



TWO-RING CIRCUS TEACHER'S GUIDE



25 PAGES OF IDEAS

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THE CIRCUS AT THE END OF THE SEA

Teacher's Guide: Two-Ring Circus Version

Note to the teacher: Possible student responses are shown in parentheses; information for the teacher is shown in brackets.

Literary elements, reading skills, and thinking skills terms are shown in italics.



PART ONE

27 Chapters of Activities

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PART TWO

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PART ONE



27 Chapters of Activities

CHAPTER 1

SETTING THE STAGE

Introducing the book cover

1. Why is the design of a book cover so important? (A book cover creates the first impression on its potential readers. It is also designed to catch the potential reader's attention and create enough interest in what's inside that they'll want to read the book.)
2. What part of a book cover is usually the first thing to catch someone's attention? (the illustration) What can you usually tell from the illustration? (what the book might be about)
3. What other things are usually found on a book cover that might help someone decide whether this is a book they'd like to read? (the title and any subtitle, a short blurb about the book, a short biography and photo of the author, possibly the price)
4. What else might you find on a book cover? (publisher's name, testimonials, a teaser, ISBN number, any awards the author or the book might have received)
5. Looking at the title and the illustration on the cover of *The Circus at the End of the Sea*, what do you think this story will be like?

Maddy's Diary/Journal (see assignment details following Chapter 1 follow-up questions)

If you have chosen to assign Maddy's diary/journal to your students, this would be a good time to introduce this assignment. Before each chapter, calling on a few students to share their entries will serve as an effective review before moving on to the next chapter. If there's time, occasionally have the class compare their entries for the previous chapter in order to see how they're the same (*summarizing, identifying the most important story elements*) and identify and discuss any differences (e.g., *critical elements* to drive the story forward vs. *details* to fill out the story and make it more interesting).

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. Who is the main character? How can you tell? What do you know about her so far? (*character*)
2. Describe the setting. What can you find in the text of the story that helped you come to these conclusions? (*setting*)
3. Maddy felt she was always the "weird new kid." What might have made her feel that way? Have you ever felt like that? Under what circumstances? Were you able to move past that? If so, how?
4. What does it mean if someone is a "natural" at doing something? (Possible response: learning it seems to come easily to them.) If something seems to come easily to someone, does it mean they were born with special abilities? (Possible response: They might be born with the ability to learn something more easily than many others, but, if they want to be able to use that special ability, they'll still need to work to develop it.)

Think of your favorite musicians, artists, athletes, and so on. How did they become excellent at what they do? (Possible responses:

lots of practice and determination; the ability to learn from the times things didn't work out the way they had hoped or planned; the ability to ask for help and listen to and consider advice)

5. What has Maddy always wanted to do? (follow the magic she sees) The author uses the word "magic" throughout the chapter. What does magic mean the way it's used in this story? (in this story, magic refers to things that don't fit in with our experience of what's real.)

6. Find some examples of magic throughout the chapter. What clues did you use to classify these examples as "magic"? (Possible responses: the sense of being pulled toward something; the unexplained stalling of the bus and then the unexplained way it started up again; the fog's removing Maddy's name from the bus driver's list and also making everyone forget Maddy had even been on the bus; the unusual cat with the strange eyes; the midnight blue writing on the wall and next to her skateboard: *why not?* and *you are here*; the painted bunny eyes that watched her as she moved down the street)

EXTENSIONS

Maddy's Diary (ongoing assignment for all chapters)

Summarizing, putting oneself into the character's shoes, writing in the first person

Create a journal or diary for Maddy, where you will be writing a 1-2-paragraph entry for each chapter of the book. Instead of a date, write the chapter number at the top of each entry. Some diary entries will be short and some longer, but be sure to include the most important parts and be sure to write in *first person*.

Things to consider including:

- What were Maddy's hopes or plans at that time? If they were resolved in that chapter, how did they turn out?
- What events or interactions occurred that might have been important to Maddy?
- How did she feel about them?
- What did she think about them?
- How did these events or interactions affect Maddy's choices?
- What might Maddy have been confused about?
- How might she have felt about the outcomes of some of her choices?
- Where did important events take place? Describe these scenes and what objects, people, or animals might have been in them. Include any *sensory* descriptions that might have been important to the scene.
- Whom did Maddy meet in the chapter? Briefly describe them. How did she feel about them when she met them? (In later diary entries, you might want to write about any changes in the way Maddy felt about them.)

Personal Mural: There are many murals painted on the walls of buildings in Venice, California. If you could paint a mural on an inside or outside wall of where you live, what would it be like? Describe it in detail in writing then draw or paint a picture of it on paper.

CHAPTER 2

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. At some point, Maddy started to realize that she might be the only person seeing or experiencing certain things. What were some of those things that Maddy saw or experienced? How had other people responded to Maddy when she told them about some of these unusual events? Have you ever had someone not believe you when you told the truth? Why might that have happened?

2. Maddy saw a mural that contained an animal that looked like a cross between a cheetah, a wolf, and a unicorn. What might that animal have looked like? What could this new animal be named? What might have been some of its characteristics? (*synthesis*)

3. What were a few of the *sensory* descriptions you found in Chapter 2? Examples:

Seeing: golden butterfly, the description of Maddy's bracelet, the mural, "shimmery"

Hearing: drumbeats, skateboard rhythm going across cracks in the sidewalk

Feeling: hot sand oozing between Maddy's toes, the silver bracelet on her wrist, the breeze on her skin

Smelling: sunblock and sweat

Tasting: no mentions in this chapter

4. Which senses seemed to have the most examples? (seeing, hearing) Which the least? (tasting, which had no mentions in this chapter) Why do you think that might be? (Seeing and hearing are the senses we use the most and are the easiest to describe; tasting is very difficult to describe. Also, there was nothing for Maddy to taste in this chapter.)

5. Were the sensory descriptions important to the plot? (no) Why do you think the author included them if they weren't important to the plot? (to help readers imagine what Maddy was experiencing or feel as if they are right there on the scene)

EXTENSIONS

Share maps and a brief history of Venice Beach with the class: location of Venice Beach (U.S. map, California map, Los Angeles map; larger-scale map showing Venice Beach and Venice Canals); compare how much detail is shown on each map, depending on its *scale*; brief history of Venice Beach and the Venice Canals (see Author's Note at the end of the book)

Short writing activity: As you read Chapter 2, try to identify the paragraph that helps build the sense of excitement (*mood*) at the drum circle. ("The rhythm rose. Someone shouted. Someone else blew a whistle, shrilly, three times.") What technique does the author use in this paragraph to help build the sense of excitement? (The sentences are very short.) Try rewriting the same paragraph into a single sentence and compare the feeling each paragraph gives.

