



TERRI LIBENSON'S

**emmie
& friends**

**EDUCATORS'
GUIDE**



**Includes discussion questions, extension activities,
and graphic novel reading strategies.**

BALZER+BRAY

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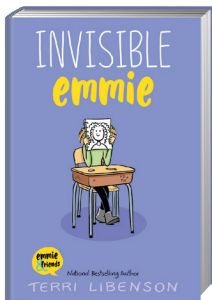
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CRUSHES. HUMILIATION. DRAMA. FRIENDS. FRENEMIES.

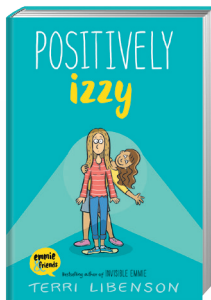
MIDDLE SCHOOL.

ABOUT THE SERIES

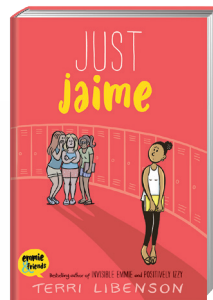
GRADES
3-7



INVISIBLE EMMIE is the story of quiet, shy, artistic Emmie and popular, outgoing, athletic Katie, and how their lives unexpectedly intersect one day, when an embarrassing note falls into the wrong hands.



In **POSITIVELY IZZY**, we meet Bri, the brain, and Izzy, the dreamer. On the day of the school talent show, the girls' lives converge in ways more dramatic than either of them could have imagined.



JUST JAIME introduces us to Maya and Jaime, who have been BFFs since forever. But on the last day of seventh grade, Maya caves in to peer pressure and ditches Jaime for the “popular” girls. What happens next surprises them both.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TERRI LIBENSON is the bestselling author of *Invisible Emmie*, *Positively Izzy*, and *Just Jaime*. She is also the Reuben Award–winning cartoonist of the internationally syndicated comic strip *The Pajama Diaries* and was a longtime writer of humorous cards for American Greetings. Terri lives with her husband and two daughters in Cleveland, Ohio. You can find her online at www.terrilibenson.com.

PRAISE FOR TERRI LIBENSON'S ADVENTURES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

INVISIBLE EMMIE: “Many readers will recognize themselves in Emmie and her friends, who are at once self-conscious and eager to be seen for who they are. A highly relatable middle grade drama.”
—*School Library Journal*

POSITIVELY IZZY: “Libenson captures middle-school dramas—family, friendships, crushes, stereotypes, grades, self-discovery—with candor, fast pacing, and authentic, relatable characters. Positively satisfying.”
—*The Horn Book*

★ **JUST JAIME:** “A delightful tale that navigates the precarious ebb and flow of friendship dynamics.”
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)



INVISIBLE EMMIE

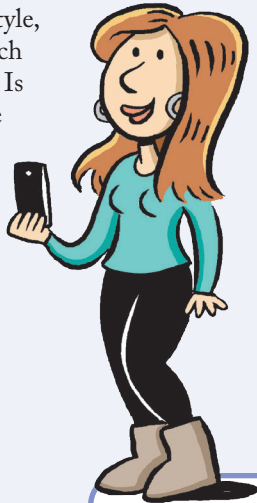
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare Emmie's and Katie's characters.

Consider why Emmie's narrative was as a mixture of prose and illustration, while Katie's was in all-graphic format. Was the author trying to show the depth of Emmie's character by using prose narrative and Katie's character as more superficial with the visual narrative? Why did she have Emmie's and Katie's perspectives look different?

2. Discuss how the narrative style, illustration, and format match the characters' personalities. Is one approach more effective than the other? Ask which style the readers prefer.

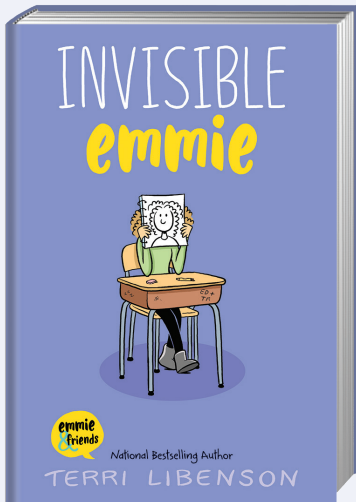
3. Explore the palette used to illustrate each character. Why did Terri Libenson use bright colors for Katie's chapters and neutral, subdued colors for Emmie's?



4. Notice how the color of the Emmie chapters changes from the beginning of the book to the end. Why do you think Terri Libenson chose to do this? Is there a change in the Katie chapters as well?



