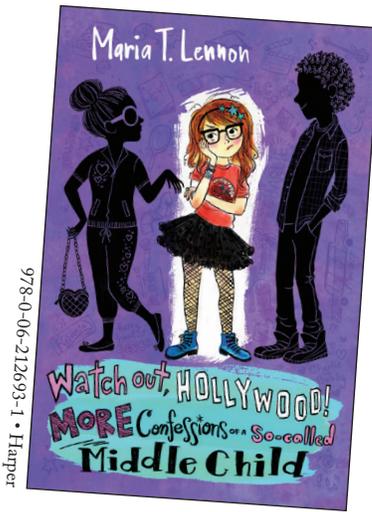
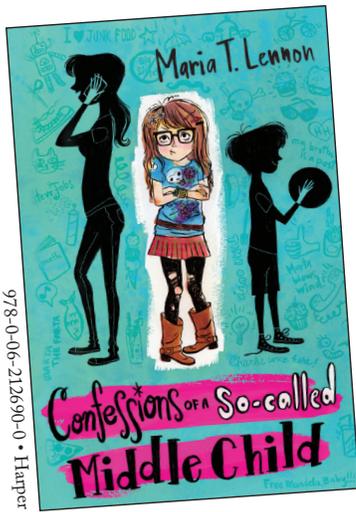


DISCUSSION GUIDE



Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child Watch Out, Hollywood! More Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child By Maria T. Lennon

CHARLIE C. COOPER is a middle child. Her older sister Penelope is an overachieving crusader for social justice. Her younger brother Felix is disgustingly adorable and sweet. And Charlie? Charlie is a misunderstood and overlooked computer hacking genius, fashion trailblazer, and popular-girl wannabe who just did one teeny, tiny bad thing. Ok, maybe not so teeny tiny. It was bad enough to get expelled for. Bad enough to have to move for, and even bad enough to be sent to a shrink for. But now Charlie is reformed! She's no longer a bully! She's thinking of others before herself! She's befriended the most unpopular girl in her new middle school! (Ok, so maybe that last one was an assignment from her therapist.)

Readers will love Charlie's "confessions." Her voice is fresh and funny and she's so realistically flawed. Like all pre-teens, she struggles with doing the right thing when it might cost her popularity. One thing is for sure—with Charlie around, middle school is never boring!

Praise for Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child

"*Confessions* is a funny story with a fresh and sassy, winning heroine who develops into a loyal and resourceful friend, daughter, and sister." —SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

"Lennon skillfully delves beyond Charlie's sass and troubled façade to reveal her insecurities and vulnerability. Readers will admire the unabashedly quirky Charlie as she embarks upon her journey of self-understanding." —KIRKUS REVIEWS

"A fast-moving story with a satirical edge." —PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

Praise for Watch Out, Hollywood! More Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child

"The novel's strength is its ability to perfectly capture the particular brand of anxieties that accompany the middle school years and concerns about friends, relationships, and the balance between wanting to do the right thing and to be liked." —SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

"Charlie's razor-sharp humor is back, as are her often self-centered motives. This time she learns she has to give up what she wants in order to help others; in fact, it's a crucial part of friendship." —BOOKLIST