Hybrid animals: Near the beginning of the book, Maddy skateboards past a mural of an animal that looked like a cross between a cheetah, a wolf, and a unicorn. [hybrid: made up of mixed parts]

Directions to students:

The class is going to get to make an illustrated book of imaginary but realistic creatures.

Each of you will get to make an 8 1/2" x 11" full-page illustration for our new classroom book.

For this illustration, pick two or three real animals and combine features from each into a new, imaginary animal. (If you

prefer, you may combine an animal with an inanimate object.)

Using parts of the names of the real animals, name this imaginary animal. (examples: frog + fox could be a **frox**; skunk + hyena could be a *skyena*)

On your poster, create an illustration of your new animal creation in its natural environment and add both a title and a paragraph in which you describe the animal's characteristics, its environment, what it eats, any enemies, its interesting habits, any special and/or unusual abilities, and so forth. Use your imagination, but base this on what you already know or can learn about the animals you combine (for example, crossing a giraffe with a fish might allow your hybrid animal to swim and to eat the leaves at the top of a tree, but it won't be able to fly).

Fun Follow-Up: Using details from your poster, write a short, fictional story with your hybrid animal as the main character. If you'd like, include yourself as one of the characters.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW / SETTING THE STAGE

What were some of the magical elements in the previous chapter, Chapter 2? Why might you feel they're magical? (Possible responses: they don't happen in real life; they're impossible.)

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. What events moved the action forward in this chapter?
2. Maddy asks one of the sand dancers whether the dancers were "real," and the lead sand dancer, Josi, tells her to define "real." "Real" is a very common word; why do you think Josi asked Maddy for a definition? (Sometimes words can mean different things to different people; "real" in a magical circus might be different from "real" in the rest of Maddy's life; what we think of as "real" or "not real" might not always be accurate.)
3. Describe what happened just as the huge wave was about to crash over Maddy. (It turned to glitter.) What was your response when you read that? (surprise; it was unexpected; relief; the unexpectedness of it broke the suspense caused by thinking Maddy might be injured or washed out to sea by the huge wave)
4. If you were able to figure out what *Il Circo delle Strade* translates to even though you don't speak Italian, how did you do this? (For nonbilingual students, they might have noticed that "Circo" is similar to "circus" and "Strade" is very close to street; they might also have remembered the title of the book, which contains the word "circus." These word pairs are called *cognates*. For students who speak any of the Romance languages, they might have noticed that the similarity to their own language helped them translate much more easily. You can point out that all of today's "Romance" languages are similar because they all evolved from the Latin spoken by the Ancient Romans, which is why they're called *Romance* languages, and has nothing to do with emotional "romance.")

EXTENSION

Audio Theater: This would be an excellent chapter for students to read aloud with expression, using key words and context from the chapter as clues to how each character would express himself or herself. This activity would need the characters of Maddy, Josi, Emmon, and “a voice.” The other members of the class could take turns reading the narration aloud, with each person taking a paragraph. Be sure to also either appoint a small sound effects group or let the entire class have fun with the sound effects at the appropriate times. Whichever arrangement is used, the students doing sound effects will need to read slightly ahead in order to come in at the appropriate times. Note: You can find an audio recording of the author reading this chapter, with sound effects, on the home page and in the Educators section of her website: <https://lorirsnnyderauthor.com>.

CHAPTER 4

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. [Ask a student to read aloud *with expression* the first 8 paragraphs or so of Chapter 4.] Using this read-aloud as a guide, describe the seagull’s personality and describe what clued you in (*inferring*). (Possible responses: bossy, silly, impatient, funny, critical, insensitive, lazy)
2. What is a muse? (someone or something, real or imagined, who is the direct or indirect source of creative ideas – inspiration – for someone else)
3. When Maddy offered to help save the circus, why was this out of character for her? (Maddy had learned at the group homes that acting as if you care about things sometimes gives other people a way to be mean to you; also, she doesn’t like to be the center of attention and so doesn’t do things that draw attention to herself.)
4. The circus was once highly successful and drew in a big audience. What happened to bring it to the point that the Ringmaster left, Vanessa started fading away, the audience stopped coming, and the circus started failing? (Various things started going wrong, and the circus was getting boring. No one was sure exactly why.)
5. Why weren’t all the other people who were part of the circus actively trying to save it? (Possible responses: each had a binding – a type of magical contract – with the circus, which meant they agreed to follow the Ringmaster’s rules, and he didn’t want help saving the circus; because they felt it was the Ringmaster’s responsibility and not theirs)

EXTENSIONS

Circuses and carnivals: Have small cooperative learning group research and share about a circus and/or carnival that’s current today, including their histories; similarities and differences between circuses and carnivals; types of buildings or tents; costumes; specific features such as acts in the big top, side shows, carnival rides, food or merchandise vendors, animal acts/training, etc. Make small posters of the features, including printed captions, and either present them orally to the class or display all the posters on a class bulletin board. This activity can be expanded to making a classroom tabletop scale model of a circus or carnival. (See Chapter 7 for this extension.)

Examples of small group projects: Circuses and carnivals

- Research and share the history of circuses or carnivals, including differentiating the two and/or comparing various types of circuses around the world.
- Research and share the music or art associated with circuses or carnivals.
- Students might want to set up, decorate, and run carnival game booths incorporating P.E. skills for their own class or for a primary class (e.g., beanbag toss, walking a balance beam, balancing a beanbag on their head, or other games of skill).
- Students can work up other projects, such as writing a script for a news feature or a “coming attractions” commercial for a fictional circus or carnival and then making a video of it with or without costumes or props.

CHAPTER 5

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, reading skills, thinking skills

1. “Vanessa took Maddy’s hand and looked at her bracelet. ‘It’s not one of ours,’ she said.” Why should it matter whether Maddy’s bracelet is a binding from Il Circo delle Strade? (If the bracelet was a binding to Il Circo delle Strade, then Maddy wouldn’t have been able to go against the Ringmaster’s wishes, meaning she wouldn’t have been able to even look for him.)
2. What happened when Vanessa cried? (Her tears were tiny octopuses.)
3. Everyone stared at Maddy when she entered the circus’s cafe. Why? (Possible responses: she was a stranger; she had lit the marquee; she had an octopus riding on her shoulder) How might this have made Maddy feel? How did she handle it?
4. What does it mean when the marquee lights? (A new circus show is about to start.) Why did Josi, the lead sand dancer, become angry at Maddy when the marquee lighted? (She thought Maddy had intentionally lighted it, which would signal a new show – but that would be going against the Ringmaster’s wishes.)
5. Adela, the chainsaw lady, has a fading tattoo of Kuma on her shoulder. What does the tattoo mean? (It symbolizes her binding to the circus.) What did Adela say was causing the tattoo to fade? (It was fading because her commitment to the circus was starting to waver; also both Adela and her chainsaw, Edith, were bored.) What does it mean to be bored? What might cause someone to feel bored? What can people do so they don’t get bored?
6. Who is Kuma? (the huge flying lion) Describe him. (copper wings, topaz eyes as large as dinner plates, loyal to the Ringmaster, needs to be out in the sunshine and open places) Is this his first appearance in the story? (No, he was the large cat Maddy saw near the beginning.) What role do you think he might go on to play in this story?
7. You’ve read five chapters so far. What do you think will be the main problem(s), i.e., *conflict*, in the story? (saving the circus; Maddy’s finding out who she is and where she belongs) What do you think will have to occur to solve the main problem(s)? (Maddy will need to find and bring back the Ringmaster to save the circus.)