5. Discuss other graphic novels with a similar style. Why do you think they think these books are so appealing. Are you more captivated by the comics panels or the illustrations, or a combination of the two?
6. Examine the ending. Did you find the twist at the end of the story surprising? Discuss some alternative endings the readers would like to have seen. Did you feel sorry for Katie's character? What are some possible story lines for Katie's character after Emmie's ending?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

TWIST ENDINGS. Stories with twist endings are always fascinating. Terri Libenson did a great job keeping the reveal a surprise. Ask readers if or when they realized the true nature of Katie's character. Discuss other books that have shocking endings. Do the other stories keep their reveal a surprise?

NARRATING POINT OF VIEW. Point of view and characterization are two literary elements that help the reader understand the characters. Ask the readers to go back and reread Emmie's and Katie's stories separately. Does Emmie's story work without Katie's and vice versa? Ask the readers to consider some of the other characters' points of view. For example, imagine why Joe Lungo behaves the way that he does toward Emmie, or consider Bri's point of view on her friendship with Emmie.

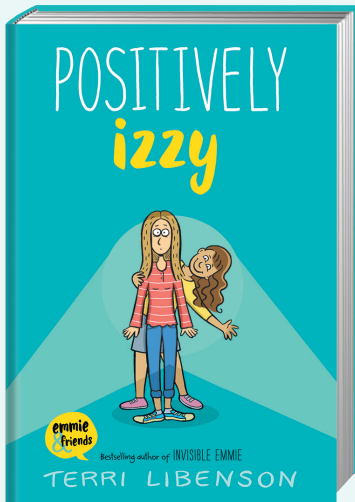
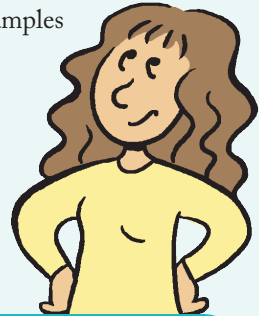
POSITIVELY IZZY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There is an adage that says a person's eyes are the window to their soul. By placing hearts over Brianna's eyes, Libenson shows the reader that Brianna has a crush on Anthony Randall (pg. 20). Examine other ways an image can reflect emotions or actions through a character's eyes. For example, what does it mean if character has "X" over their eyes, or if a character's eyes are exaggerated in size to be larger than usual?
2. Consider the use of borderless panels for Izzy and panels with borders for Brianna. Which do you prefer? Do you think one way is more effective than the other? Does adding borders to a sequence of panels make a difference in how you read it?



3. Consider the quote: "Ms. Bloom's voice is so bland that it's like I'm listening to the hum of an electric fan" (pg. 43). The accompanying image shows Ms. Bloom with a fan where her head should be. A figure of speech such as a simile or metaphor may seem more outlandish when drawn out and can be a helpful way of emphasizing the graphic novelist's point. Can you find other examples of this in *Positively Izzy*? Ask readers to draw some common figures of speech.
4. Color is a helpful tool with which an artist can accentuate a character's mood. For example, red is often used to indicate anger or anxiety, whereas bright colors like yellow are used to show happiness. Can you find any examples of this in the book?
5. Compare pictures of Brianna's dad with illustrations of Ben. Is there any resemblance between those two characters? Ask readers who they think Brianna's dad might be. Why?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

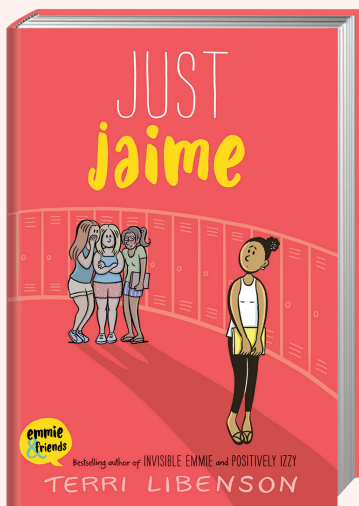
TWIST ENDINGS. In the first book, *Invisible Emmie*, there was an unexpected twist ending. Did you anticipate a similar twist in *Positively Izzy*? Were there any clues that tipped you off? Now that you know the relationship between Izzy and Brianna, see if you can find places in the story that might hint at the connection between them.

RUBE GOLDBERG MACHINES. Rube Goldberg was a cartoonist and inventor who created elaborate chains of events to ultimately complete a simple task. Brianna has arranged a series of strings tied to alarm clocks that are sequentially triggered to finally pour orange juice on her to wake her up (pg. 14). Ask the readers to draw their own Rube Goldberg machines with at least four or more chains of events.

