

# **RULES BY CYNTHIA LORD**

**SCHOLASTIC PRESS, 2006**

## ***ABOUT THE AUTHOR***

Cynthia Lord has been a bookseller, behavior specialist, teacher, and now a writer. She began writing songs with her sister at age 4. They grew up in New Hampshire, and she now calls Maine home. Lord has 2 children, one with autism. Her book, *Rules* is loosely based on her son. She aimed to show readers the full picture, both good and bad, of raising a child with autism. Her personal website is <http://www.cynthialord.com> And her publisher's website is <http://www.scholastic.com> Another website not to be missed is her daily journal <http://www.cynthialordlivejournal.com> A valuable resource for teachers is [http://www.cynthialord.com/pdf/rules\\_worksheetspdf](http://www.cynthialord.com/pdf/rules_worksheetspdf)



Rules is her first novel, and she has received nominations and awards for this first attempt. Some awards she has received include: the Newberry Honor Award, KY Bluegrass Award, Maine Student Book Award, and a nomination for the Young Hoosier Book Award. Her newest novel is called Touch Blue, Scholastic, 2008.

## **ANNOTATION**

Cynthia Lord has hands-on experience with the theme of this novel. *Rules* is about growing up in a home with a special needs child. Lord lives this scenario daily. She cleverly organizes the events in the plot according to the rule that needs to be learned and followed. The rules are written and interpreted by Catherine, a caring but often times frustrated, big sister. This first novel attempt by Lord has landed her several award nominations, and she isn't wasting any time publishing her second writing.

## **GENRE**

The genre of this Young Hoosier Book Award nominee is Contemporary Realistic Fiction.

## **POINT OF VIEW**

The point of view in *Rules* comes from the main character, 12 year old Catherine, and it is told in the first person.

## **THEME**

Here are the two prevailing themes in this novel. 1. People have good intentions to live by the rules they are given, but no matter dedicated they are some rules might be broken. 2. There are flaws in all of us – not just those with special needs. We all try to do the best we can to get approval, but things don't always end up the way we intend.



## **CONFLICT**

Examples of external conflict in *Rules* are as follows:

Catherine and her father don't have enough time together according to Catherine. Dad works, gardens, and of course watches David. Catherine feels slighted because he spends very little time with her.

There is a conflict between the bully Ryan and Catherine. Ryan is actually picking at and making fun of David, but David thinks it's a funny way to get attention. Catherine knows better. She feels the need to protect her brother from David's unkind words and advances.

An example of internal conflict is between Catherine and herself. She helps her mom, David, and Jason in almost any way they need. However, she struggles with her feelings about the following situations: growing up, her best friend is in CA, making a new friend, helping David learn the rules, and helping Jason with his communication cards.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Personal conflicts are often resolved in this story by citing or using one of the designated rules. Catherine's rules are invented to get or keep them out of bad situations.

Catherine is part of the solution to the problem with her and her father. She calls him at work and demands he come home to help her.

The conflict between Catherine and Ryan is usually pushed under the covers when she just gets angry and yells at him. The final solution is when she decides Kristi can be with Ryan and Catherine doesn't need to be with Kristi.

Catherine's internal struggle continues throughout the whole story, but as she grows and matures she handles it with more ease.

## **CHARACTERS**

The two major characters in the center of the story are 12 year old Catherine and her younger brother David. Catherine loves to sketch with her colored pencils. She seems to be able to pullout her sketchpad anytime anyplace and start from scratch. Her sketchpad is also where she keeps her very important list of rules. The rules she keeps are for her and for David. Catherine has an interest in the local antique store, and she is a very organized person. She seems to have sticky note reminders everywhere. The best rule that describes her is; "You gotta work with what you've got."

David has autism and attends occupational therapy at the clinic on Tuesdays and Thursdays. His first love is the video store and his others are the circus, fair, and beach. He can not tolerate loud noises, and the noise that sets him off the most is the squealing of his sister's guinea pigs. Also, David doesn't do well when his dad is late getting home from work. He especially appreciates Catherine's caring and her rules. The rule that describes David the best is "Late doesn't mean you are not coming".

The minor characters are Mom, Dad, Jason, Kristin and Ryan. Mother runs a tax office out of her home, and stays busy between work and caring for David. Dad is a pharmacist and seems to always stay late at work. He is a great gardener and is very proud of his tomatoes. Kristin is the new girl that moves in next door. She has straight brown hair that she usually pulls into a braid or pony tail. Kristi worries about the same things as Catherine like boys, clothes, bathing suits, hair, and make-up. Her new boyfriend is Ryan, and Catherine can't tolerate Ryan. It seems Ryan is rather a bully when it comes to her brother David.

The final character is Jason. He is a 14, turning 15, year old boy who has a communication disorder. He meets our main characters at the clinic twice a week. Even though he is confined to a wheelchair, he learns how to have a lot more fun when he meets Catherine. The only way he can communicate with others is through a notebook of word cards. He understands spoken communication perfectly well, but he must use the cards in place of speaking. The sky is the limit with word cards after he meets Catherine and she continuously sketches him new words.