EXTENSIONS

Sidekicks (creative writing): Define “sidekick” (a loyal, trustworthy companion who, in a story, plays a significant but secondary role and helps move the plot along). So far in this story, at least two sidekicks have made their appearances. Who are they and to whom is each attached? (Ophelia, the mimic octopus, is with Maddy; Kuma, the flying lion, is with the Ringmaster; Edith, the chainsaw, has just been introduced, so we don’t yet know the relationship between Edith and Adela.)

On the board, create two columns: *Realistic* and *Fantasy*, with realistic being defined as “true to life.” Have the class brainstorm fictional and nonfictional characters who had a sidekick-type relationship such as Maddy has with Ophelia.

As the class brainstorms, write the name of each character, along with that of their sidekick, in the appropriate column. Which sidekicks had special talents or powers? How did they use them?

Assignment, Part 1: Creating the perfect sidekick

If you could have a sidekick, either realistic or fantasy, describe the sidekick you’d like. Make up your own; do not pick one that somebody else, either real or fantasy, already has. What would you name your sidekick? What would their skills or powers be? Where would your sidekick live? What would your relationship be like? How would each of you benefit from your relationship?

Assignment, Part 2: Creative writing

Using your imagination and assuming you have had your sidekick for two years already, write a 1-2-page story* about your meeting and the adventures you and your sidekick experienced during those two years. [Whole-class activity: brainstorm and list types of information students might include.] Make a poster and/or model to use when you introduce your sidekick to the class.

*Or create a short graphic novel or puppet show or video

CHAPTER 6

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. Maddy made a hard decision in this chapter. What was it? (whether to ride the Race Thru the Clouds) What made it such a hard decision? (She hated roller coasters and she wasn’t supposed to go on rides like that because of her heart condition.) Why do you think she decided the way she did? Do you agree or disagree with Maddy’s decision? Explain.
2. When Annie asked Maddy, “Who are you?” why did Maddy have no idea how to answer? (Maddy doesn’t know her parents or anything about her background, and doesn’t yet have a good feel for who she is.) [This whole story is Maddy’s search for her identity.]
3. When Maddy puts on Vanessa’s leg warmers, she wears them the same way Vanessa had. What did Ophelia do right after Maddy put on the leg warmers, and why? (“Ophelia turned the bottom half of each tentacle a matching soft blue” because, just as Maddy had wanted to dress like Vanessa, Ophelia wanted to “dress” like Maddy.) (*inferring*)

CHAPTER 7

REVIEW / SETTING THE STAGE

1. *Suspension of disbelief*: When we willingly and knowingly decide to pretend something unreal or impossible in a story is true so that we can enjoy that story. All fantasy, science fiction, and other speculative fiction requires a suspension of disbelief. Is this the same as the reader actually believing the unreal or impossible parts are real? (no)

What things have you come across so far in the story that are actually unreal or impossible?

Why does the author include them if they're unreal or impossible? (Fantasy and science fiction, by definition, are stories of things that aren't in our everyday world. Also, there's a difference between "not real" and "not true." No fiction is "real," but all good fiction reflects truth.)

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. The carny in charge of the *Race Thru the Clouds* asks Maddy what her talent was. What is a talent? (A talent is an ability a person is born with that will help them learn something easily.)

2. Without naming names, what are some of the talents people you know or know of have? [Consider appointing two students to take turns listing talents on the board as the class generates responses.]

3. People are born with different talents, such as being able to learn languages or music easily, or how to get along well with others. However, having a talent matters only if a person works to develop and use it. Considering that a natural talent or skill isn't enough by itself to make someone successful at something, how might the people you listed have become very good at what they do? (Possible responses: time, effort, learning from failure, not giving up, asking for advice or help)

4. What were Maddy's three fondest wishes? (a home, a family, a place to belong; finding the Ringmaster was a wish of lesser importance)

5. At the end of the chapter, when it's time for Maddy to say out loud where she wants to go, she is very proud of herself for remembering to add the part asking for the Ringmaster of *Il Circo delle Strade* and not the Ringmaster of a different circus. This was immediately followed in the story by "Unfortunately, there were other parts she didn't think to add." What can you infer from this last little bit? (that later in the story Maddy will run into trouble because her directions were not as detailed or specific as they should have been) (*foreshadowing*)

EXTENSIONS

Miniature tabletop circus (extension of Chapter 4's Circus and Carnivals activity): If time allows, the entire class can create a miniature tabletop circus using small cardboard boxes, paper sculpture, fabric, cut-outs, etc., *using a predetermined scale*. The grounds of the circus, including walkways, can be painted on a large piece of butcher paper before all the booths and tents are arranged on it.

Personal talents and skills (homework; may be started in class): Create columns for four lists: In List #1, list all the talents and skills you have or are working on developing. Then, show List #1 to family members and friends and ask them what other talents or skills they think you have or are working on developing, and write those in List #2. For List #3, make a list of other talents and skills you hope to have developed by the time you are grown up. Then, show List #3 to family members and friends, ask what they think you should add, and write those in List #4.

CHAPTER 8

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. Skeeter Chen comes back into the story in this chapter. Who is Skeeter Chen? (The boy with the skateboard) Describe Skeeter's personality. (helpful, caring, not shy, confident, proud of being the Fastest Boy on Wheels, likes to show off and admits it, good sport) What clues in the chapter helped you understand Skeeter's personality? (*inferring*)
2. Does the author tell you directly what Skeeter is like, or does she show you? Go back into the chapter to find clues to support your responses. (The author uses Skeeter's actions and what he says – i.e., *dialogue* – to show what kind of person he is instead of simply telling the reader.) This is what is meant by "*Show, don't tell.*" Which do you find more interesting as a reader: being told something by the narrator, or being shown the same thing by what the characters do or say and how they do or say it? Why?
3. During Skeeter Chen's dramatic announcement of the race, he refers to Maddy as Octogirl. Why do you think he calls her this? (Because she has an octopus with her and he likes making things dramatic, so he played on that to give her a nickname; also, he might feel friendly toward Maddy) How does Maddy feel about being called Octogirl? Why?