JUST JAIME

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before we even see Maya, we see Maya's ceiling from her point of view (pg. 9). Drawing from a character's perspective is a great way for an artist to help readers imagine themselves in her position. Ask students to draw their bedrooms from their perspectives as if they are lying in bed. Now ask them to draw their bedrooms with them in it. How do the two pictures differ? How do perspective and point of view change the ways in which we interpret characters?
2. Often graphic novelists will use or include recurring jokes, otherwise known as "running gags," in their illustrations. Can you find any instances of this in *Just Jaime*? Are there any running gags that span all three books in the Emmie & Friends series? Discuss the ways these jokes can add to the story even when they may not be part of the main plot line.
3. Maya says admitting she was wrong and apologizing to Jaime "may be the hardest thing I've ever done in my life" (pg. 223). Why do you think Terri Libenson chose to illustrate these moments in close-up panels? How you think the emotional effect would be different if Maya's whole body had been pictured?
4. Hyperbole (exaggerated statements not meant to be taken literally) is a literary device that can be more poignant as a visual. Discuss the illustrated hyperbole used in *Just Jaime* to show how Jaime feels as she waits for Maya's reply (pg. 74). Can you find any others? Consider other hyperboles in everyday conversation and see if you can draw them.
5. Visual cues are a great way to show emotions without explicitly stating them in the text. Illustrated actions like yawns, eye-rolls, and tears all convey particular feelings to the reader (pgs. 32-33). What emotions do these actions convey to you? Discuss some places in this book where you can identify how a character is feeling by being shown, rather than told.
6. Graphic novelists often use different kinds of lines in their illustration to show things like movement, emotion, direction, or even smell. Look for examples of this in *Just Jaime*. Why do you think the graphic novelist uses dashes or dotted lines in some places, and curved or wavy lines in others? What do these different types of lines mean to you?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHARACTER CONNECTIONS. Terri Libenson's books *Invisible Emmie*, *Positively Izzy*, and *Just Jaime* all tell magnificently intertwined stories of students at Lakefront Middle School. The titles all have significant connections with their main characters. Consider all three book titles and how they reflect on their characters' personality and perceptions. What would the title of your story be?

FRIENDSHIPS. Throughout *Just Jaime*, we see the characters' friendships being tested. Discuss each character's perspective and their feelings regarding their friendships with other characters. Pick a character whose point of view is not featured and write a short story from their point of view.



READING STRATEGIES

Here are some tried-and-true strategies and activities for utilizing graphic and highly illustrated novels that can be applied to any book or series. The most important aspect of reading an illustrated novel or graphic novel is taking the time to look at the illustrations. Study the movements, consider the visual cues (coloring, lettering, panel layouts), and think about how it all comes together to move the story forward.

1 Study the illustrator's use of color. Ask readers what they think the illustrator's choice of colors implies. How do the colors impact the story's mood, tone, or even theme?

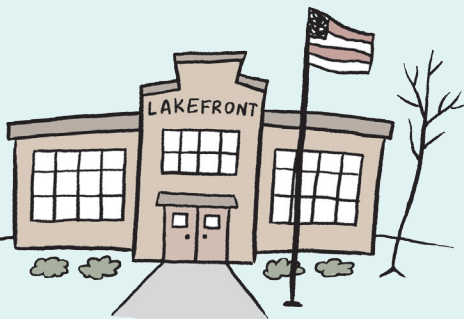
2 Consider the panels. How does the illustrator use the panels to bring focus to the story? Think of each panel as a movie scene and the angles (close-up, elongated panels, single- or double-page spread) as a way for the illustrator to bring depth into the story. For example, if an illustrator uses an elongated panel, it may emphasize the distance between two points. Angles are just as important as the art itself.

3 Examine each character's narrative. What style does the illustrator use to narrate the character's story? Is it from a first-person or a third-person point of view? Discuss why the illustrator does this.

4 Study the illustrations. Look for visual cues the illustrator may be using to create emotion in the scene. For example, if a character is mad, his or her eyebrows may be drawn at a slant, or if there are X's over the character's eyes, it means they have passed away, or if the character has a bead of sweat on their forehead, it could mean they are nervous or hot.



5 Analyze the gutters—the space between each panel—and infer what might have happened between the panels. There are many inferences that the reader must make from one panel to the next. For example, you might view a sequence of panels as follows: a character walks by a stove; a close-up of water splashing out of a steaming pot over a flame; the character running his hand under cold water. As a reader, you could infer there was something hot on the stove and it splashed and hit the character on the hand.



This guide was created by Tuan Nguyen, who received his Master's in Library Science from the University of North Texas and is a Library Consultant for Mackin Educational Resources. He is the cofounder of the Texas Library Association Maverick Graphic Novel Reading List and the Little Maverick Graphic Novel Reading List and has presented many professional development workshops on the importance of visual literacy and utilizing graphic novels.

Activities and discussion inspired by Cynthia Alaniz, an elementary school librarian in Coppell, Texas. Cynthia is currently serving on the Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts Committee with the National Council of Teachers of English.

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