confessionsofasocalledmiddlechild.com

Discussion Questions: Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child

- ★ Charlie C. Cooper is a middle child. Much of Charlie's behavior is attributed to the fact that she is smack in the middle of an older sister and a younger brother. What stereotypes come to mind when you think of children who are the oldest? The youngest? An only child? Do these stereotypes match any of the characters' behaviors in the novel? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6**
- ★ Charlie is hoping for a fresh start in her new school. This plan seems doomed when her psychiatrist Dr. Scales assigns Charlie a specific task she is to complete at her new school. What is Dr. Scale's plan and why do you think he has given this assignment to Charlie? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**
- ★ Charlie's intense focus on fashion is woven throughout the story. How does fashion affect Charlie's first day at her new school in terms of first impressions and friendships? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1**
- ★ Jai is Charlie's confidante in India. Charlie Skypes with Jai to discuss her social "conundrum." She confesses to Jai that she wants to be popular. What words of wisdom does Jai share with Charlie about the pursuit of popularity and how she can follow through with Dr. Scales's assignment? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1**
- ★ Charlie's older sister Pen seems naturally drawn to social activism and kindness. Charlie decides to adopt Pen's words, "no one did anything, so I did," as her own mantra. How does this new outlook change Charlie's behavior at school? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6**
- ★ Charlie encounters Trixie and Babs on the first day of school and is both wary of and attracted to the popular pair. Trixie is clearly the leader of the two. In one of Charlie's "true facts" she states, "Followers are more dangerous than leaders." How is this true of Babs?
- ★ A spot on the gymnastics team is the most desirable recognition at Charlie's school. Describe how Trixie and Marta fare during the team tryouts. What factors seem to be the most important when the team captain is deciding who to choose for the team? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**
- ★ Charlie discovers some startling facts about Marta's life at home. What does Charlie discover and what do these facts reveal about what kind of person Marta really is? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**
- ★ Charlie's pursuit of being included in Trixie's life full of sparkly clothes, housekeepers, and mansions with elevators takes a sharp turn when Charlie discovers more about Marta. Why do you think Charlie realized that her fate and Marta's were linked? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3**
- ★ Trixie concocts an evil plan to punish Charlie for supporting Marta's efforts to make the gymnastics team. What was her plan? Why do you think the principal was so quick to blame Charlie for Trixie's prank? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3**
- ★ Charlie's dad is working on restoring Harry Houdini's home, but is equally interested in discovering the tunnels rumored to be below Houdini's house. What role do these tunnels play in the final events of the story? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**
- ★ With several adults in pursuit of them, Charlie and Marta have hidden away in Houdini's tunnels. In their hiding place, the two discover a box and a note from Houdini that says, "In this box are all my secrets, the keys to my magic, and the key to yours. Protect them with your life." What item do they discover along with the note? Why is this discovery significant considering what Charlie has been struggling with over the course of the story? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**
- ★ The author Maria T. Lennon, brings the story to a close on an ominous note, "'Thanks, Trix, wherever you are.' I hoped she heard me. I knew we were far from over." Given what you know about Trixie's personality, what do you predict will happen when Charlie and Trixie meet once again? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3**

Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are noted throughout. For more information on the Common Core, visit statestandards.org.

The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters' and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

Discussion Questions: Watch Out, Hollywood! More Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child

- ⚡ What role does popularity play in the life of a student at your school? In this novel, Charlie C. Cooper is seeking “sustainable popularity.” Why do you think this type of popularity is so important to her?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2
- ⚡ Life has taken a dramatic turn for Charlie. She was on the verge of being kicked out of school and in potential trouble with her parents. How has Charlie’s life changed for the better in this novel?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1
- ⚡ What does the “white lie” about Marta that Charlie shares with the agent reveal about Charlie’s character? How does this part of Charlie’s personality make you feel about her? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3**
- ⚡ What is Charlie’s plan to soften her white lie about Marta? Do you think that Charlie’s plan makes her little lie okay?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1
- ⚡ Charlie is riding high after all of the media attention and comes to school expecting a huge reaction from her peers. Instead, she encounters indifference. Why do you think that Lillian tells Charlie that the kids have “moved on” from Charlie’s sensational news? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3**
- ⚡ Charlie is starry eyed at the thought of her potential fame. What role does Bobby play in helping her see the darker side of being famous? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1**
- ⚡ Charlie describes herself as “destructive” and her sister Penelope as “constructive.” Charlie states, “Yes, Pen, you’ll end up in the White House, and I’ll end up in the jailhouse.” Why do you think that the author includes a character so different from Charlie in this story? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6**
- ⚡ When it is revealed that Marta has a ticket to the Junior Olympics in gymnastics, Lillian decides to act. What does Lillian do to get back at Charlie? Cite evidence from the text that describes Lillian’s plan for retaliation against Charlie. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1**
- ⚡ How is the situation between Charlie and Marta something like the tale of the scorpion and the frog?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.9
- ⚡ Contrast the reaction the photographer has to Charlie during the photo shoot with the reaction of Charlie’s classmates once they know that she lied about Marta. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3;**
- ⚡ Lillian does not want Marta securing a spot in the Junior Olympics. She asks Marta, “What if I were to tell you that you’ll pull out of JOs all by yourself?” What does Lillian do to make sure that Marta will have no interest in the Junior Olympics? **ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1**
- ⚡ Charlie’s audition for the television series does not go as she expected. The producers emphasize that character in the series “learns to do things the honest way. That’s what we want kids to take away from this.” At this point all of Charlie’s manipulation and lies catch up with her. What is your feeling about Charlie at this point of the story?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3
- ⚡ In one of the “true facts” peppered throughout the novel, Charlie states, “We love to watch our heroes crash and burn.” How does this statement apply to Charlie’s situation with the television series? Identify other examples of famous people who have fallen out of favor. What do other troubled celebrities have in common with Charlie?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.6
- ⚡ How does Marta’s new-found fame affect her status at school with her peers? What is lurking underneath all of the attention that Lillian and Erika are giving to Marta?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1
- ⚡ At the end of the novel, Marta, Penelope, and Charlie are on the path to realizing their dreams. All of these characters faced obstacles as they tried to reach their goals. How do you think the struggles each character encountered shaped the character’s feelings when she achieved her dream? Would their reactions to success be different if they had not faced obstacles? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2**

