

## Middle School Common Read 2010

### *Anything but Typical* by Nora Baskin

Jason Blake is anything but typical. He tells his story in his own language, that of an autistic twelve-year-old boy. He is intelligent and sensitive, with many special gifts, and he is different. We learn of his sensitivity and "differentness" as he writes about his life and describes his world. Jason's challenges in school, socially, and at home all portray his difficulty in navigating normal life situations. He uses his writing to help him deal with the world and express himself. (Review adapted from Simon & Schuster Reading Group Guide)

- Choose **ONE** of the options below.
- Write a one page typed response for your chosen option (use size 12 font and double space) **or** follow the specific guidelines below if artwork or poster-making is involved.

#### **Option #1—Writing as a Means of Sharing**

Many young people use writing as a way of sharing who they are: it helps them find a voice that they don't have in talking with people. Try writing something that reveals something about yourself that you may find difficult to verbalize but that you can write about. You might describe a fear or hope, explain a unique reaction that you had to a certain situation, etc. Let your writing capture the inner dialogue that we all have with ourselves.

#### **Option #2—Writing as a Means of Learning**

Through Jason's voice, we can experience the thoughts and perceptions of an autistic child. Do you think readers of this story will have a better understanding of autism? Or do you think that some harm might even be done in assuming that people with autism are all like Jason? Support one of these positions, using examples from the book that help explain autism.

#### **Option #3—The Story within the Story**

Compare Jason with Bennu, the main character in his story. How are they similar? How are they different? What else about Bennu's life can compare to Jason's life? You might begin by making a Venn diagram, but be sure to turn that diagram into paragraphs that answer the questions above. You might even get creative and explain who or what you would choose as a fictional character to represent yourself!

#### **Option #4—Your Own Experiences with Differences**

We've all known (or observed, or loved, or avoided) someone who seems "different" from us and maybe even "different" from most of the people we know. We've all probably felt "different" ourselves at times. Describe your experience with someone like this, or describe a time when you felt like you were the one who was "different." How did it make you feel? How do you think the other person felt? Did anyone go away from the experience feeling misunderstood or hurt? Did anyone end up wiser or more tolerant? Did anyone help you understand or handle the situation?

#### **Option #5—Art Inspired by Writing**

Make a collage, drawing, or painting that depicts the experience of autistic children or is in some way inspired by *Anything But Typical*. You might choose to illustrate one of the many similes that Jason uses to describe his experience. Write an explanation or interpretation of your work that could be displayed along with your artwork.

#### **Option #6—Research Anyone?**

Find out more about autism. Write out your findings, record your source, AND make connections between this information and Jason's experiences in the book. You might look up "autistic savants." You might give information about famous people who experience some degree of autism.