Book Title:

Just Maria

# Grade Band:

Middle School (Grades 6 and 7)

# Topics/Themes:

* Blindness
* Disability
* Friendship
* Middle School
* Popularity
* Fitting In
* Children’s Fiction
* Literature

# Potential Ohio State Standards (ELA):

## Reading Literature

* RL6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
* RL 6.3: Describe how a particular story plot unfolds in a series of episodes, as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves towards a resolution.

Writing

* W6.2: Write informative/explanatory text to convey ideas, concepts and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Expanded Core Curriculum Standards:

## Compensatory Skills

* Page 14 Unidentified Paper Objects, inaccessible print mentioned. In chapter 11 the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) and student build tactile roads and street controls using felt, Velcro, buttons, and other tangibles such as toy cars to understand the rules of the road and traffic, which are too big for Maria to feel in real life. Maria uses braille to participate in school.

## Orientation and Mobility

* Mentioned in several chapters, 11-13 “Will help to prepare me for when I’ll be older and on my own.” Maria uses a cane she named Roxanne. Maria explains what it is like working with a COMS, who taught her three questions—Do you know where you are? Do you know where you are going? Do you know how to get there? Some strategies included the position of the sun during the day to navigate compass directions (the sun always rises in the east), and mental mapping. Chapter 12 Maria informs that to mental map environment one must pay attention. She knew where exit of the store was because she noticed check out registers beeping nearby when entering. “Clue collector.” Maria’s first independent travel occurs chapters 34-36. Concentrates on identifying traffic surge patterns, directions, and controls. Problem solved and listened for dangerous cars.

## Assistive Technology

* Chapter 34 Maria mentions using her phone to identify where she is when traveling outside in public.

## Sensory Efficiency

* In the beginning of book Maria knows it’s JJ because of the smell of mustard, sound of boots, and wheezing. Chapter 12 Maria feels the road begin to slope, which is a cue to look for upcoming curb. Chapter 35 Maria notices the smells and sounds matching with hair salon, furniture store, coffee shop. Heard the flick of Cynthia’s cards to identify her.

## Social Interaction

* Page 10 I did my best to make my face show doubt. Ms. Nita (Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments) says that doubt looks like wrinkled eyebrows and a pouty mouth. Page 24 There are always things I could be doing better, asking questions, facing the speaker, standing the right distance away. Chapter 19 In public places. if you don’t speak, squeak, wheeze, shuffle or grunt there’s a good chance I won’t know you’re there. Which is why I try not to pick my nose anywhere but in my own room. Cameras are everywhere. Page 95 Mom says I can’t do anything stupid, or foolish. Because then people will decide that they were right about me all along, helpless, weird blind kid who doesn’t know how the world works
* Also in this chapter it’s mentioned how being too engrossed in one’s life can lead to poor perspective taking skills.

## Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

* Chapter 34 Maria determines to use her orientation and sensory skills to help find Cynthia. One way she advocated (telling someone what she needed) was asking what store she was in.

# Reflection Questions:

* Before Reading
  + What makes a good friend?
* During Reading
  + Can you describe a time in which you had to act, “out of your comfort zone,” and explain how that felt?
  + Is it better to be known for something you are, or for something you did?
  + Before chapter 23, is respect earned or given?
* After Reading
  + Define the words trust and loyalty.
  + Who were the trustworthy adults in the story? Explain why.
  + What does it mean to be “true to yourself?”
  + Can you list any “social norms?”
  + When are social norms important?
  + When is it ok to break social norms?
* Wrap Up
  + One cannot necessarily know or control others thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. However you can control your own behavior, thoughts, and feelings. Considering other people’s perspective (thoughts, feelings, reason for behavior) and acting accordingly improves positive relationships and increases good communication.

Connected Activities:

Divide the class into three groups. Have a student from each group lay on the floor on top of a large piece of construction paper. The rest of the group will draw an outline of the body, and then cut out the person shape. There should be three cut out people, one for each group. (Or, cut people figures yourself ahead of time instead). Assign each group a character from the book: Maria, JJ, and Hannah. Ask each group to “fill out” the blank person by using content from the novel to describe through words and illustration what kind of person and friend the character is. When everyone is done, write two terms on the front board and draw a line down the middle to divide the board in half. Round/dynamic character and flat/static character. Have each group present their character to the rest of the class: what kind of person and friend are Maria, JJ, and Hannah? As a whole class, decide together whether the characters were round/dynamic or flat/static (did any growth occur?)

Another simple activity is to have each student create a “Wanted Ad” for their ideal best friend, complete with written advertisement description, an illustration, and contact info.

# Connected Texts (To Use in Unit Planning):

* [Unfriended](https://www.amazon.com/Unfriended-Rachel-Vail/dp/0147511542/ref=asc_df_0147511542/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312167335900&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=10654360040235768547&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9014973&hvtargid=pla-526890559395&psc=1&tag=&ref=&adgrpid=60258871417&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvadid=312167335900&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=10654360040235768547&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9014973&hvtargid=pla-526890559395) by Rachel Vail (popularity, friendship, social media safety).
* [Good different](https://www.amazon.com/Good-Different-Meg-Eden-Kuyatt/dp/1338816101), by Meg Eden Kuyatt (neurodivergent, fitting in).
* [Stuck](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/258294/stuck-by-jennifer-swender/) by Jennifer Swender (friendship, fitting in).

# Helpful Resources:

* [Expanded Core Curriculum](https://deafandblindoutreach.org/Ohio-Guidelines-for-Working-with-Students-BVI/Expanded-Core-Curriculum)
* [Nonverbal Communication Skills for Blind Children –](https://aphconnectcenter.org/familyconnect/education/ecc/social-interaction-skills/nonverbal-communication/#:~:text=Head%3A%20Your%20head%2C%20while%20upright,don't%20forget%20to%20smile!) ConnectCenter
* [Paths to Literacy](https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/just-maria/).
* [Talking Blind: The Interaction of Sight and Communication](https://medium.com/@lrkyle47/talking-while-blind-how-nonverbal-communication-differs-between-sighted-and-vision-impaired-9139f714daca).
* [Nothing Better Than A Good Friend](https://healthunit.org/wp-content/uploads/Nothing_Better_Than_A_Good_Friend.pdf) lesson plan.
* [Cliques in Schools](https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/cliques-in-schools) lessons and activities-Learning for Justice.