



Grades 7 and up • HC: 978-0-553-50786-7
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ABOUT THE BOOK

Deep, understated, and wise, this engaging YA novel is about more than the tough issue of dealing with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Adam Spencer Ross is almost fifteen, and he's got his hands full confronting the everyday problems that come with having divorced parents and a stepsibling. Add to that his OCD and it's just about impossible for him to imagine ever falling in love. Adam's life changes, however, the instant he meets Robyn Plummer: he is hopelessly, desperately drawn to her. But is it possible to have a normal relationship when your life is anything but?

Filled with moments of intense emotion and unexpected humor, *THE UNLIKELY HERO OF ROOM 13B* explores the complexities of living with OCD and offers the prospect of hope, happiness, and healing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Teresa Toten is well known in her native Canada. She is the author of the acclaimed *Blondes* series, as well as *THE GAME*, *THE ONLYHOUSE*, and, with Eric Walter, *THE TAMING*. Winner of the Governor General's Award for *THE UNLIKELY HERO OF ROOM 13B*, she has also won or been nominated for numerous other award. She lives in Toronto. To learn more about Teresa Toten, please visit teresatoten.com.



Matthew Wiley

Common Core State Standards Correlations

In addition to the question-specific standard correlations, participation in a book group supports both the Common Core Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration standard (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1) and the Common Core Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas standard (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4).

Asking students to use specific textual evidence to support their discussion and analysis also correlates to the Common Core Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details standard (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1).

Discussion Questions

In the first chapter of the novel, Adam’s therapist asks each member of the Young Adult OCD Support Group to choose a *nom de guerre* for their group sessions (p. 7). Later, during their coffee shop outing, Wonder Woman observes that each one’s alter ego reflects his or her struggles in a different way (p. 140).

1. Why do you think the majority of characters choose superhero identities to use with the group?
2. What does each character’s chosen alter ego reveal about him or her?
3. In what ways do the characters’ superhero identities foreshadow the ways in which they change and develop throughout the novel?
4. What would you choose for your own superhero name, and why?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3

Consider the structure of the novel, which is narrated in the third person yet is told from Adam’s point of view.

1. Why might the author have chosen to use the third-person perspective rather than making Adam the narrator?
2. How does this perspective set the tone or contribute to your understanding of the novel?
3. How might the story, and its effect on the reader, be different if Adam himself was the narrator?
4. How might the story be different if it was told from Robyn’s perspective?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 6

Throughout the text, Adam’s thoughts appear in traditional comic book “scream bubbles” (see pp. 4, 59, 194, and 228 for examples). The novel also includes some of the Top 10 Lists that Adam writes for his therapist (see pp. 12, 107, 132, 191, and 240 for examples).

1. How do these elements work to set the tone of the novel and develop its characters?
2. Why might the author have chosen to include them in the text?
3. What additional insights into Adam’s state of mind do these textual elements provide?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 5



Consider the significance of the novel’s title, *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B*.

1. Using textual evidence, describe some of the actions Adam takes throughout the novel that might be considered heroic. What is the significance of the word “unlikely”?
2. Do you think Adam is a likely or an unlikely hero?
3. How do you think Adam sees himself?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3, 4

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4

In his first Tens List, Adam writes, “I believe I am a liar because I have to hide all the things I have to hide” (p. 12).

1. Why does Adam believe he is a liar?
2. What are some of the things he has to hide and lies he has to tell?
3. How do Adam’s lies affect his ability to trust others?
4. Do you consider Adam a liar? In what ways might some of Adam’s lies be helpful rather than harmful?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3

Think about some of the major settings of the novel: Room 13B, 97 Chatsworth (Adam’s mother’s house), the cemetery, and Adam’s father’s house.

1. How does the author use each of these different settings to convey tone and develop the plot?
2. What language does the author use to describe each of these places?
3. What are the different feelings evoked by each setting?
4. What is the significance of each setting to the overall story?
5. Which scenes from the text support your reasoning?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 3, 4, 5

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3

Guilt is a recurring theme throughout the novel. For example, Adam feels guilt for telling the group about his mother’s letters, for Sweetie’s accident, and for entangling Robyn in his struggles with OCD after she has recovered. Meanwhile, Robyn, Carmela, and even the Green Lantern all feel guilt for their own reasons.

1. What are some of the specific reasons that each character in the novel feels guilt?
2. Are the feelings of guilt justified for any of them?
3. How do feelings of guilt both motivate and hinder the actions of characters in the novel?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3

The idea that “everyone lies” appears throughout the text in different contexts—first during Adam’s therapy session with Chuck, then when he’s in the cemetery with Robyn, and finally while he’s talking with Sweetie at the end of the book (pp. 13, 161, 277). Consider each of these different settings and their specific contexts in the novel.

1. Why is the idea that “everyone lies” so important to Adam?
2. How do the meaning and significance of this phrase change for Adam over the course of the novel?
3. What inferences can you draw from the text to support your ideas about Adam and his belief that “everyone lies”?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3, 4

In a later Tens List, Adam writes, “I believe that all of the superheroes (maybe even Wolverine) are my friends and that I am theirs. This is important in a way I haven’t figured out yet” (p. 241).

