

Everyday Hero

Kathleen Cherry

Interest level: 9-12

9781459809826 PB

Themes: autism spectrum disorder, Asperger's syndrome, friendship, family, courage, compassion, comfort zone

Book Summary

Alice doesn't like noise, smells or strangers. She does like rules. Lots of rules. Nobody at her new school knows she has Asperger's, so it doesn't take long for her odd behavior to get her into trouble. When she meets Megan in detention, she doesn't know what to make of her. Megan doesn't smell, she's not terribly noisy, and she's not exactly a stranger, but is she a friend? Megan seems fearless to Alice—but also angry or maybe sad. Alice isn't sure which. When Megan decides to run away, Alice resolves to help her friend, no matter how many rules she has to break or how bad it makes her feel.

Author Biography

Kathleen Cherry lives in northern British Columbia with her husband and two daughters. She is a school counselor and is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in psychology. Kathleen loves working with children and empowering them to develop their creativity through writing. She enjoys visiting school classrooms and libraries. As well as writing, Kathleen also loves to run, travel and read. For more information, visit www.kathleencherry.ca.

Prereading Ideas

- Looking quickly at the cover of the book, what is your first impression?
- On the back cover, the copy begins with "What's normal, anyway?" What does that make you think of? Why? What is "normal" in your life?

Chapter One**Vocabulary**

accurate, competent, emphasized, observant, squelching

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Alice say that looking after her might be harder than looking after a typical kid?
2. What sort of things bother Alice?
3. Why do you think Alice's Dad hasn't given the school more information about Alice?

For Discussion

- Alice and many other people on the autism spectrum have sensory issues. What do we mean by sensory issues?
- Many people are bothered by noises, lights, sounds, smells and textures. Can you think of any time when you had a really strong positive or negative reaction to a sensory stimulus?

Author's Note

I once went to a hair salon and there was a flickering fluorescent light. It drove me so crazy I had to leave without my haircut!

Connecting to the Curriculum—Life Skills

The RAS—Reticular Activating System. The RAS is a mechanism for keeping the brain awake and alert. It is the brain's attention-focusing center. Sensory stimuli (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, taste) continually arrive via the spinal cord and are sorted and screened by the RAS. The sensory input deemed relevant by the RAS is routed to its appropriate destination in the conscious brain. What's irrelevant is blocked.

Alice says that she is hyper aware of stimuli. She has difficulty blocking out irrelevant stimuli. However, one of her coping strategies is to focus on one specific thing, e.g. counting or dictionary definitions.

We all have coping strategies and we can all “lose it” from time to time. What are some of your coping strategies?

Chapter Two**Vocabulary**

idiom, muted, amplified, molten, designation

Author's Note

My Mom came from Sheffield in England and she was the Queen of Idioms. (She also looked like the queen!) If she ever felt like she was wearing way too many clothes in winter, she'd say “I feel like a throttled earwig!”

Do you know any idioms that perhaps are unique to your culture?

Comprehension Questions

1. Why do you think Alice tells the teacher who wrote the note?
2. Why do you think Megan stands up for Alice?
3. Why does Alice think Megan has bad hand-eye co-ordination?

Connecting to the Curriculum—Creative Writing

The boy who writes the note and Alice would have very different perspective of the incident with the teacher. Rewrite the scene from the boy's point of view.

Chapter Three**Vocabulary**

clarity, intermittent

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Alice like Megan?

For Discussion

- What is normal?
- *The average in type, appearance, function, achievement and development.* This is the definition Alice finds for “normal.” Do you think it is a good definition? Do you know any people who are **not** average in type, appearance, function, achievement and development but are still pretty awesome?

Chapter Four**Vocabulary**

carousel, momentum

For Discussion

“You could ride, you know, when the fair opens,” Megan said.

I shook my head.

“Why not?”

“Because—because—you know...”

“What?”

“Asperger’s,” I said.

“So? My left foot’s bigger than my right. Doesn’t mean I can’t do stuff.”

- What does Megan mean when she mentions her left foot?
- Have you ever overcome your fear and done something that you didn’t know if you could do?

Chapter Five**Vocabulary**

punctuated, elongated

For Discussion

Alice has several strategies for coping when she is overwhelmed. For example, a mask to stop smells and looking down to cut down on visual stimulation.

Do you ever feel really bothered by noise? Bright lights? Textures? Crowds? How do you cope?

Author's Note

I have never gone to a really loud rock concert because I find it difficult to cope with really loud noises and, in particular, the vibration of the bass.

Chapter Six**Vocabulary**

rummage, pamphlet

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Alice say that she likes that Megan doesn't do things for gold stars?
2. Why does Megan say that she likes Alice?

For Discussion

Sometimes we can feel different things at the same time. How do you think Alice's Dad feels about Alice wanting to use social media?

Chapter Seven**Vocabulary**

Schizophrenic, linoleum

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Alice hit the boy at the locker?
2. Who do you think Alice's Dad might be talking to on the phone when she comes home?
3. What does Megan want Alice to do?