CHAPTER 9

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. After Maddy and Ophelia dropped into the canal, what were some of Maddy's first thoughts? (that Ophelia was safe and that she herself would also be safe since the water was so shallow)
2. How did Maddy's plan to simply stand up on the bottom of the canal up work out? (not that well; there was no bottom to find)
3. How did Maddy get out of her predicament? (Vanessa's magic leg warmers covered Maddy's face and enabled her to breathe and to see clearly through the murky water, and then they pushed her straight down toward an opening that dropped her out of the water and into the sky.)
4. After Maddy and Ophelia fell out of the canal and into the sky, what happened? (The leg warmers dropped them onto the roof of an enclosed bridge, which they then fell into.)
5. What happened to Maddy on the cold floor of the stone bridge? (She became completely filled with all kinds of doubts about herself and her self-worth.) Why do you think this happened?
6. Up to this point in the story, what characters have been there for Maddy, supporting her in one way or another – or would probably be there to support her if she needed it? What makes you think so? (the bus driver, Waterfall T, Kuma, Skeeter Chen, Vanessa, Ophelia, Isabette, Annie the Ballerina Clown, Barton the carny, the rabbits from the mural) Even though Ophelia is not a human, can she be considered to be a character? Explain your answer.

CHAPTER 10

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. What new characters appear in this chapter? (Isabelle, the cranky mermaid who is in charge of all the waterways; the ducks; a man with purple shoes wearing a beautifully tailored suit)
2. What characters reappear from previous chapters, and what more, if anything, do you now know about them? (the carny, who we now know is called Barton, seems supportive of Maddy here)
3. Who would like to try reading the paragraph beginning with "That was not *some* bridge..." out loud the way Isabelle would have said it? (*reading with expression*)
4. Who do you think the man wearing the purple shoes and the beautifully tailored suit is? (the Ringmaster—*predicting*) What makes you think so? Could this turn out to be someone else? If so, who else might it be?

CHAPTER 11

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. When Maddy starts to tell the Ringmaster what she went through to find him, he stops her, puts his hands over his ears, and says, "That is a *terrible* way to tell a story." How did Maddy's way of telling her story compare to that of the Ringmaster's? (Maddy wanted to tell her story in the fastest, most direct way, but the Ringmaster thinks every story should be performed, like a show.) Which way do you think is the right way? (Either or both, depending on the purpose of the story.) When would you want to tell a story Maddy's way? When would you want to tell a story the Ringmaster's way? (*story-telling style*)
2. The Ringmaster offered Maddy *beignets* (ben-YAY) for dessert. *Beignets* is a word you might not have come across before. If you didn't know what it means, what are some of the ways you could find out? (Possible responses: looking in a dictionary; using context from the story; asking someone; checking Maddy's Magic Dictionary on the author's website) (*using context; reference skills*)
3. Describe the Ringmaster's personality (loyal, takes his responsibilities very seriously, very dramatic, loves storytelling, likes to be the center of attention, is all "dazzle and flash," probably not very fatherly, etc.)
4. When the Ringmaster became the Ringmaster, he swore to protect the circus with all his being, all his magic, and all his everything. What does it mean to swear to do something? (to promise to do it) What does promising something mean?
5. The Ringmaster felt it was his job as leader to protect the circus and the circus workers. The circus workers counted on him to protect them and the circus and waited for him to do it. What is your opinion of this arrangement and why? (Possible responses: having all the responsibility might have been very hard on the Ringmaster; no single person has all the answers and, even if one person is leading the effort, others might also have some good ideas; one person doing all the work while the others wait for results doesn't seem fair; the circus workers were keeping their promises to follow the Ringmaster's request that no one find him; not everyone wants or is able to help; some people would really rather do all the work themselves, etc.)

6. Whose job is it to protect other people? (Possible responses: everybody's, to the best of their ability; people who are hired or elected to do it)
7. When Maddy thought to herself that "This is my life, like it or not. These are the cards I was dealt," what did she mean?

CHAPTER 12

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. After the Ringmaster tells Maddy that he was not her father and did not know her parents, how did Maddy's feelings change? (from feeling happy at possibly finding her parents to feeling unwanted; from her new feeling of hope back to sadness and not knowing who she was or where she belonged)
2. What does Maddy's bracelet mean to her? (It feels like a link to her parents; it makes her feel special and as if she had something all her own; it feels magical. Yet, she might still want the choice of being able to remove it someday.)
3. Describe Ophelia. (a mimic octopus, can become many different shapes and colors, friendly, caring, helpful, watches over Maddy, comes up with creative solutions to problems)
4. When Maddy was ready to enter the Heart at the End of the World, the Ringmaster says, "Break a leg," which is what is traditionally said to a performer to wish them good luck on stage. Maddy responds with, "It's not a show." What did she mean by this? (that it's real life and not make-believe or a performance, so there would be real consequences)
5. In response to Maddy's comment, the Ringmaster said, "My dear girl, *everything's a show.*" What did he mean? What do you think this shows about his view of life and relationships?

CHAPTER 13

REVIEW / SETTING THE STAGE

It seems as though Maddy is about to enter the Heart. What do think that experience might look and feel like? (*predicting*)

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. After Maddy walks into the Heart at the End of the World, she starts hearing the sound of the ocean and then notices salt water sloshing into the tunnel. What was the *surprise twist* in the story at this point? (Isabette appeared and Maddy found herself back in the Venice canal instead of in the Heart.)
2. How did Maddy feel when she learned that Skeeter had been looking for her? (wonderful, as if someone cared about her and wanted to spend time with her)

3. How are the daytime and nighttime circuses different from each other? (The crowds are different: during the day the circus is spread throughout the city, so there's room for the audience and the performers to have space between them; the night circus is not spread throughout the city but is all in one small space, so the audience and performers are mixed together; kids aren't allowed at the nighttime circus. The nighttime circus is also wilder and more frightening.)

4. One *theme* that runs through this story is choice. How was this theme shown in this chapter? What details in the text can you cite to support your conclusion?

CHAPTER 14

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. What was meant by Dov-who-was-not-Dov? (He seemed to be Dov at first, but when Maddy and Skeeter looked more closely, there were things about him that didn't seem the same.)

2. Who else seemed to have changed? (Barton, the carny, was no longer jolly and boisterous; the sand dancers had become unrestrained and wild and their appearance had changed into something frightening; and Josi was actually courteous to Maddy.)

3. Maddy was learning to accept situations she didn't like. What does this mean? Why might people need to accept some things they don't like? Can you give examples of things someone might have to accept even though they don't like them?

