



**Chick: Lister**

Alex Van Tol

Reading level: 2.4

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**Book Summary**

Chick is a popular fourteen-year-old who is essentially on this earth to live up to his father's impossible expectations—at least, that's how he feels. This pressure is a grinding source of anxiety for him, which he copes with by making lists. He itemizes every aspect of his life, from his daily routine to the things that make him nervous. As the pressure of school and his budding romance with his debate teammate Audrey builds, his compulsion starts to feel impossible to control—or conceal.

**Author Biography**

**Alex Van Tol** grew up reading a wide range of books, from Enid Blyton to Stephen King. She taught middle school for eight years before making the switch to writing for a living. Alex lives in Victoria, British Columbia with her family. Alex has published numerous titles with Orca, including *Oracle* in the Orca Currents series.

**Connecting to the Text*****Character and Novel Study***

Use the following as group discussion topics, individual novel study or writing exercises:

- Chick writes lists to calm himself when he experiences stress and anxiety. He says, "It lets me feel like I have some control when things feel out of control" (ch. 9). Choose one of Chick's lists, either from chapters 4 or 7.
  - What emotions is he experiencing? (e.g., nervousness, anxiety, fear)
  - What is he experiencing physically? (e.g., sweaty palms, shaking, shortness of breath)
  - Can you identify triggers for Chick's anxiety or panic attacks? What seems to bring them about or aggravate them?
- In chapter 5, Chick describes his relationship with his father. Chick says, "For some reason, all of Dad's unfulfilled dreams are pinned squarely on me...I get scrutinized and criticized." Chick thinks that nothing he does and none of his choices are ever good enough for his dad.
  - Do you think this plays a role in Chick's mental health and his OCD?
 

**Prompt:** In chapter 8, Chick says, "Dad can never know about this. He would freak out if he knew his kid had something wrong with him."
  - Do you think Chick's dad lives vicariously through Chick? Why is this unhealthy for Chick—and his dad?
  - How do you feel about how Chick's mom responds to her husband's behavior toward Chick? If you could talk with her about that, what would you say?
- In chapter 9, Chick takes a big risk by telling Audrey about his compulsive list making. He assumes she will "run away screaming" and think he's a "whack job." How does Audrey react? Does she judge Chick and see him as a "freak" like he thought she would?

***Incorporating Vocabulary into Research & Writing Activities***

The words below are used in the novel in the context of Chick and Audrey in the debate club, primarily chapters 10 and 13.

argue	compete	podium	rebuttal
assertion	debate	persuade	research
audience	defeat	position	script
challenge	evidence	preparation	
conjecture	opposition	public speaking	

Invite students to learn more about how debate clubs work and the skills students gain through participation. Ideas for writing activities that incorporate the vocabulary include:

- When you're in a debate, each team knows the topic ahead of time. This is really important because...
- When you're in a debate, you may have to argue for or against something you may not personally believe. I wonder how I would feel if this topic came up...
- Being in a debate club would be a good opportunity to decide if you want to be a lawyer because you'd be able to...
- In a debate, teamwork is important because there is a lot of work to do before and during the debate. For example...
- The thing I find most interesting about debating is... The thing I might not like is...

### *Art and Service Projects*

As a way to connect creatively with the characters and themes in *Chick: Lister*, encourage students to choose from the ideas below or design their own art or service project. Students may wish to incorporate actual quotes into their projects.

- In chapter 10, Audrey says, "Who even knows what normal is? There is no such thing as *normal*." Chick felt relieved. She didn't judge or shame him. She accepted him as he is. Design a poster that talks about mental health for teens and includes resources.
- Audrey says, "Of course [your OCD] is weird. We're all weird" (ch. 10). Lots of people are okay with being different or weird. Create a funky collage of people being "weird." What are benefits of being "weird"? Share your artwork in places in your school with high visibility. How might it inspire creativity, personal freedom, artistic expression and diversity?
- Chick doesn't like debating and he doesn't want to be a lawyer, although his dad pressures him to do both. Audrey said, "Never concede defeat before you've even raised your sword" (ch. 10). Design, draw, sculpt or paint a sword for Chick and incorporate all of the words Chick wants to say to his father into your creation.
- Imagine Chick and Audrey as superheroes and Chick's dad as a villain. What name would each have, and what type of costume would capture their spirits best? Consider that Chick says, "The quieter he speaks, the more nervous I feel" (ch. 11).

### *Language Arts*

Chick uses lists to find equilibrium and also to communicate. In chapter 14, he uses a list to tell his father how he really feels. We use lists for all kinds of things. Can you imagine a world without them?

- What's your favorite home-cooked dish, appetizer or dessert? Research how recipes are written and share a recipe with the class. Recipes always start with a list of ingredients and are followed by instructions in a list format.

- Write a “top five” list for something you enjoy such as favorite songs, bands, books, movies, sports figures, celebrities, artists, etc. Write a sentence about each item that describes what you like about them. You could also try the opposite: a “top five” dislike list!
- Write a song, poem, rap or letter based on the format and style of Chick’s final list, “Things I’m Dying to Say to...Someone Who Needs to Hear Them” (ch. 14). What important things are you dying to say?
- Write a response to each of the items in Chick’s final list in the voice of Chick’s dad. Begin with *Number one: You don’t control my life. I control my life*, and go through the other four items on Chick’s list. For each, imagine what Chick’s dad would say to him at the beginning of the novel—and at the end. How might his responses be different?