1. In what ways are Adam’s friends important to him?
2. Describe his relationships with Ben, Royn, and the Group.
3. How does Adam give his friendship to them, and how do they give Adam their friendship in return?
4. What role do Adam’s friends play in his character development?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3

When Adam chooses the name Batman, he vows to become a superhero for Robyn (p. 8). Later, Wolverine accuses Adam of cowardice because he’s unable to enter his own home in order to protect his mother from a threat (p. 245). The other members of the group defend Adam, but he agrees with Wolverine.

1. What does it mean to be a hero?
2. What are some of the ways Adam tries to save other characters?
3. Overall, do you consider Adam to be a hero or a coward?
4. What are some of the ways in which other characters in the novel act as heroes or cowards?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3, 4

In a later Group session, Chuck tells Adam, “Let those comments wash over you for a bit. . . . Let them challenge what you perceive to be the truth. Maybe they’re valid observations. Maybe you can trust them” (pp. 246–7).

1. How does Adam perceive himself, and how does his self-perception differ from how others see him?
2. Consider the attitudes of Robyn, the Group, Chuck, Ben, Sweetie, and Adam’s parents. What are the different ways each character views Adam?
3. How would you describe Adam’s character? How do you think he would describe himself?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3

Adam struggles to protect his mother but ultimately has to betray her trust in order to save her.

1. Why is Adam’s relationship with his mother, Carmela, so fraught with tension and pain?
2. What are some of the ways in which Adam and Carmela show that they love each other?
3. What are the ways in which they hurt each other?
4. Do you think Adam betrayed his mother by revealing her secrets at the end of the novel?

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.1, 2, 3

FOR EDUCATORS

Pre-Reading Activities

Superheroes. Either alone or with a group, brainstorm a list of all the superhero characters you know. While they all have different superpowers, what are some of the characteristics they all have in common? What makes each one a hero? If you were a superhero, what would your power be?

Mental Illness. Think about the different forms of mental illness that people struggle with today. What do you already know about OCD, anxiety, and depression? How does society treat people who suffer from mental illness?

Family Identity. Talk with your parents and/or siblings about how they view your family as a whole. What are the physical or personality traits that the members of your family share? What are the ways in which each member of your family is unique? When something happens to one person, how does that affect the rest of the family?

Friendship. Write a letter to a friend in your life who is important to you. Tell your friend about the ways you value his or her friendship. How does your friendship with this person change the way you view yourself? Keep the letter to yourself, or give it to your friend if you choose.

Class Debate

Over the course of the novel, Adam's compulsions escalate beyond his control, while his mother's mental condition also deteriorates. Have students use library and Internet resources to research OCD and anxiety, specifically as they relate to the symptoms both Adam and his mother exhibit. Divide the class into groups and stage two formal debates. Have students use evidence from their research, as well as textual evidence and inferences from the text, to argue both sides of these statements:

1. "Adam's mother is the cause of his OCD."
2. "After the novel ends, Adam is going to be okay."

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.READING 1, 3, 7, 10

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.WRITING 7, 8, 9

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SPEAKING AND LISTENING 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.LANGUAGE 1, 6

Character Gallery Walk

Put students into small groups; then assign each group a different character from Adam's Young Adult OCD Support Group. Students will use library resources and the Internet to research clinical definitions, causes, and symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. As they research, students will create a running log of new vocabulary terms and definitions related to OCD. Then, combining their research with specific textual evidence from the novel, each group will create a character profile that explains how that character exhibits symptoms and suffers from OCD, using new vocabulary terms and definitions as appropriate. Additionally, each group will research that character's alter ego and make connections between the superhero story and the character's personal struggles. Using a combination of images and text, each group will create a large-format poster that profiles that character's experiences with OCD, superhero connections, and role in the novel. Display all the posters and ask students to do a gallery walk among them to review each character's poster profile.

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.READING 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.WRITING 2, 4, 7, 8, 9

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SPEAKING AND LISTENING 1, 2, 4, 5, 6

● CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.LANGUAGE 1, 2, 6

Essay Writing

Near the end of the novel, Robyn tells Adam, “But that, you dope, is the definition of courage: you go on despite the fear” (p. 255). Ask students to use print or online reference sources to research different definitions of “courage” and “fear.” Then use their research to develop their own definitions of the word “courage.” Have students choose one or more characters from the book and write an essay using textual evidence to argue whether their actions do or do not demonstrate courage, according to their personal definitions.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.READING 1, 2, 3, 4
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.WRITING 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.LANGUAGE 1, 2, 4, 5, 6

RESOURCES:

American Mental Health Foundation
www.americanmentalhealthfoundation.org

The International OCD Foundation
<http://iocdf.org/>

Teen Mental Health
www.teenmentalhealth.org

National Institute of Mental Health
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/index.shtml>

Mental Health America
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/ocd>

Kids Help Phone-OCD
<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/Emotional-Health/Anxiety/Obsessive-compulsive-disorder.aspx>



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This guide was created by Laura Schick, a librarian at Jesuit High School in Portland, OR.



**THE
UNLIKELY
HERO
OF
ROOM**

13 B



**TERESA
TOTEN**

DISCUSSION GUIDE

INCLUDES COMMON CORE STANDARD CORRELATIONS