phil says, *"There's more to life than girls...There's education...friendship. Artistic endeavors."*
 - ◆ Daisy: *I nearly crash into the most gorgeous girl I have ever seen. She has pale skin and*

shiny black hair, and she smells like grapefruit, only sweeter.

Invite students to write similar sentences describing Mr. Germinato, Miss Aubin, Mrs. Fung and Marie Gérin-Lajoie.

2. Foreshadowing is a literary device where the writer hints about things that later escalate or are resolved. An example is Rowena. Through most of the novel, she has strong opinions about the dress code but can't join the Student Life Committee or talk about her parents.
 - ♦ Follow the conversations between Rowena and Eric in chapters 7, 12, 13, and 15. What do we learn about Rowena with each conversation?
 - ♦ As you read these conversations, did you want to find out more about Rowena? Were you able to guess what her secret was?

Creative Writing, Vocabulary Enrichment

The vocabulary words below are in the context of Eric's experience with rules in high school.

arbitrary	detention	flagrant	regulations	uniforms
confiscated	enforced	prohibited	rules	violation
consequences	fashion	punishment	suspended	warning

Invite students to use the ideas below or explore the theme in their own way using some of the vocab words above.

- You're Mr. Germinato. You want students to stay focused on education. Write a speech for the next assembly. Can you convince the kids the dress code is a good idea?
- You're Rowena. Your Dad is really strict and doesn't understand your point of view when it comes to self expression and identity. Write a rap or slam poem that shows how you feel.
- You're a seventh grade student at Lajoie High School and you've been shadowing Eric because you really look up to him—and you've been live-tweeting all along. Write three tweets that tell Eric's story from your point of view.
- You're Marie Gérin-Lajoie. You're 16 years old and living in Quebec, Canada, in 1883. How do you feel about the rules regarding women voting?

Connecting to the Students

1. At Lajoie High School, there's a strict dress code aimed primarily at girls. Mr. Germinato said he doesn't want students "distract[ed]" (ch. 2). And Eric admits, "It *is* kind of distracting" (ch. 3). Ask students to reflect on this and then share insights in small groups. How do you feel about the dress code? Is it fair and reasonable, or unfair and sexist? Compare Mr. Germinato's reasoning with Rowena's:
 - ♦ *It shouldn't matter how a girl dresses. It's her choice. It's a guy's problem if he gets distracted by a girl's midriff or her cleavage.*
2. At Eric's last school, the students wore uniforms. Ask students to debate the pros and cons of wearing uniforms. Topics, to deepen understanding, include:
 - ♦ Think of organizations and professions where people wear uniforms. For example, police, workers in service industries, sports teams, marching bands, first responders. Why do they wear uniforms? What would happen if they didn't?

- ♦ Create and populate two lists: *for* and *against*.
Prompts: uniforms identify a group to others, are more practical than street clothes, and provide a sense of togetherness. But they don't enable individual expression and can leave people feeling disempowered.
 - ♦ In chapter 2, Mr. Germinato says "the focus at Lajoie is neither fashion nor fun. It is...education." Could wearing a uniform actually make student life easier and less stressful? Are fashions and fads a form of "uniforms" if everyone wears them? If students have to wear uniforms, should teachers and principals wear them too?
3. Consider Mr. Farrell's Life Sciences topic in chapter 5. He asks about parallels between the female baboon's reproductive signaling (the "hot-pink swollen rump") and society.
- ♦ In your "social circle," are there signals people use to attract others?
 - ♦ Rowena says clothes are about self-expression and identity, and not about impressing guys. Do you agree with her? Why or why not? What has been your experience?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

In chapter 4, Eric applies for Student Life Committee. Miss Aubin asks him to complete a questionnaire and write an essay explaining why he wants to join. Imagine that your school (or class, term, team, club, faith group, family, etc.) has a similar committee. Design four questions you would want for its application questionnaire and two essay questions. Then write a paragraph explaining why the questions you chose are important.

History

1. Marie Gérin-Lajoie (1867–1945) was an activist and advocate for social and political rights for women in Quebec, Canada. Ask students to find out more about Marie's life and work. Note her maiden name, Lacoste, and birthdate, October 19, so she is not confused with her daughter, a feminist and pioneering social worker, with the same name.
 - ♦ Throughout Marie's life, women in Quebec (and across North America) had very few rights. She fought for women's suffrage. What is suffrage and why was it important?
 - ♦ Imagine you're having lunch with Marie and comparing the experiences of women in North America today with women in Marie's time. Could Marie vote, own property, or pursue post-secondary education? What was her "everyday" life like?
2. A prominent theme in the novel is effecting change, even when strong authorities or systems do not support it. Miss Aubin says, "Sometimes the best way to effect change is from the inside" (ch. 8). Ask students to research examples of people who effected change even when it seemed impossible. Examples: Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Susan B. Anthony.

Personal Planning, Life Skills

Eric, Rory, and Phil face two big changes at the beginning of the novel: They start high school—and it is co-ed. Sometimes big changes can be fun but also challenging. Ask students to brainstorm changes they have faced and what has helped them cope. Explain that everyone experiences change differently, and what works for one person doesn't necessarily work for another.

Prompts:

- When my family moved, I wanted to know everything that was going to happen and when. I made a calendar and I wrote down what I had to do every day (sorting things for a garage sale, packing, updating contacts on my phone). That really helped.
- When I started high school, I didn't want to go there beforehand. That would've just made me more nervous. I was happy to show up on the first day with my friends.
- I was really upset when my older brother moved to another state to go to college. We hung out a lot before he left. I learned how to use Skype on the computer at the library. Now we Skype sometimes after school. Staying connected has made a big difference.
- I like talking with people who have been through the changes I'm going through. Before I started working at the food court at the mall, I asked my friend's older sister who works there what it's like.

Connecting to the Wider World

Students may feel they can't effect change while they're young and in school—that they can't “make history” like Eric and his friends. They will be interested to learn that the Leggings Revolt is similar to the history of Pink Shirt Day (Anti-Bullying Day in the United States), which is now celebrated every year all over the world.

In 2007, at a high school in Nova Scotia, Canada, two students, David Shepherd and Travis Price, noticed a male student being bullied for wearing a pink t-shirt. The next day David and Travis and a whole bunch of their friends came to school wearing pink shirts to demonstrate solidarity and to encourage others at their school to practice kindness and acceptance. They took a stand against bullying, and made a real difference.

Websites of Interest

www.biographi.ca/en/bio/lacoste_marie_17E.html

<http://dayofpink.org/2015/01/07/schools>