### The Writer’s Craft

#### *Creating Images Using Metaphor and Simile*

Metaphors and similes connect ideas, giving us images that expand our understanding of situations and characters. Read the following examples from *Chick*: *Lister* aloud or write them for the group to read. After each, discuss the connection that is being made and how it lends meaning to the text (for example, tongue + cement = speak slowly; hard to speak):

- ch. 1      *Ab. There’s my tongue. Except it feels like it’s full of concrete.*
- ch. 6      *There it is, my heart roaring out of the gates, hammering like a tin roof in a rainstorm.*
- ch. 6      *My mind flies around like a gnat in a windstorm, desperate to land somewhere.*
- ch. 7      *I get my feet under me and stagger toward my room, a gorilla in an earth quake.*

Ask students to find five descriptive sentences in the novel that use metaphor or simile. Encourage students to draw a picture of the image being created. Be silly and creative!

### Connecting to the Curriculum

#### *History*

Ask students to choose a character’s name from the novel and find out two interesting things about it. They may wish to research their own name as well.

**Prompts:** *Where does the name originate, and what does it mean? Is it masculine or feminine, or both?* Be mindful that name origins vary and a range of answers may emerge. Examples include:

- *Audrey* is an English name that goes back to the Medieval age. It means “noble” and “strength.” It was once a name for boys and girls but these days it’s mainly for girls.
- *Finnian* comes from Old Irish. It means “white” or “fair.” It’s a boy’s name. In the novel, Finnian is Chick’s best friend. He plays rugby and girls think he’s cute.

- *Jazmin* is the Hungarian form of Jasmine, a fragrant flower used in perfumes and teas. In 2005 in the USA, 185 of every million baby girls were named Jazmin!
- *Tadeusz* is the Polish version of Thaddeus, a biblical name. It means “heart.” It’s pronounced, *Ta-DEY-oosh*.

### *Human Sciences*

Chick believes he has OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder. Ask students to research and write a short report on OCD, answering the following questions. Encourage students to interview a special education or resource teacher in your school or district.

- What behaviors characterize obsessive-compulsive disorder?
- What struggles may kids with OCD experience?
- What are some ways to treat OCD?
- If someone you know thought they had OCD, where could they go for help?
- Chick refers to himself as “schizo crazy pants,” a “total freak” and a “whack job” (ch. 9). Do you think this is a healthy self-image? What other terms could he use to describe himself?

### **Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration**

1. Writing lists helps Chick feel calm and get his anxiety “back in control” (ch. 1). Brainstorm healthy ways to relieve stress and anxiety. Challenge students to try out a method for a week. Ask students to share their experiences after the week. Possible options include:
  - ♦ Yoga
  - ♦ Running
  - ♦ Keeping a journal or drawing
  - ♦ Talking with a trusted friend or family member.
  - ♦ Listening to or playing music
2. Words below are used to describe how characters feel in the novel.

afraid	courageous	panicky	stressed-out
angry	desperate	relaxed	tense
anxious	frustrated	relieved	upset
calm	nervous	silly	worried

To help students increase or sharpen emotional intelligence skills, introduce an emotions wheel (sometimes called a feelings wheel or emotions color wheel). You may want to begin with a simple feelings wheel, with *excited*, *tender*, *scared*, *angry*, *sad* and *happy*; or utilize more sophisticated tools such as Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions or Parrott’s Emotions by Groups.

- ◆ Where do each of these emotions fall on an emotions wheel? Are there some words here that don't fit on the wheel? What emotion is the nearest fit?
- ◆ At the end of chapter 2, Chick says he's "squarely in the orange zone." What emotions are in this area of the Wheel of Emotions?
- ◆ Using an emotions wheel or chart, record your strong feelings for a week. How might naming our emotions help us anticipate and manage them, as Chick does?
- ◆ Use the wheel to find antonyms for the emotions listed, or other feelings you regularly experience.
- ◆ Take turns role playing body language and facial expressions for the emotions listed. Can others guess which emotion is being acted out?

### More Novels in the Orca Currents Series

The following novels share similar themes with *Chick: Lister* and Chick's experiences:

- In *Nine Doors* by Vicki Grant, Emery learns that his neighbor Marjorie has an anxiety disorder which makes it impossible for to leave her home. Emery and his friend Richard learn about this after a prank they play on homes in the neighborhood goes from fun to dangerous.
- In *The Shade* by K. L. Denman, Safira used to love swimming and being in the water, but things changed and now she doesn't want to swim at all. She experiences a terrifying panic attack while underwater at camp. Safira worries her dad is disappointed. She used to be a strong competitor and he was really proud of her.
- In *Mirror Image* by K. L. Denman, Sable is haunted by her constant feelings of doom and dread. She worries about a third World War, an attack by aliens, or a flu epidemic. She only wears black. When her art teacher pairs Sable and with cheerful, pink-wearing Lacey for their final project, the girls learn a lot about each other—and themselves.

### Web Resources

[www.ocdeducationstation.org/ocd-facts](http://www.ocdeducationstation.org/ocd-facts)

[www.ocdaction.org.uk](http://www.ocdaction.org.uk)

[www.bcdebate.org/starting-a-debate-club.html](http://www.bcdebate.org/starting-a-debate-club.html)

[www.ippf.idebate.org/about/debate/startclub](http://www.ippf.idebate.org/about/debate/startclub)