4. Josi tells Maddy she still doesn't like her, but that she is helping because, "Some things are bigger than any of us." What did she mean by this?

CHAPTER 15

REVIEW / SETTING THE STAGE

What did it take for Maddy and Skeeter to go to the nighttime circus? (bravery, an open mind, being willing to try, each other's support)

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. What does the nighttime muse mean when she says, "Many faces, one self"? (Each of us has many different sides, and all of those sides combine to make a full, complex human; none of us is only one thing; different sides of us might be seen in different circumstances, but all those things go into making up who we are.) Give examples of how somebody can be one person but have many sides.

2. When the nighttime muse vanished after telling Maddy and Skeeter they were safe, Maddy and Skeeter "...started to laugh. Soon they were laughing so hard they collapsed onto the wet sand, which made them laugh even more. Maddy wasn't sure why, exactly, just that it was such a relief. They had walked through the nighttime circus and they were still here, together, safe and

sound." What were they feeling such a relief from? (tension, nerves, fear, apprehension, confusion, possibly feeling they were in a dangerous situation) What might relief like this feel like?

3. While Skeeter slept, Maddy was treated to the stars and galaxies, billions of miles away, putting on a show of acrobatics. As you were reading this portion of the chapter, what were you seeing in your mind? Were you able to form a strong image of it? Are you still able to picture it in your mind? If so, why might this be? (because the author used words that help create strong *imagery* in our minds, *sensory* words that help us imagine the scene) If you drew or painted or made an animation of this scene, what would you make it look like?

EXTENSION

Cosmic acrobatics: Draw or paint the scene where the stars and galaxies are putting on a show of acrobatics. Using complete sentences, add a one-paragraph caption to your poster. Other options: Write a poem or song lyrics about this scene.

CHAPTER 16

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. What did Skeeter mean when he said he had only a "sort-of binding"? (His tattoo was a kids' version of the binding tattoo so he could feel as if he belonged.)
2. Skeeter brought funnel cakes for his and Maddy's breakfast. Where do you think he got them? What evidence (clues) can you find in the chapter that the funnel cakes came from the circus? ("Breakfast? Funnel cakes with raspberry jam. It's an *Il Circo* specialty.") Does this passage actually say the funnel cakes came from the circus? (No, it's implied by the words in such a way that the reader infers that they probably did come from the circus.) What's the difference between *evidence* and *proof*? (Evidence means clues or hints; proof shows that something is a fact or known for sure. Proof comes when the evidence leads to a conclusion that can't be questioned.)
3. What did Maddy, Skeeter, and Ophelia find they all have in common? (They were all living on their own without parents.) (*comparing*) How were their situations different from each other? (Maddy never knew her parents; Skeeter was taken from his mother because she wasn't able to take good care of him; and an octopus's mother dies when its babies hatch, so having a mother isn't part of an octopus' expectations – but, in this fantasy story, Ophelia was created from one of Vanessa's tears and not from an octopus egg, so she might consider Vanessa a kind-of mother.) (*comparing, contrasting*)

EXTENSION

Bridges: The ancient Bridge of Sighs, which in the real world is in Venice, Italy, plays an important role in the story. Share videos of creative bridge solutions from around the world or have students watch them at home. Here are a few:

- Short and fun animated video showing nine different ways humans have come up with to get themselves across water without interrupting boat and ship traffic:
<https://www.core77.com/posts/53351/12-Different-Designs-for-Movable-Bridges-Animated-For-Your-Pleasure>
- Time-lapse video of very creative bridges (3 minutes):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_cCWaPcVug

- Illustrated article of longest, highest bridges:
<https://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/infrastructure/g2383/the-worlds-most-impressive-bridges/>

Follow up with a discussion of bridge features and/or other creative solutions to the challenge of getting across something. Possibly offer extra credit for making models of bridges and explaining them to the class.

CHAPTER 17

REVIEW / SETTING THE STAGE

Class discussion: Imagine you were writing this story. You have now arrived at Chapter 17 and need to make a decision as to how to move the plot forward. There are many possible ways to do this. Keeping in mind that each choice you consider will move the story toward a different ending, what might you decide to have happen in this chapter?

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. When Kuma asked Maddy whether she had news, how did she tell him her news? (rushed; main points only and not with the dramatic flair the Ringmaster would have used)
2. Which way do you think Maddy should have told her story: her way, with basically only the most important points, or the Ringmaster's way, with lots of interesting details and drama? (with only the most important points) Why? (Kuma probably didn't have much time to hear more than the most important information; Maddy wanted to hurry up and tell him right away.)
3. When Skeeter tries to wake up Vanessa, he yells, "Oh great and wondrous muse of *Il Circo delle Strade*, please grace us with your presence!" (*hyperbole*) Why did he try speaking like this? (He likes being dramatic; he's a goofball; he thought Vanessa might respond better to more drama.)
4. Where does Skeeter sleep at night? (on a graffiti bed) Since Skeeter sleeps on a painting of a bed, does this make him magical too? Explain. (*opinion*)
5. What is required of people who wanted to cross the Bridge of Sighs? (They have to face the most frightening thing they can imagine.) What is this requirement similar to from earlier in the story? (In order to ride the Race Thru the Clouds, Maddy was required to give up her fondest wish.)

EXTENSION

Creative writing: Adding interesting details: Have the class generate a bare-bones story-starter list that includes a protagonist, a setting, several important plot elements, and a conflict. Then have students work individually or in groups of 2-3 to develop this list into a very short story (1-2 pages) by adding characters, plot elements, details, and descriptive language. Have groups pass around and share their completed stories, then discuss some of the different ways the stories were developed and what might have made the more successful stories (or parts of stories) so interesting.

Variation: Write a sequel to *The Circus at the End of the Sea*.

CHAPTER 18

REVIEW / SETTING THE STAGE

This is a good place to go more deeply into the history of Venice, California, or Venice, Italy. [See Author's Note at the end of the book or additional resources on her website or elsewhere online.]

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. In this chapter, Maddy, Skeeter, and Ophelia become graffiti art inside a wall of graffiti. What might that have felt like? If you were experiencing that, would you like it, find it scary, or...?
2. One graffiti character says, "We, *l'arte delle strade*, are forever grateful to him." To whom was the character referring and what was she grateful for? (the Ringmaster, for creating a home for all the graffiti characters painted on the wall; for remembrance; for never having been sandblasted away)
3. How was Maddy, who didn't speak Italian, able to translate "*l'arte delle strade*"? (It was similar to both "*Il Circo delle Strade*" and the English word "art," which is a *cognate* of *arte*.)
4. Why is it important to remember the past but stay in the present? (Possible responses: If we get stuck only thinking about the past, we won't see what is real and true right now; we can learn from both the past and the present; it's important to know how we got to where we are now; if we know about mistakes in the past, we can learn from them and try not to repeat them in the present.)
5. Who was the gray-haired man holding a pocket watch in the mural? (Abbot Kinney) Why might he have been included in this story? (He created Venice, CA.)
6. Abbot Kinney says that most things are both an ending and a beginning, an exit as well as an entrance. What might he have meant by this? (When one thing ends, something else starts; doorways, for example, are both exits and entrances. Also, when something in one's life ends, something else starts.)

