

'NOTHING EVER HAPPENS HERE' ACTIVITY PACK For ages 11+

PERFECT FOR: Exploring relationships and character connections, considering different points of view, researching issues surrounding the LGBT+ community, themes of love, family, change, acceptance, gender and sexuality.

ACTIVITIES INCLUDE: Writing in role, comparison charts, letter writing, drama and role-play, creating settings and props for a show, creating timelines and researching historical events



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For students aged 11+

1. How are the relationships between Izzy's family **presented** and **explored** throughout the first few chapters? What do we learn about them? How are parent/child relationships explored and how are the relationships between siblings explored? Do any of the family members remind you of anyone you know? Why?
2. The author describes films as being '**like a doorway into another world**'. Do you have a favourite film or a film that is important to your family? Why? How can films be like doorways to other worlds? Do you prefer films or books? How are they similar? How are they different?
3. On page 26, Izzy's mum tells her she can't see what's in front of her nose. What does this mean? Can this comment have more than one meaning in the context of this story? Have there been any **clues** so far as to what Izzy's dad might be going through? Why and how has Izzy missed them?
4. Keep a record of all the words and phrases that describe Dee and her journey as she transitions. How does her **manner, personality and relationship** with the other characters change as the story progresses? Record your ideas using an Emotions Graph to track Dee's changing thoughts and feelings during important scenes and events in the story.



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5. Do you like Grace? How is she similar to Izzy? How is she different? Is Grace a good friend? Why? Why not? What does Izzy learn about herself after her argument with Grace? Why do you think the author decided to separate Izzy and Grace for the second half of the story? What **effect** does it have on both characters?
6. On page 53, Sheetal talks about the boys having to 'prance around in tights'. Why does this make Izzy uncomfortable? What does the verb 'prance' suggest about the boys? Do you think Sheetal is aware of how she has made Izzy feel? Are there any other examples in the story of characters using **careless language** which harms and upsets another character? Have you heard anyone using careless language which might offend or cause harm? How might you tackle this?
7. Describe Vicky in three words. What role does she play in the story? What things do we learn about her that help our understanding of her behaviour? Is she as confident and assertive as she seems? How does she influence each of the family members in Chapters 10 and 11? How is Chapter 11 a **turning point** in the story for all the characters?
8. Take some time to read and explore Chapter 12. What do you notice about Izzy's use of **pronouns** when referring to Dee? Why might this be important? What does it signify about the family's views on Dee's transition?



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9. There is a **significant shift** in Chapters 13 and 14 regarding Izzy's treatment by her classmates at school. Why do you think Lucas is behaving like this? What do we learn about Sam and his dad? Do you think Izzy is most hurt by Mia, Lucas or Grace? Why? What reasons can you give to support your opinion?

10. Were you surprised by Mrs Okafor's reaction to Izzy and Dee? Why? Why not? What does she mean when she discusses the **importance of loving thy neighbour**? How have Mrs Okafor's experiences been similar to Izzy's? What does Mrs Okafor's opinion tell us about different interpretations of religious texts?

11. In Chapter 29, Dee faces Pastor Johnson during a live TV debate. Using a table, **summarise their arguments** for and against teaching young children about trans issues. Who do you think has the most powerful, persuasive argument during the TV segment? How does the author present Pastor Johnson and his views?

12. Can you describe Mr Thomas in three words? Who do you think has more of an **impact** on Izzy: Vicky or Mr Thomas? Why? How does Mr Thomas show **bravery and kindness** throughout the story? Would you like to be taught by him?



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13. How might the plot have changed if Sam had been **removed from the story**? What role does he play in the book? What is the most important thing he **teaches** Izzy? What is the most important thing he **learns**?

14. Which of these do you think is the most **important theme** in the story? Order them from most important to least important. Now, think of examples in the story where each of these themes is pivotal: family, gender, bullying, difference, acceptance, betrayal, courage.



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SUGGESTED ACTIVITY 1

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BEFORE READING: THE HISTORY OF LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

Spend some time discussing what life is currently like for people in the LGBTQ+ community. How are they treated? What might make their life difficult? How far has the LGBTQ+ community come in terms of **representation** and **equality**?

In groups, you may wish to read a range of books about the history of LGBTQ+ rights, the beginning of this important movement and different families. Think about who these books are **aimed at** and what **age group** you think they are suitable for. The books could include:

- 'Stonewall' by Rob Sanders and Jamey Christoph
- 'This Day in June' by Gayle E. Pitman and Kristyna Litten
- 'From Prejudice to Pride' by Amy Lame
- 'And Tango Makes Three' by Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell and Henry Cole
- 'Julian is a Mermaid' by Jessica Love

How do these books help your **understanding** of 'Nothing Ever Happens Here'? Create a timeline with key dates and events showing the history of LGBTQ+ rights and moments of social change. You may wish to include:

- The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885
- Wolfenden Report, 1957
- Stonewall Riots, 1969
- Gay Liberation Front, 1970
- Section 28 of the Local Government Act, 1988
- Civil Partnership Act, 2004
- Gender Recognition Act, 2004
- UK Black Pride celebrated for the first time, 2004
- Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act, 2013



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SUGGESTED ACTIVITY 2

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DURING READING: SIBLINGS AND FAMILIES

Spend some time drawing or painting a picture of your family. In groups, share information about your families. How are they similar? How are they different? Do you get on with your siblings? What are the benefits and drawbacks of having siblings?

