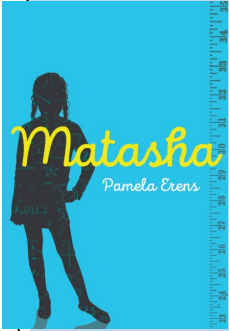


Matasha



Growing up in 1970s Chicago comes with many challenges for eleven-year-old Matasha Wax. Brainy, inquisitive, and by far the shortest kid in her class, Matasha is a target for bullies, and even her best friend, Jean, is starting to treat her differently. Against the backdrop of the end of the Vietnam War, Matasha's life gets much more complicated when a doctor prescribes growth hormone shots and her mother suddenly moves far away with a man who isn't her father. Matasha learns that she is more resilient and capable than she ever realized, and that sometimes things can turn out in unexpected ways.

Themes: Friendship, Family, Divorce, Disability, Bullying

Curriculum Connections: History, Psychology, Geography, Character Study

- First Gay Pride march marks anniversary of the Stonewall riots (June 28, 1970)
- Watergate break-in (June 17, 1972)
- OPEC oil embargo begins (October 1973)
- Patty Hearst kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army (February 4, 1974)
- Vietnam War ends (April 30, 1975)
- Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak form the Apple Computer Company (April 1, 1976)
- America celebrates the Bicentennial (July 4, 1976)
- *Star Wars* opens in theaters (May 25, 1977)
- Three Mile Island nuclear accident (March 28, 1979)

3. Matasha writes a book about the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 that wins an award at her school. Have students use computers to search for the answers to the following questions:

- On what date did the Great Chicago Fire begin?
- For how many days did the Great Fire burn?
- How does legend say the fire started?
- What factors made Chicago vulnerable to a fire?
- What event occurred a month after the fire?
- What is now located on the spot where the fire began?
- How did the Great Fire change Chicago's future?

4. For homework, have each student write a letter posing a question to an imaginary advice columnist. (Make sure students know the letters will be shared.) Distribute the questions and have each student write a response to the question received. Have students glue the letters and responses to a large piece of construction paper or poster board to create their own "Dear _____" column.

5. At the beginning of the book, Matasha is terrified of needles. She learns to face her fear, and by the end of the book is able to give herself her own hormone shots. Talk to the class about two or three methods for dealing with stress or anxiety. Examples of methods to discuss could include deep breathing, journaling, moving your body, and mindfulness. (The 54321 method is a simple mindfulness activity that you can read about [here](#)) Set aside a few minutes to practice these techniques.

activities

1. Matasha loves learning about the Dewey Decimal System at the school library. Divide students into groups and assign each group to a section of the Dewey Decimal System. The students can use [this website](#) to learn about their category.

Have each group tell the rest of the class about their category and share 2 topics they might want to read about that fall under their category. (Example: For the 500s category, Science, students could say they'd want to read about volcanoes and blue whales.)

2. Assign each student or pairs of students to research one of the following events from the 1970s and find the date that it occurred. Have students form a line, putting their events in chronological order by discussing with their classmates. Then, go down the line and have each student or pair share a couple of sentences about their event with the class. Exclude events from this list or add additional ones at your discretion based on the age and maturity level of the class.

- The Beatles announce their breakup (April 10, 1970)
- Apollo 13 mission ends in failure (April 17, 1970)
- Kent State shootings (May 4, 1970)

Matasha

for discussion

1. Matasha's friend Jean "never volunteered in class; she said it was pushy" (p. 13). Does Matasha agree? Why do you think Jean feels this way?
2. Matasha sometimes "felt that other kids had access to some sort of rule book that no one had shared with her" (p. 17). What do you think this means? Can you think of a time that you felt this way?
3. Matasha reads the newspaper every morning and watches TV coverage of the war in Vietnam (p. 19). She "sometimes had to skip ahead when reading about the horrendous things human beings did to other human beings . . . but she always marked the spots she skipped with a paper clip and made herself go back to them later" (p. 14). Why does Matasha make herself look at things that scare her? How do Matasha's parents feel about Matasha educating herself on current events?
4. How is Jean's family different from Matasha's? Do you think Matasha is envious of Jean's family? Do you think Jean is envious of Matasha's? Why or why not (p. 84 and pp. 104-105)?
5. Matasha's mother says that "when someone is cruel to you, you have to walk away" (p. 170). Do you agree? Give two examples of times when Matasha does or does not listen to this advice. What would you do if you were Matasha in these situations?
6. Matasha is disappointed by Dottie Summers's response to her letter (pp. 286-289). How would you have responded to her letter if you had your own advice column? Do you think Matasha learned any lessons from the Dottie Summers disappointment?
7. Matasha and her father discuss whether two people is a family (p. 236). What does family mean to you? Have you met other families that are very different from your own? If yes, describe what that was like. If no, describe how you might feel when meeting different kinds of families.
8. What is the message of the book, *Maybe Yes, Maybe No*, that Dr. Daisy gives Matasha (p. 239)? Write a few sentences about a time in your life when something worked out in an unexpected way.
9. Describe how Matasha changes over the course of the novel, by comparing her responsibility for Mr. Bunny (pp. 51-53) at the beginning of the book with her caretaking of her new kitten, Peanuts, at the end (pp. 253-255 and p. 277). What factors do you think caused these changes?
10. When Matasha is preparing to visit her mother in Switzerland, she feels "speedy, like a car out of control," and says that "it wasn't a good feeling, and it wasn't a bad feeling" (p. 285). Have you ever felt more than one emotion at once? When Matasha compares her feelings to a car out of control, she uses a simile, a literary device that highlights the similarities between two things using the comparison words "like" or "as." Write a sentence about an emotion or emotions you've felt, using a simile.

