Project (un)popular

About This Book

Perry had no idea that sixth grade was going to be this hard. After all, she and her best friend Venice were going to go through it all together, just like they always had. And they were both yearbook photographers, so they would be able to have fun together while taking cool pictures of their classmates. But now Anya, the bossy eighth-grader who chose them for the yearbook staff, has made it clear that she is only interested in photos of her popular friends. Perry and Venice want to make sure that everyone is included in the yearbook, but all their ideas end in disaster. When Venice starts turning to Leo, from yearbook class, for help in besting Anya, it’s the last straw for Perry. She needs to act fast before Leo and Venice start dating and Perry is out of the picture for good. Before she knows it, Perry is plotting with Anya, hiding things from Venice, getting detention, and trying her best to do what’s right. Does she have what it takes to get her best friend back, make the yearbook great for everyone, and make the most unpopular kid in her class seem cool?

Discussion Questions

* The book begins with Anya giving advice to Venice and Perry that she says will make them better photographers. Is her advice helpful to the girls? What do you think her motives were in giving them advice? Is there anyone else in the book who offers to help Perry with her problems? How helpful do they end up being?
* Anya tends to boil people down to their “thing”—a word or phrase that defines their personalities. Is this an effective way of dealing with people? What might the downfalls be, particularly in middle school? How does Perry feel about the fact that Anya does this?
* Piper tells Perry to just get through the year, and wait until seventh grade, when she has more power, to make changes to the yearbook. Is this good advice? Does Perry consider doing this? In what ways would it make her year easier? In what ways would it make her year worse?
* While talking to Derby’s mother, Perry realizes that she’s not telling anyone the “exact truth,” and that she’s actually doing a lot of things that aren’t very nice. Is she right to feel bad about this? Is it necessary for her to tell the exact truth to anyone? Does Perry reach a point where she does tell the truth about everything? Is it the right thing to do?
* What things do Venice, Leo, and Perry try to make Derby seem more cool to his classmates? Do any of them work? How does Anya’s plan fit in with their efforts? How does Derby feel about everything that is happening around him?
* At one point, Perry says “I didn’t care what I was becoming. Leo had to go. And if Derby had to suffer a little more embarrassment, he’d survive just fine. I had to do what I had to do.” (p. 131). Do the ends really justify the means in this case? Do Perry’s actions save her friendship with Venice, or put it in jeopardy? Does Perry go too far?
* What kind of relationship does Perry have with Piper? How helpful is Piper as the story progresses? Are there any similarities between the issues that Perry has with Piper, and her problems with other characters?
* How does Perry get her topographic map glued to her face? Does this incident make her feel more or less stressed about her life? Would Perry’s situation have been better or worse if she had been able to attend school that Friday instead of going to the emergency room?
* Do you think that Anya is a bad person? Are her ideas about the yearbook completely wrong, or do some of them have merit? Are there any ways that Perry is like Anya?
* Does Perry overreact to Venice’s relationship with Leo, or are her actions justified? Does Venice have to choose between romance and friendship? Is it realistic of Perry to have thought that their friendship would never change?
* Perry’s actions end up making a lot of people either angry or disappointed with her—Venice, Anya, her parents, her school principal. What does Perry do to make it up to them? Is it enough? Would you forgive her?
* What makes one person popular and one person unpopular? Is this fair? Can someone, like Derby, change how popular they are?

Activities

* Perry and Venice love to take photos because it helps them to express their creativity. Is there something you like to do that lets your creative side shine through? Create a portfolio of photos, write a song, paint a picture, write a story, or create in the format that allows you to be most artistic.
* There are several points in the story where others make assumptions about Perry that she doesn’t feel are accurate. Is there a time that you’ve felt like you were judged unfairly? Write a short story about the situation, why the judgment was unfair, and how it made you feel.
* When Perry needs to be strong, she carefully chooses and outfit that makes her feel powerful and protected. Do you have any clothes that make you feel like you can take on the world? Describe the outfit and explain why it makes you feel powerful. If you don’t have such an outfit, design one that would have the desired effect.
* The story is filled with unusual foods, from Piper’s exploding dolmades to Derby’s cannoli. Find a recipe for a food that you’ve never had, and make the dish. Perhaps you will find a new favorite.
* Piper uses information that she learned in her AP Psychology class to give advice to Perry. What do you know about psychology? Choose a topic in the field to research, and write a short report about how the information you learned can help you in your daily life.
* Venice and Perry want the yearbook to represent everyone in their school regardless of popularity. Is there a class or a club at your school that you can join that will let you improve the school experience for everyone?