What impression do you get of Izzy, Jamie and Megan in the first few chapters? Complete this table, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

CHARACTER	IMPRESSION	EVIDENCE
IZZY		
MEGAN		
JAMIE		



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DURING READING: SIBLINGS AND FAMILIES

Now, create a **table** with three columns: one for Izzy, Megan and Jamie. While you read, add information that you learn about each of these characters at key points in the book as the story progresses.

What are the main **challenges** and problems faced by each character? How do they overcome them?

Use a **Venn diagram** to compare and contrast Izzy and Megan. Think about their personality, behaviour, treatment of Dee and how they deal with her transition. How are they similar? How are they different? Who changes and learns the most?

Carry out a **role on the wall** activity for Mum. Draw an outline of her and inside your picture, write down any words, phrases or key quotes which describe her. In a different colour, on the outside of your drawing, write down any questions you have for Mum during the story.



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SUGGESTED ACTIVITY 3

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DURING READING: GUYS AND DOLLS

- 'Guys and Dolls', the theatre and the **importance of drama** for Izzy feature heavily in the book. Discuss in pairs why you think this might be.
- If you have time, you may wish to watch the movie of 'Guys and Dolls' or listen to some of the classic songs from the show, including 'If I Were A Bell', 'I'll Know' and 'Luck Be a Lady'.
- Spend some time **researching** the story of 'Guys and Dolls' and finding out about the characters played by Izzy, Grace, Sam and Lucas. How are these characters similar? How are they different?
- **Why** might Izzy have been chosen to play Sarah Brown?
- Do any of the **themes or storylines** in 'Guys and Dolls' echo any of the themes or storylines in 'Nothing Ever Happens Here'?
- Look at a variety of posters and adverts for 'Guys and Dolls' and work in groups to **produce your own programme** for the school show. What does a programme for a theatre show need? Think carefully about the type of colours, font and layout you will choose and your use of persuasive language.



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DURING READING: GUYS AND DOLLS

- Use a shoebox to create a **3D diorama** of what the stage and setting might look like for a production of 'Guys and Dolls'. You could include props, models of characters, famous song lyrics and information about the show/film around your model.
- You may wish to work in groups to choose an **important moment** from the story to turn into your own playscript, which you could rehearse and perform. Remember to include stage directions and set out your script using the correct layout conventions.



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SUGGESTED ACTIVITY 4

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AFTER READING: DEAR EDITOR

- Mr. Thomas asks the class to find an article in the newspaper or online, about any topic they like, and write a letter to the editor in response. In groups, spend some time looking at a variety of local and national newspaper articles. What are the **important events and news** taking place right now?
- Use a table to explore the similarities and difference between a **broadsheet** and **tabloid** newspaper. Think about the layout, type of language use, the number of photographs used and who these papers might be aimed at.
- Choose one newspaper article that **discusses a topic that is important to you**. First, use a piece of tracing paper and trace the layout of your newspaper article, identifying the key points, the headline, any photographs, quotes or statements and the conclusion. Discuss with a partner why you chose this article and how you will respond to it.
- Plan and **write your letter to the editor**, ensuring your letter is short, persuasive, references the original article and makes at least two points to support your opinion.
- As a challenge, you may wish to ask a partner to, in role, reply to your letter as the editor. Have you **persuaded them** to listen to your opinion?



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SUGGESTED ACTIVITY 5

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AFTER READING: IZZY'S TRANSFORMATION

- Izzy is the **heart and soul** of her family. Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?
- What might Izzy and Grace be thinking and feeling while they discuss Dee in Chapter 5? Choose one of the characters and write an **inner monologue** to show their thoughts and feelings. Now, act out the scene in pairs, taking time to pause and share your inner monologue. Is there a difference between what your character is saying and feeling?
- In Chapter 26, Izzy sends Grace a text message, explaining about her parents and how awful they are. In role, **write a text message** to Grace, describing your thoughts and feelings and recounting what has happened with Dee. As an extension, you could then write a reply from Grace, thinking about her character and what she might say. Would the way these two characters text and communicate differ?
- In pairs, discuss how Izzy has changed and **developed** over the course of the story. Make a note of your ideas – you could record them in a series of thought bubbles, diary entries or a graph.
- Write a **letter in role** as Izzy at the end of the story and address Izzy at the beginning of the story. What have you learnt? What advice would you give yourself? How has your relationship with Dee changed? What new challenges do you now face?



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