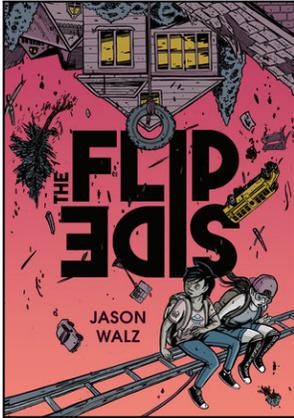


Discussion and Activity Guide for Educators



Book Title: *The Flip Side* by Jason Walz

Recommended Ages: 12 and up

Note: This is a story about friendship but also grief and depression. It includes references to self-harm as well as some mature language. Adults should be aware of these references and provide opportunities to help young people process their meanings.

About the Book

Theo's best friend has died of cancer, and his grief is deep and raw. When the adults around him don't seem to understand, his grief turns to depression, and Theo is forced to confront his sadness alone in an alternate reality where his city is literally flipped upside down. Everyone in the world has disappeared except a monster that embodies his depression and a girl named Emma who has been stuck in the flipped world for a while and is fighting her own monster. Together, as Theo and Emma face their depression and find friendship in each other, they work to find their way out of the flip side before their monsters consume them.

Notes for Educators

Grief is how we react to losing someone or something in our lives. While it's something most people will experience at some point in their lives, many things are contributing to grief in youth today, including death, changing friendships and family dynamics, coming of age, and socio-political factors. Grieving is a personal thing, and while our cultures, beliefs, and community all shape how we cope with grief, everyone grieves differently. Grief is also not linear, and the emotions associated with grief may come and go.

Depression is when low feelings last longer than just a few days or a week, and it can start to affect everyday activities such as school, extracurriculars, or work. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, about 12% of teens between ages 12-17 experience depression each year, and it is more common in girls than in boys.

For more information about navigating grief/loss or depression, and for resources for young people, educators, parents, and caregivers, check out [Young Minds](#), an organization committed to supporting the mental health of young people.

Reflection Questions for Educators

Before you read this book, think about:

- What is your experience with grief? What were you taught growing up about what grief looks like, sounds like, and feels like? How comfortable are you with expressing grief or being with someone who is grieving?
- What is your experience with depression? What were you taught growing up about what depression looks, sounds, and feels like? How comfortable are you with sharing your emotions of feeling down or being with someone who is sad or depressed?
- Assume there are students experiencing grief or depression present in your classroom that you are unaware of. How can you keep this in mind as you respond to student behavior?
- What mental health supports are in place for young people in your school community? What else could be done to help prioritize student mental health?

Journal Questions for Students

- What is your experience with grief? When have you witnessed or experienced it yourself? If you could draw it, what would it look like?
- Do you or someone you know deal with depression? If so, what does it look like? What could others do to be more understanding of someone struggling with depression?

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- Imagine Theo is someone you know. Write a letter to Theo, showing your encouragement and support as he confronts his grief.

Discussion Questions for Students

Chapters 1 - 3

1. At the beginning of the story, what don't people understand about Theo's friendship with Evan and why his grief is so hard to cope with?
2. Imagine Theo is someone you know. What could you and your peers say or do to let him know you are there to support him as he navigates his grief?
3. Theo wakes up to find his literal world turned upside down, and the monster haunting him shapeshifts to look like Evan and then his mother.
 - a. How do the Flip Side and the monster depict the grief and depression he feels after losing Evan?
4. Why was Theo upset at Evan when Evan told him he finished the movie they were making together?
5. Why do you think Emma has been in the Flip Side for so long?

Chapters 4 - 6

6. On page 109, Emma lists several tips for preoccupying the mind to keep the monster out of her head. Have you ever done something similar to cope with unpleasant feelings?
 - a. When might these strategies be necessary or helpful?
 - b. When might they not be helpful?
7. On page 123, it says, *"Everything looks brand-new upside down. Kind of beautiful, in a messed-up way."* What do you think this means?
8. How does Emma change after Theo promises that he's there for her?
9. Bernard tells Emma that Theo needs her and she needs him. What does he mean by that?
10. Why does Bernard want Emma and Theo to leave him alone?
 - a. What do you think happens to Bernard when the monster finally gets him?
11. Why do you think Emma says she wants to be lost and not find a way out?
12. How is Theo's fight with Emma similar to his fight with Evan before he died?