A Passion for Fashion



Charlie views much of her life events through the lens of fashion. She puts a great deal of energy and thought into what she wears to school. Charlie also notes what others wear and draws conclusions about what other people's clothes reveal about them. Look through *Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child* to find examples of what the different characters wore. Describe the characters's outfits and what their clothes indicate about their personalities. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2**

Character	Outfit	What the clothing reveals about the character
Charlie		
Marfa		
Trixie		

TRUE FACTS, Marta Style



Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child is told from Charlie's point of view. The author emphasizes Charlie's thoughts and reactions to events in the story by including TRUE FACTS throughout the novel. These asides often act as a comment about what has just happened in the story. Try to picture the story from Marta's point of view. Select three events from the story that would be important to Marta. Describe the story event and invent a TRUE FACT that Martha might observe about each.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6

STORY EVENT	TRUE FACT
	TRUE FACT:
	TRUE FACT:
	TRUE FACT:

Private Spaces



In *Watch Out, Hollywood! More Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child*, Charlie has an underground room in Harry Houdini's secret tunnels and Bobby has a decorated rock cave in an estate owned by the actor who played Tarzan. Both spaces reveal details about the characters' inner personalities. Re-read the sections of the story that describe the bedroom (in the chapter entitled "Shut Pen Up") and the rock cave (in the chapter entitled "Life Stinks and Then You Die"). Draw an illustration of each space. Write a caption below each illustration describing what each space says about each character.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3

Charlie's Underground Room

Bobby's Rock Cave

Smaller Moments



When Charlie is at her lowest in *Watch Out, Hollywood! More Confessions of a So-Called Middle Child*, her friend, Jai, offers her some words of wisdom:

“Life must be measured in smaller moments, Charlie, to achieve satisfaction. It’s not *being* the Hollywood star, it’s *becoming* the Hollywood star. It’s what you do along the way. That is what your life is.”

Charlie’s path to fame is not without obstacles. Draw a curvy line between the START and FINISH points below. Mark the path at intervals and write a brief phrase to next to each mark detailing the key events or “smaller moments”—both good and bad—that occurred as Charlie pursued a starring role on *Off the Beam*.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3

START

FINISH

Bookmark and Door Hanger

Print this page on card stock using a color printer. Cut out the bookmark and door hanger below and show your friends just how cool it is to hang out with the one and only Charlie C. Cooper!

TRUE FACT:

This book totally rocks.



Confessions of a So-called Middle Child

Fashionista at work

Do not even THINK of entering.



Watch out, HOLLYWOOD!
MORE Confessions of a So-called Middle Child