EXTENSION

Graffiti-style mural: Have groups of 3-4 students choose a scene from the book that tells a story (shows characters involved in some sort of action) and then illustrate it using graffiti-style art on butcher paper. (You can find graffiti art tutorials on the author's website.) Have students include a title and descriptive caption on their murals.

CHAPTER 19

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. What does it mean to have common sense? (having sound judgment about or a basic understanding of practical things)

2. How might the place where the ocean meets the land be considered both a beginning and an end?

3. Let's define *friends*, *casual acquaintances*, and *allies*:

- friend: someone you like, trust, and enjoy being with
- casual acquaintance: someone you've met but who is not yet a friend
- ally: a person or group who is – or probably would be – on your side in an issue

Maddy realizes she has friends for the first time in her life. How does this realization make her feel? At this point in the story, who are some of her friends? (Skeeter, Vanessa, and Ophelia are Maddy's most obvious friends; others, such as Kuma, seem to be more allies than friends.)

4. Skeeter advised Maddy to never turn her back on the ocean. Why was this good advice? (Waves change quickly and can sneak up on you and cause serious injury or even wash people out to sea. Always staying aware of wave behavior when you're in the ocean is very important.)

5. When Maddy sees a huge wave approaching her, what advice does Skeeter give her? (keep her eyes on the wave and, when it reaches its greatest height, dive under it) What did Skeeter say diving under the wave would accomplish? (Diving under the wave would push her back up and let her emerge on the other side of the wave.)

6. When Maddy follows Skeeter's instructions and dives under the wave, how does it work out? (She feels the water wanting to push her to the surface, but her bracelet pulls her down instead.)

CHAPTER 20

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. When Moonlight-on-the-Water talks about "little ones," what is it referring to? (humans and others that are very small compared to the size of the entire universe) (*perspective, point of view*)

2. Moonlight-on-the-Water tells Maddy that she (Maddy) is wishing for something that was already in her grasp, if she could only see it. What does this mean? (that Maddy really did have parents, in a way – although not the kind she meant.)

3. How did Maddy end up in foster care? (Moonlight-on-the-Water and Il Circo found her abandoned on the beach as a baby and fell in love with her, but since they knew they couldn't raise her, they gave her parts of themselves and delivered her to other humans to take care of her.)

4. After Maddy had had a chance to think over the fact that Moonlight-on-the-Water and Il Circo had rescued her, given her the gift of magic, and found people to care for her, how did her thoughts and feelings toward not having parents change? (She realized that in a sense she *did* have parents, beings that were bigger and older than she was who were looking out for her and taking care of her, even if she hadn't been aware of it at the time. Then she felt gratitude and resolve.)

EXTENSION

Picture postcards: Make a series of four captioned picture postcards (cut from paper or cardboard) featuring scenes from the book. On each postcard, in the space for the message, write a short message from one of the characters in that scene to another character in the story. Or write from one of the characters to you, or from you to one of the characters.

CHAPTER 21

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. When Maddy arrived at the Bridge of Sighs, what was the biggest problem facing her? (her own fear)
2. At one point, voices started telling Maddy that nobody wanted her, that she didn't belong, that she was more trouble than she was worth. What were these comments based on? (Maddy's deepest fears and hurts; things that she had been told by others in her life.) What effect did these comments have on Maddy? (Possible response: At first Maddy started accepting them all as true and let them keep her from moving forward in what she had planned to do.)
3. How did Maddy get past the paralyzing effect of all these hurtful comments? (Possible responses: she came to realize and accept that her fears were part of who she was, just like the daytime and nighttime circus were both part of Il Circo; she used what she had learned in the nighttime circus to look more closely at her fears and saw that they weren't nearly as big or scary as she thought they were and that she herself was making them seem bigger than they were.)
4. What kinds of fears might some kids your age have that hold them back? (Possible responses: fear of making a mistake, not belonging, being made fun of, not being the best, being different, not living up to their own or others' expectations)
5. What might they be missing out on with each of those fears? (Possible responses: not trying new things because they might make a mistake, not riding a bike or a skateboard because they might get hurt, not studying because they don't feel smart enough anyway or they might not understand it at first, not standing up for something they feel is right because they're afraid their friends might reject them)
6. What did Maddy finally realize was the most terrifying thing she had to face? (herself) Why is this the most terrifying thing? (Possible responses: because we often think things are wrong with us or that we are bad or ugly or not right somehow, and this is terrifying. Author's note: it's also not true. We are often so scared that what we will find deep inside of us is something ugly and unworthy, when the truth is that our deepest selves are beautiful and courageous and powerful.)

CHAPTER 22

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. Maddy's progress toward the far side of the Bridge of Sighs is stopped by a small booth with a sign that read, "Welcome to the Alter, the last step on the bridge. Fortunes read and ruined / Lives told and lost. (ATM inside)." Which line of the sign may have felt

as if it didn't belong? (ATM inside). Why? (It doesn't fit in with the serious feeling of the rest of the sign and so was unexpected.) Did anyone find it *funny/humorous*? (Something unexpected is often a part of *humor*.)

2. When Maddy enters the booth, she stays by the door in case she needs to run out. Why does the fear inside her nod its approval? (because this was an appropriate time to listen to her fear, and she had done just that)

3. The Alter says, "I am change, and I cannot be escaped." What do you think she means by this? (Life is full of changes, whether we want them or not.)

4. The Alter also says, "No one but you can say what you become, and nothing is guaranteed." What did she mean? (In the long run, we each get to decide for ourselves who we are and how we choose to live, and that life doesn't make any promises except that there will be change.)

5. When Maddy saw her happy self in the mirror and wanted to become that girl, she came to realize that she couldn't move forward toward that or any other future unless what happened? (Possible responses: unless she actively did something to make it happen; unless she chose to move forward instead of getting stuck in thinking that a change she liked could be held onto as long as she pretended that the world had stopped changing)

6. The Alter told Maddy that "All decks are stacked. It's a lie meant as a kindness to say that everyone plays with the same deck." Although it sounds as if the Alter is talking about card games, what is she really talking about? (Everyone is dealt a different hand in the "game of life." Some people have more opportunities than others and some people's lives are easier than other people's lives; people have different family arrangements, educational opportunities, talents, health situations, etc.)

