

# Educator Discussion Guide

## **BRAVE**

by Svetlana Chmakova

Illustrations by Svetlana Chmakova

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2019-2020**

**Grade 6-8**

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### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

“If they say mean crap about you just for kicks and laughs...are you sure they’re your friends?” Jenson just can’t get the hang of middle school. Overweight, unpopular, and nerdy, he hasn’t found his place and every day gets a little bit harder. *Brave*, a graphic novel by Svetlana Chmakova, brings to life the thoughts and feelings of a middle school boy who is being bullied. Jenson spends his time plotting to save the world - or at least his school - from a zombie apocalypse while avoiding the guys who pick on him constantly and the uncomfortable situations that happen in middle school. Until that moment...the moment he decides to be brave. A story of heartbreak, pre-teen humanity, and understanding, *Brave* inspires readers to ignite change and reminds them that they’re not alone.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR**

Svetlana Chmakova is an internationally published, award-winning manga author, with more than a dozen published books, and her work is translated into over 13 languages. Born and raised in Russia, she moved to Canada to finish high school and received her Classical Animation diploma from Sheridan College shortly after high school. Chmakova has drawn and written for animation, how-to-draw books, toy designs, and most of all, comics and manga. In addition to producing several manga series, Chmakova was a Master Comics Artist-in-Residence at Atlantic Center for The Arts, and a featured artist for the US-wide 2011 "You Are Here" Collaborative Summer Library Program.

Source: <https://svetlania.com/>

### **BOOK AWARDS**

2018 - Nominee for [The Harvey Awards](#) for "Best Children or Young Adult Book".

2018 - Honorable Mention for the inaugural [Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards](#).

2018 - Selected for the [2018 Great Graphic Novels for Teens](#) by Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA).

2017 - Selected as one of the [Top 10 Kids Graphic Novels of 2017](#) by ICv2.

2017 - Included on the [Top Ten Kids' Graphic Novels of 2017](#) by School Library Journal.

2017 - Included on the [Best Comics and Graphic Novels of 2017](#) list by Amazon.

2017 - Nominee for the [Silver Birch 2018 Fiction Award](#).

Source: <https://svetlania.com/>

### **OTHER TITLES IN SERIES**

*Awkward*, July 2015

*Crush*, October 2018

## **PREREADING ACTIVITIES**

### **Feeling Left Out**

Ask students to write for 10 minutes about a time that they didn't feel included in a group. Make sure the essay includes the way they felt when they were left out. After the writing time, lead the class in a group discussion. Talk about how being left out made them feel. Ask them how their experiences relate to anyone who is perceived as different and what challenges they might face in a school setting.

### **What makes a good friend?**

Ask students to list at least five qualities that make someone a good friend. Have them draw a picture that illustrates some of those qualities in action. Have students use paint, charcoal, oil pastels, or another art medium not typically used in your classroom. Have students share their artwork and discuss the qualities they chose to list.

### **Performing Arts Activity**

Divide students into 5 groups. Ask each group to write and perform a skit for the class. Assign each group a different task:

1. Write and perform a skit that illustrates students leaving one member out of a fun event/activity.
2. Write and perform a skit in which students aren't acting the way a friend should.
3. Write and perform a skit in which students depict a group including someone they may not usually include.
4. Write and perform a skit in which students depict being a good friend.
5. Write and perform a skit in which one student (or more) stands up for another student in some way.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What types of activities are you involved in at school? Do you find that your closest friends are also in those activities?
2. Do you feel like your friend group is exclusive or inclusive? Explain why.
3. Jenny and Akilah say that any "mean and dismissive jokes" count more if Jenson's "friends" are saying them. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Has a friend of yours ever told a "joke" about you that you didn't like? Perhaps a joke that may fall into the "mean and dismissive joke" category? How did that make you feel? Did you let your friend know how you felt?
5. Did reading *Brave* make you think about how your friends treat you? Please explain.
6. Did reading *Brave* make you think about what kind of friend you are? Please explain.
7. Akilah and Jenny got in a big fight in the middle of the book and were mad at each other for a while, then made up. Is that a healthy friendship? Explain. What are some ways they could improve their friendship?
8. What do you think of Jenny's Lizard Brain reaction? Have you ever been in a situation that made you so mad you lost the ability to think rationally?
9. Jenson didn't understand why Jenny and Akilah wanted to interview him for their topic. Why do you think Jenson was surprised to be included in Jenny and Akilah's project?
10. Have you ever been in a situation when you had to stand up for yourself? Was it hard? Explain. How did it make you feel after you did it?