Chapters 7 - 9

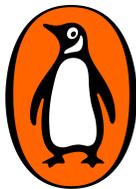
13. When Theo apologizes to Emma on page 215, he says, “*Those words aren’t us, this place isn’t us.*” What does he mean?
14. When Theo and Emma get out of the mall, and Theo asks if it’s gone, Emma replies, “*It’s never really gone*” (p. 224). How does this relate to what you know about depression?
15. Theo finally gets to Evan’s house and finds the Goon Squad video.
 - a. What message was Evan trying to leave for Theo?
 - b. Why do you think Theo doesn’t see it right away?
16. How does Theo keep his promise to Emma, even after his world flips back around?
17. What do you think the author wants the reader to understand about grief and depression after reading this graphic novel?

Additional Activities for Deeper Connection

- **I Wish Everyone Understood** – Cut out and make available small strips or squares of paper. Ask students to finish the sentence, “*I wish everyone understood...*” Let students write as many things as they wish, using a separate strip/square of paper for each thought. Make sure students know that this is an anonymous activity and that they do not have to write their names on their slips of paper. Create a collage of their responses. After students have a chance to look at all the responses, discuss the following questions:
 - How did it feel to write your response(s)?
 - What patterns do you notice, if any?
 - What experiences on this collage do you want to try to understand better?
- **Emotions Story Mapping** – Assign students to small groups. Give students blank poster paper, markers, and a copy of the [Core Emotions](#) list (taken from Elena Aguila’s *How to Feel Better Program: Week 1 Packet*. Bright Morning, www.brightmorningteam.com, 2021). Assign each small group one chapter from *The Flip Side*. Ask students to create an emotions story map of their

chapter, showing 5–7 events from the chapter and naming the emotions they see in the various characters throughout, using color, symbols, or words to enhance their maps. Allow students freedom to be creative with their maps, or provide them with a template if you wish. Afterward, ask groups to share their maps, and discuss the following questions:

- Were there any trends when it came to the emotions in your chapter?
 - Which, if any, emotions did you notice in the characters during this exercise that you missed when you first read the book?
 - Why is it important to accurately name emotions?
- **Explore Empathy** – Show the video, [Brené Brown on Empathy](#). Afterwards, discuss the following questions, and/or offer them as journal prompts:
 - Share about a time when someone showed you empathy. What did the person do? How did it feel to be on the receiving end of empathy?
 - Why is it difficult to have empathy for others sometimes? What makes it easier to have empathy for others?
 - What advice would you give someone who might be struggling to show empathy for someone else?



The Flip Side
by Jason Walz
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Connections to Anti-Bias Education and Social-Emotional Learning

What is Anti-Bias Education? *“Anti-bias education is a critical approach to teaching and learning that...helps children strengthen their identities as capable and empowered human beings. Through anti-bias education, children identify issues and inequities in their lives, ask questions, consider multiple perspectives, and think about their lives critically, growing to actively resist prejudice and discrimination.”* (Derman-Sparks et al. Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide for Change. Teachers College Press, 2015.)

The AmazeWorks Anti-Bias Education (ABE) tenets touched on in *The Flip Side*:

- Empathy and understanding for self and others
- Healthy and complex identity development
- Respect across and appreciation of differences
- The ability to notice, name, and reject bias
- Responsiveness and taking action against bias, prejudice, and discrimination

Infused within Anti-Bias Education is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). **Social-Emotional Learning Competencies touched on in *The Flip Side*:**

- Self-awareness - Build awareness of one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.
- Self-management - Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one’s goals.
- Social awareness - Build awareness of one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.
- Relationship skills - Establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships, and effectively navigate diversity.
- Responsible decision-making - Make ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior

About AmazeWorks

The mission of [AmazeWorks](https://amazeworks.org) is to champion equity and belonging for all. We believe that everyone should see their families, identities, and lived experiences reflected in positive mirrors and windows into the lives of others who are different from them. AmazeWorks is happy to partner with Jason Walz to offer this discussion guide because we all believe in the power of stories to inspire, educate, and connect us all.

