



## RULES FOR DAVID

If the bathroom door is closed, knock!  
(especially if Catherine has a friend over).

Say thank you when someone gives you a present  
(even if you don't like it).

Don't stand in front of the TV when other people are watching it.

A boy takes off his shirt to swim, but not his shorts.

Some people think they know who you are,  
when really they don't.

No toys in the fishtank.



\* reproduced from Cynthia Lord's website, <http://www.cynthialord.com/rules.htm>



When **CYNTHIA LORD** sat down to write her first children's book, she knew it would be a middle-grade novel. As she recalls, "I grew up next to a lake in New Hampshire and I remember being ten years old, lying on our pier, listening to the seagulls calling, and daydreaming about *Borrowers* and *Chocolate Factories* and *Secret Gardens*."

In her debut novel *Rules*, twelve-year-old Catherine just wants a normal life, which is near impossible with a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability. Filled with humor and warmth, *Rules* takes a candid and sensitive look at feeling different and finding acceptance—beyond the rules.

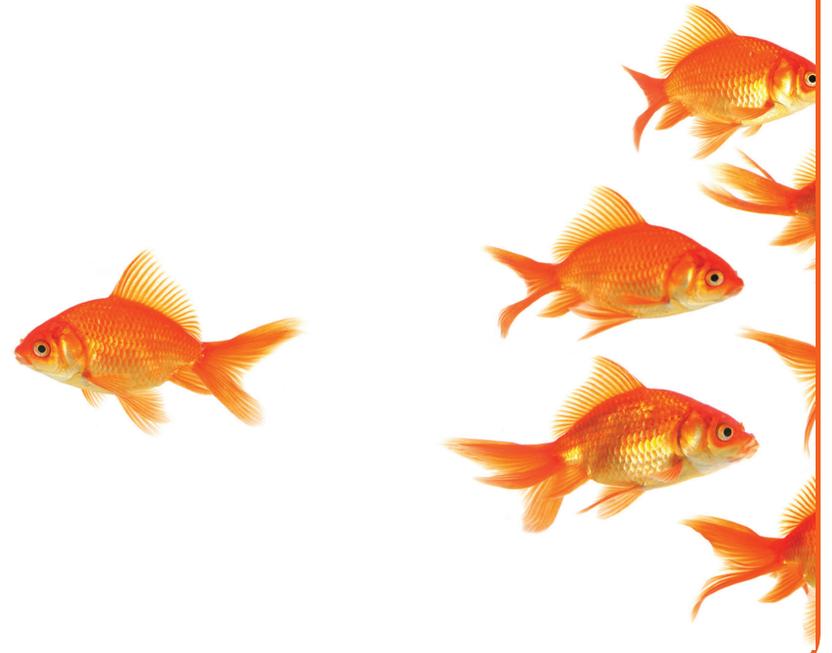
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1. Compare and contrast David to your own sibling(s). If you don't have a sibling, use a cousin or a friend's sibling as an example.
2. Why is the rule "Sometimes people don't answer because they didn't hear you. Other times it's because they don't want to hear you," different from "Close your mouth when you chew." Which do you think is harder for David to understand and why?
3. How are rules important to us? Give examples of some social rules that you think David would need to learn and explain your reasoning.
4. Imagine having a little brother like David. What might be some of the challenges for you and what might be some of the joys?
5. Why does Catherine go to the clinic with her mother and David? Would you want to do the same if you were Catherine? Explain
6. Catherine feels very ashamed for drawing Jason, even though she didn't mean any harm. Describe a time you have been made to feel bad about something you did, even though it was a misunderstanding. What does Catherine do to try and fix the problem and what did you do?
7. It's natural to be curious or to want to look at someone who is different than you, but it can hurt or upset a person to always be stared at. Imagine you had a difference that people looked at. What could you say or do to teach people about your difference and help them to change their staring?
8. Catherine's meeting with her new neighbor doesn't live up to her expectations. Describe a time when you had high hopes for something and were disappointed. How did this affect you and your attitude?
9. How would you feel if someone in your family was always late for something that you felt was important? What might you do to address this with them? What does Catherine end up saying to her father and do you agree with how she handled it?
10. What are David's conversation rules? How do these differ from your conversation rules?
11. Catherine is often embarrassed by David's behavior even though she knows he can't help it. Describe a time when you felt embarrassed by someone you were with and explain how you dealt with it.
12. Compare and contrast Mrs. Morehouse with Catherine's mom.
13. On page 43, Catherine volunteers herself to help with Jason's book and then wonders why that popped out of her mouth. Describe a time when you spoke first without thinking and what the effect was.
14. Imagine your body was crippled and you couldn't speak, like Jason, but you were yourself in your mind. Describe how you think that might feel and give examples of what everyday life would be like for you.
15. Catherine feels throughout the book that her parents don't understand or think of her feelings. Give examples that support this. Do you agree with Catherine? Why or why not?
16. Catherine tells several lies during the course of the book. Explain the situations where she lies and why she does this. Would you do the same in her position? Explain.
17. The book shows the tension between Catherine's father and mother. How does this make you feel about them and what effect does it have on Catherine and David?
18. What is **normal**?
19. Catherine has a lot of tough decisions in the book. How does she change as a character throughout *Rules*?
20. What is Catherine's relationship like with Kristi? How does Catherine compromise herself to "win" Kristi's friendship? Talk about a time when you felt influenced by what someone else might think of you and what choices you made.
21. Discuss the ending of the book. How did you feel about it and why? Would you have written things differently if you were the author?



## ACTIVITIES

1. There is a lot of figurative language in *Rules*, for instance Catherine says her hopes “rush with the water under the bridges.” Find other instances of figurative language such as personification, simile and metaphor and draw or paint an illustration of the images that the language conveys.
2. Write a short piece or poem from Jason’s point of view about his experience when Catherine pushes him in the wheelchair.
3. Imagine you were creating a movie version of *Rules*. What important scenes would you include in your screenplay and what might you leave out?
4. Imagine you had a “word book” like the one Jason uses and those words were the only way you could communicate. Create your own “word book” using index cards or heavy weight paper. Label and illustrate your book and then try it out with friends or family. Was it challenging?
5. Interview someone with physical or mental disabilities and do a story for your school or local paper. How did interviewing this person change or influence your feelings about people with “differences?”
6. Volunteer to work with the Special Olympics or other organization that works with people with special needs.
7. Do research on Autism and write a report about the spectrum and how it affects individuals.
8. Since Catherine is the narrator, we hear about things from her perspective. Imagine how her parents feel and the challenge it must be to raise David as well as provide for her needs. Write a scene from *Rules* from either parent’s perspective.
9. If David was your brother, you might want to have a list of rules posted on your door. Make a decorative poster with your important rules for David.



# Rules



*Cynthia Lord:* <http://www.cynthialord.com>



*Cynthia Lord on Scholastic:* <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/contributor/cynthia-lord>



*Cynthia Lord's Live Journal:* <http://cynthialord.livejournal.com>

*An Interview with Cynthia Lord:* [http://www.debbimichikoflorence.com/author\\_interviews/2006/cynthialord.html](http://www.debbimichikoflorence.com/author_interviews/2006/cynthialord.html)

*Autism Speaks:* <http://www.autismspeaks.org>



*Autism Society:* <http://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/family-issues/siblings.html>

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