11. Have you ever been in a situation where you wish you would have stood up for yourself or someone else but didn't? What do you think stopped you from standing up at the time? Explain.
12. What are some things you can do at school to make sure no one feels like Jenson does in *Brave*?
13. In *Brave*, Felicity Teale gets suspended because she refuses to change her skirt that the administration thinks is too short. What do you think about your school dress code? Is it too restrictive? Is it too lenient? Do you think it applies to males and females equally? What would you change about it? How do your male and female students feel about some girls wearing shorter skirts than the rules dictate intentionally? [Love this series of questions! I bet you'd get some great responses from kids!]
14. Miss Lee asks Jenson's class whether they think "society should have the right to jail or punish you for what you choose to wear." Answer that question and please explain your answer.
15. Which character in the book showed the best friendship qualities? Explain.
16. Jenny, Akilah, and Felipe were videoing Yanic messing with Jenson, but Jenson and Yanic didn't know they were being recorded. Is that fair? Or does that cross a line? How would you feel if someone was recording you without you knowing?
17. Can you think of someone in your school who Yanic reminds you of? Without revealing who you're thinking of, is there anything you can do to help them change?

## LASSROOM CONNECTIONS

### English/Language Arts

- In an essay, compare and contrast your middle school experience with that of Jenson in the story. How are they similar? How are they different? Use at least three examples.
- Point of view writing prompt: How has the author developed Jenson's point of view in the story? Explain using text evidence.
- Writing: Define the word "Brave." Choose two characters from the book who showed bravery. Using text evidence, explain your choices in an essay.
- Poetry: Choose one of the following topics and write a poem. Focus on how these situations made you feel.
  - Speaking out against bullying
  - A time that you felt isolated or left out from friends
  - A time that you were brave

### Art/Design

- Technology/Design - Using an available computer design program (Publisher, Pages, InDesign, Gravit), create a 2-page newspaper with articles featuring the main events in *Brave*.
- In a graphic novel, each frame helps develop the story. Choose the ten pictures/frames from *Brave* that best illustrate the overall theme/arc of the story. Write a paragraph for each explaining your choices and an analysis of the chosen frames.
- Have students create anti-bullying posters to hang around their school.
- In small groups, have students discuss things they would like to see change in the social climate of middle school. Next, have them write a short script and act out:
  - First, an example of what they would like to see change - how it happens currently.

- Second, an example of what middle school would look like if what they wanted was changed.

**Science**

- Jenson considered submitting his article on sunspots to the school newspaper. Sunspots are not fully understood by the science community. Research sunspots and write an essay/expose’ like the one Jenson may have written to have published in the newspaper.
- Have a psychiatrist or psychologist come to class to discuss the short-term and long-term effects that bullying can have on people.

**VOCABULARY**

Nepotism	Harass	Courage	Troglodytic
Lurk	Justice	Rational	Denigrate
Primal	Refuse	Vigilant	
Barricade	Suspension	Submission	
Petition	Epidemic	Apocalypse	
Imposing	Rejected	Dismissive	

**RELATED WEBSITES**

**Stop Bullying**

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/>

A US government managed website designed to help teachers, parents, and students stop bullying. Provides educational materials, discussion suggestions, warning signs, and bullying prevention tactics for teachers and parents.

**Social Skills for Middle School Students**

<http://www.cccoe.net/social/skillslist.htm>

Social Skills for Middle School Students breaks down the basics of healthy social development into four categories (Prerequisites, Skills in Classroom, Skills with Peers, Skills with Adults) and provides resources to help students develop the skills they need to be successful, well-rounded adolescents who have the tools they need to deal with the situations that arise in Brave and in middle schools in real life. Each category has a list of skills with activities to help teachers/parents lead students to build the necessary social skills.

**National Bullying Prevention Center - Middle/High School Education Curriculum**

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/classroom/mid-high-curr/>

Provides curriculum - one lesson, five lessons, and/or 32 lessons - designed to introduce middle and high school students to bullying in an effort to stop or prevent bullying in these age groups. Lessons range from defining bullying to providing students with tools to report or stand up to bullying.