7. Maddy felt that life wasn't fair. Do you agree or disagree with her? Why? Do you think Maddy lets the idea that life isn't fair stop her from growing or moving forward? Explain your opinion.

CHAPTER 23

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. Who are the heartmice? (the mice who live in Maddy's heart and mend where it's torn.)

2. Geoff the heartmouse tells Maddy he needs her to bring him better materials to use for repairing her heart. How does he tell her she can create them? (By paying attention to what her heart thinks is a good idea instead of listening to everything else. In other words, she needs to listen to what her heart recommends rather than paying attention to what other people think of her and her life.)

3. Some of the heartmice discovered a large, new supply of heart-mending materials. Where did these new materials come from? (When all of Maddy's cards showing happy memories burrowed into the heart muscle, little trees full of blue thread started growing.)

4. What do you think Maddy's plan is to get the heartmice better mending materials from this point on? (listen to her heart)

5. When parts of someone's life aren't going well, how might they be feeling? One example is *downhearted*. What does the expression *downhearted* mean? Hint: At one time many people considered the heart to be the source of emotions. What other

words might people use to describe how they're feeling when parts of their lives aren't going well? [Select several student scribes to list the class's responses on the board or screen, with or without a little amateur artwork to show expressions.] (Possible responses: sad, confused, angry, frustrated, betrayed, lonely, left out, worried, scared, guilty, overwhelmed, resentful, jealous, helpless, hopeless, like a failure, abandoned, disappointed)

How many of you have ever experienced any of these feelings? Which of these feelings might Maddy have been experiencing up to this point in the story?

Think about some of the times you've felt downhearted. What were some of the things you did or could have done to help yourself feel better? [Again, list these on the board or screen.] (Possible responses: talk it over with someone you trust, try to fix the situation, get together with friends, hug your pet, put on some happy music and sing or dance, play some ball, do something nice for someone else, do some art or make some music, read a book, write in your diary, etc.) [See "Design your own heart-mending kit" activity in Extensions, below.]

6. The chapter ends with, "By the time the ringmaster arrived and picked her up, she had slipped into darkness." What is ending a chapter with a new problem called? (a *cliffhanger*) What do you expect might happen in the next chapter?

EXTENSIONS

Design your own Heart-Mending Kit: If you could design a personalized heart-mending kit for yourself for the times you feel downhearted and fill it with items and activities that might really help raise your spirits, what would you put into it and why?

Show all your chosen items and activities on a paper or poster. Give the poster a title and add a label or caption to each activity you've shown that might help you feel better during such times.

Character Poster: Select a character from the book. Either from memory or by going back into the book, create a list of words and phrases that describe this character: appearance, how they move or speak; attitudes; behavior/actions; role in the story; what others might say or feel about this character; etc.

Using your visualization of what this character looks like, create a poster on 8½ x 11" larger paper showing the character in a scene from the book. On this poster, artistically list or arrange the descriptive words and phrases you collected that describe this character.

Fun follow-up: Display the posters, grouping them by character. Class or small group discussion: How similar or different are the descriptive words or phrases for each character? What do all the drawings have in common? What are the differences? What might account for the fact that there are many similarities among the posters? What might account for the fact that no two interpretations of any one character are exactly the same?

CHAPTER 24

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. Compare what you expected to happen in this chapter to what actually did. Which parts of the chapter matched your expectations? Which parts were unexpected?

2. Because there is a connection between Maddy's heart and the Heart at the End of the World (also known as the circus's heart), Maddy could understand that the Heart at the End of the World wanted something different. What did it want? (to become what it wanted to become, to grow and change, to have a new rhythm and not to stay locked into the rhythm it used to have) Does the Ringmaster agree or disagree with Maddy? (disagree)

When the Ringmaster disagrees with Maddy, what does he say is his reason? ("There is one rhythm and one rhythm only that can save Il Circo, and that is the rhythm it has always had.")

What is Maddy's response to the Ringmaster's reason? ("Shouldn't the heart choose for itself?")

3. Fill in the blank: Maddy tells the Ringmaster, "You're stuck...Your path has changed, but you can't see it. The circus has changed, but you can't see that either. You can't see what it is because you're so focused on what it ____." (*was*) What does it mean to be focused on what something *was* as opposed to what it *is*?

4. What does it mean when someone says you have to *play the hand you're dealt*? (It's comparing the things in life you don't have control over to the cards you're dealt in a game; you don't have control over which cards you get, but you have to play them anyway. Everyone starts life with a different collection of advantages and disadvantages, many of which are out of our control. As we go through life, we have to deal with these, along with other things that happen in our lives. Reminder: some of life's "cards" can be either positive or negative, depending on the circumstances and how the person plays them.)

5. How did this chapter leave you feeling?

EXTENSION

Dear Me! : Write your future self a letter in which you tell your future self what kind of person you want to be when you're grown and how you might go about starting now to become that person. Date it, then put the letter into an envelope and seal the envelope. Write your name on the front, along with the words, "To be opened only by me when I'm grown." Then put it away in a private and secure place to read when you're a grown-up.

CHAPTER 25

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. When Kuma says, "We are no longer part of this rhythm," what does he mean? (that he and the Ringmaster have a different rhythm to follow and it's time to let go of the old one. They are no longer part of this time and place, and their new rhythm will take them someplace different, to the Circus Beyond.) (*inferring*)

2. What might Kuma mean by "the Circus Beyond"? (Responses will vary.)

3. The Ringmaster says, "...even the grandest of shows must have a finale. Otherwise, how will a new one ever begin?" What is your opinion of this?

4. Maddy loved her bracelet, so why did she feel bitter about not being able to take it off? (She felt that no one had given her the choice of whether she wanted to wear it.)

5. The spirit of the circus said that sometimes our most powerful choices are the ones we don't even know we've made. Why might that be? (When we don't realize something is actually a choice we've made and not just the way things have to be, that choice has power over us instead of us having power over it. Sometimes this works out well, such as the example of how Maddy didn't think she had *chosen* to follow the magic; she just thought that was the only way to be. Sometimes, however, it doesn't work out well, such as if you get angry and then feel as if you have no choice but to punch someone in the face – when in reality, there are many other choices.)

Can you think of examples of choices we might make without realizing we had a choice in the matter?

6. Maddy "...could feel her entire life unfold in front of her with endless possibility." What is meant by *endless possibility*? (an unlimited number of choices; so many options of what to do or experience, or who we choose to be)

EXTENSION

Cards of Life: Have the class brainstorm possible "cards" that humans from all over the world could be born with, while several students write them on the board. Let the students discuss which ones might be *classified* as positive, negative, or neutral/either, depending upon the circumstances. (This may lead to a lively discussion and the discovery that many "cards" that might originally be considered positive could actually turn out to be neutral or negative, and many "cards" that might originally be considered negative could actually end up as neutral or be "blessings in disguise.")