For Discussion

Alice likes rules. She finds it very difficult to break the rules. Do you think there are ever times when it's okay to break the rules? Why or why not?

Connecting to the Curriculum—Social Studies

Start a discussion about online safety. Have students look up basic rules for online security and personal safety. Compare and contrast the concept of digital safety with the concept of physical safety.

Chapter Eight

Vocabulary

omission

Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Alice so upset that her Dad had lied to the person on the phone?
2. What else does she think he might have lied about?

Chapter Nine

Vocabulary

vibration

Connecting to the Curriculum—Creative Writing

Alice is really upset in the bus station. Write the scene from another perspective. Maybe Megan's or a bystander.

Chapter Ten

Vocabulary

acquaintance, latter

For Discussion

Alice discusses body language. What is body language? What are all the different ways we communicate to others how we feel?

Chapter Eleven

Vocabulary

compulsion, buckled

Comprehension Questions

1. What happens in Starbucks? Why does Megan leave?
2. Why do you think Megan came back?
3. What is Megan's Mom's problem?

For Discussion

- Megan says she has no friends. Alice is confused because Megan has “good social skills.” What do we mean by “social skills”?
- Alice says that Megan has 201 friends on Facebook. Is having friends on social media the same as having friends in real life? Why or why not?

Chapter Twelve

Vocabulary

staccato

Comprehension Questions

1. How does Alice's Mom react to Alice? To Megan?
2. Why does Megan leave?

Chapter Thirteen**Vocabulary**

infinity, reverberating

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Grandpa think that Alice should go after Megan?
2. Why won't Alice let Megan get on the bus alone?
3. What does Alice learn about Megan's stepfather?

For Discussion

"You're braver than me. You're the bravest person I know. You're like a hero," Megan spoke the words in a rush.

- Why does Megan say this about Alice? Do you think it is true?
- Do you have someone in your life that you think is a hero?

Fiction Response Journal

After you read from your book, write down something about it and your reaction to it. Begin each response with the book title and the date of your journal entry. Then choose one or two of the following:

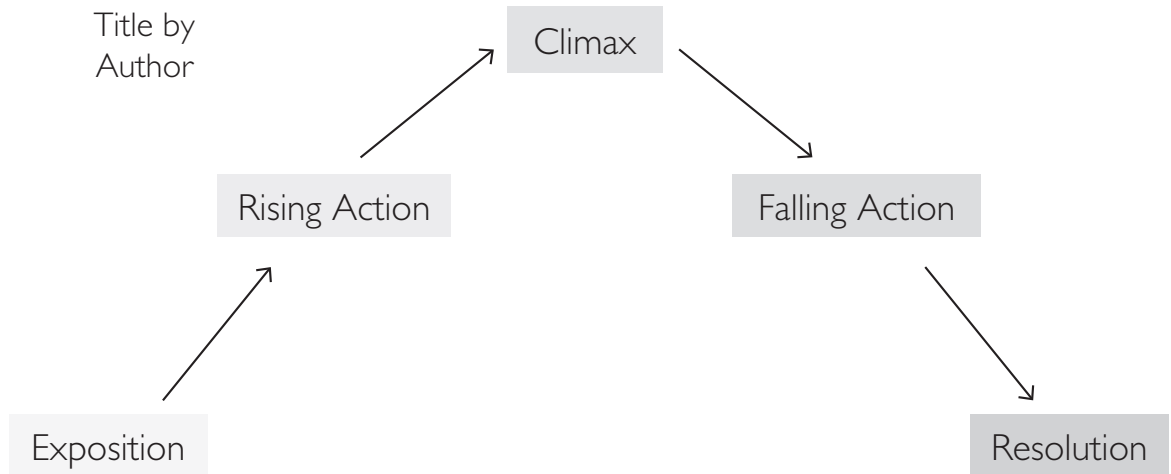
- Write about what happened in the story.
- Write down questions about things that confuse you or that you wonder about. (e.g. "I wonder why...?")
- Describe your feelings about the characters, setting or the events.
- Copy down a quote from a character and write why you think it's meaningful.
- Describe your favorite part. ("I like it when ___ because ___")
- Make a prediction about what will happen next. Explain why you feel this way. (I think ___ will happen next because ___)
- Describe a part that surprised you.
- Write a letter to the author or a character.
- Draw a picture or create a graphic organizer.

Small Group Projects

- **A Good Yarn**—Have students tape yarn to a wall to create a really big plot map, then write the important plot events on cards and post them at the appropriate places on their plot map.



Title by
Author



- **Life-Size Character**—Have students in a group trace around one person to create a life-size character shape on bulletin board paper. After drawing in the character's features and clothing, the group writes in character traits around their person, adding details from the story to support their choice of each trait.
- **Big Themes, Mini-Book**—In small groups, have students divide up the important themes from the story and work together to create pages for a booklet explaining each of the story's main themes.