CHAPTER 26

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. Even though Maddy had worded her earlier request very carefully, why had the Race Thru the Clouds never taken her to the Ringmaster? (It had, but it had taken her to herself – because, although she hadn't known it then, she was the new Ringmaster.)

2. "Joy and sadness, excitement and fear were swimming around inside her like brightly colored fish."

How are joy and sadness related? (They're opposites.) How about excitement and fear? (They're not necessarily opposites, but one is usually considered to be positive and the other one to be negative.)

Is it common for people to be able to experience two very different emotions at the same time? (yes, very much so)

What are examples of when that can happen? (example: excitement on your birthday but disappointment that your best friend wasn't able to attend your birthday party)

How might people deal with two opposite feelings at the same time?

CHAPTER 27

FOLLOW-UP: Comprehension, literary elements, reading skills, thinking skills

1. By accepting the baton from Vanessa, Maddy was promising to love and protect the circus and to keep it safe. What did Maddy add to that promise? (to let it grow) What did Maddy mean by “letting the circus grow”? (letting it change into a new, more mature, different version of itself when it wanted to)

2. Why is letting the circus grow important? (Possible responses: because nothing can be fully alive without growing in some way, which includes changing and adapting to new conditions; we all have to grow, because if we don't we get stuck in old ways that no longer help us; if the circus doesn't change in order to offer new acts, people will get bored and stop coming)

If you weren't ever able to learn new things and change and grow, what would that mean for the rest of your life? How would that feel?

3. When Vanessa said, “While I inspire the acts, I could be a little more *proactive* in finding them,” what did she mean by being proactive? (making things happen instead of waiting or hoping for them to happen; taking care of things before they become a problem or an issue.

What are other examples of being *proactive*? (Possible responses: planning ahead; thinking things through before doing them; trying to prevent a possible problem from happening or, if it does happen, to keep it from being worse than it could have been)

What is the opposite of being *proactive*? (being *reactive*; dealing with a situation after it happens)

What is the advantage of being *proactive*? (You are more likely to keep problems from happening in the first place or, if they do happen, your planning might keep them from being worse.)

4. What did Maddy announce as her new plans for the circus? (no bindings and asking for volunteers to help teach her and to help run the circus)

5. What was the *mood* of this last chapter? (possible responses: joy, excitement, relief, rekindled hope)

EXTENSIONS

Old and New (comparing, brainstorming): Under Maddy's leadership, how might the circus be different from the way it had been? How might it remain the same?

Break the class up into groups of 4-5 students. Each group selects a recorder, who divides a sheet of paper into two columns: *Changes* and *Stays the Same*. Students will be given 5-10 minutes to *brainstorm* what will most likely stay the same in the newly revived circus and what will most likely change. The recorder will write responses in the appropriate columns.

While groups are compiling their lists, divide a board or screen in half and label the halves *Changes* and *Stays the Same*.

After you call time, appoint two scribes to write responses on the board. Then rotate through the groups, giving each group a turn to contribute one of their responses per rotation. Start with *Changes* first; then go to *Stays the Same*. During this time, stick with the brainstorming rule of no comments.

Once all responses have been recorded on the board, invite the students into a class discussion to tactfully share and support

their opinions of which outcomes would be most likely and realistic if the story continued. When consensus has been reached, mark those outcomes.

Talk Show! :Can be done as whole class or in small groups. As a talk show host, write a script and film a video of interviews with several characters from the story.

PART TWO



Comprehensive End-of-Book Discussion Questions

for

The Circus at the End of the Sea

GENERAL

1. What were your favorite parts of the story? What did you especially like about these parts?
2. Was this story a work of fiction or non-fiction? Was it realistic fiction or fantasy? Explain.
3. What is the difference between *real* and *realistic*? (real = is not made up; realistic = like real life but is made up)
4. What parts of the story were realistic? What parts were fantasy? What made those parts fantasy?

CHARACTERS: CHANGE AND GROWTH

5. Who was the main character? Describe this character (who she is, what she looks like; what she thinks and believes about herself, about others, and about what's happening; how she acts; what others think about her, etc.)
6. Besides Maddy, what other characters played important parts? Which characters, if any, could have been left out of the story without seriously affecting it?
7. What were the main struggle or struggles that Maddy had to deal with? (finding out who she was, who her parents were, where she belonged, and whether she was lovable; also learning how to accept all parts of the circus and of herself and understanding how to save both the circus and herself) (*conflict*)
8. How did the main character change or grow between the beginning of the story and the end? What might have brought about those changes? Were those changes for the better or worse? Explain.

MISCELLANEOUS

9. If this story were made into a video, do you think it would work better animated or with live actors? Explain your preference.
10. What do you think the differences might be between seeing the story as a video and reading the story in print? How might the reader's or viewer's experiencing the story differ?
11. If you were going to write a sequel, what would happen in it?

12. If you could visit with the author, what would you like to ask or tell her?

THEME

There doesn't seem to be total agreement as to what the **theme** of a story is. Some say it's a word or a phrase that describes the general idea of the story – such as courage, friendship, or good versus evil – and some say it's a lesson learned by the main character or a message the author wants to get across to the reader, such as "Actions speak louder than words" or "Don't judge people by how they look." Also, stories often have more than one theme.

13. If you were to try to identify the theme or themes of *The Circus at the End of the Sea* using the first definition (a word or phrase), what would those themes be? (search for identity; friendship; change; growth; loyalty; choice; accepting things for what they are but also allowing them to change; chosen families; understanding yourself and all your sides)

14. If you were to try to identify the theme or themes from this book that might be **messages** or **lessons** to think about and maybe live your life by, what might some of those themes be? There are many of them in this story! (Possible responses: There is always beauty and magic around us if we choose to see it; when we take the time to see and understand things for what they really are, then we know what is true and can make our choices based on that and not on something we've made up; change is a part of life, so being able to adapt to change is an important life skill; learn to play the cards you're dealt even if it means using some of them to change your situation, because everyone's deck has beauty in it; when you learn to pay attention to what your heart tells you, it will lead you home; you have the power to choose how you move through life.)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lori R. Snyder

In an alternate universe, Lori Snyder is a circus performer—probably an aerialist wearing a lot of glitter. In this universe, she's had many different careers (none of which, sadly, are circus-related): marine biologist, fourth grade teacher, dancer, yoga teacher a studio owner, book editor, and writer. Venice Beach is one of the great loves of her life, as are kindness, delight, and the sea, and this book is her love letter to all of those. Lori is also the founder of the **Writers Happiness Movement**, which offers free happiness tools to writers.

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