## **SETTING**

Rules opens on the first day of summer vacation in a coastal community in Maine. The ocean shoreline with many wooden bridges attracts many tourists during the summer season. This normally quiet town is bustling a little more than usual as the story opens.

## **INTEREST LEVEL AND READING LEVEL**

The interest level in Rules is. The Guided Reading Level is “R” and Lexile is 780.

## **BOOKTALK**

“Excuse me”, “Please”, “I’m sorry”, and “Oh, I’ll help clean it up.” aren’t phrases that Catherine’s brother David is capable of saying. In the Novel Rules by Cynthia Lord the reader gets a close-up look at what it might be like to have an autistic sibling. Twelve year old Catherine is on her first day of summer vacation, and she should be looking forward to the great days ahead. Unfortunately, her best friend has to go stay with her dad in another state, and Catherine has so much responsibility watching over her younger brother. Can the summer be salvaged if a new girl moves into the empty house across the street? With her sketch pad in hand, Catherine accompanies David and Mom to David’s clinic twice each week. She can’t stay home alone, so she’ll just make the best of it with her pack full of colored pencils. She even begins to anticipate these days after she meets Jason, another child about her age, at the clinic. Now she has a goal and a purpose with her pencils; she is going to create beautiful communication cards for Jason. After all, since it’s his only means of communication, he needs some really colorful and useful words. David’s mom isn’t completely comfortable with all the self-expression and independence he is learning from Catherine. Will her creativeness and energy be too much as she makes a new great friend? Will her summer be ruined because she’s too protective of her special needs brother? After all, she has to teach him all of her rules, right?

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **PRE-READING QUESTIONS**

What does it mean to have special needs?

Describe a personal situation between you and a special needs person.

What are the everyday rules in your house?

Are there any different rules you have when you are someplace else?

What would be a rule you could create to help yourself if you ever get into a sticky situation?

## **DURING READING QUESTIONS**

CHAPTER 1 Where are David's favorite places? P.2

How does Catherine feel when she sees a moving van next door? P.5

What does she tell David the rule is for wanting to leave a situation? P.8

Compose your own rule to allow you to tactfully leave quickly (Bloom's Taxonomy, synthesis)

CHAPTER 2 What does Catherine say her reason is to continue going to the clinic? P.13

Predict what sort of activities David might do in Occupational Therapy. P.14 (Bloom's,comprehension)

How would you react if somebody's mom talked to you the way David's mom spoke to Catherine? P.21

CHAPTER 3

What are the hopes Catherine has for the new girl moving in across the street? P.41

Determine the qualities you would hope for in a new friend. P.41(Bloom's, application)

Conclude why Catherine is interested in putting so much time into Jason's word cards.

P.46(Bloom's, comprehension)

CHAPTER 4

Identify at least one example of Catherine's organizing techniques. P. 51(Bloom's analysis)

What is the one rule in this chapter that David has no trouble with? P.56

CHAPTER 5

Show the example on p.63 where Catherine follows her own rule. (Bloom's, application)

CHAPTER 6

What are the words she is repeating in her mind on p. 66?

Describe how she explains her rule system to Jason on p. 71. (Bloom's, comprehension)

CHAPTER 7

Where does Catherine come up with the ideas for her new Words? P.76

Figure out how you know David DID put a toy in the fish tank on p.85.(Bloom's, analysis)

CHAPTER 8

Describe Kristi's room on p.90. (Bloom's, comprehension)

On p. 93 why does Catherine think Kristi's house is so different from hers?

CHAPTER 9

On p.102 can you conclude who one of Catherine's favorite musicians is?

Who comes along for the first time to the clinic in chapter 9? P.103

CHAPTER 10

Why do you think Mom wants Catherine to sign up for a summer class? P. 105

What does she compare her brother to in this chapter? P.110(Bloom's, comprehension)

## CHAPTER 11

Dramatize the opening scene in this chapter between mother and daughter. P.113  
(Bloom's, application)

Sequence the order of events in this chapter and locate the highest point(climax). P.121-122 (Bloom's, analysis)

## CHAPTER 112

What was the game she played with her dad when she was little? P.124

## CHAPTER 13

What does Kristi think is so funny on p.132?

Describe Kristi's feelings about her parents' separation on 139.

## CHAPTER 14

Name the 2 special things in Jason's life today. P.145

## CHAPTER 15

Why is David so impatient? P.155

On p. 157 what does Catherine think the blank poster board reminds her of?

## CHAPTER 16

For what reason is she in the antique store? P. 162

## CHAPTER 17

What is comical about the title of this chapter? ("Pantless Brothers are not my Problem")  
p.167

## CHAPTER 18

Evaluate the conflict between brother and sister in p.182.(Bloom's, evaluation)

## CHAPTER 19

Why is "Late doesn't mean not coming" an important rule for David? P.186

## CHAPTER 20

What makes Catherine mad at the dance? P.194

When does she break on of her own rules? P.197

## CHAPTER 21

Why is it so fitting that the novel ends with a scene from a Frog and Toad book by Arnold Lobel? P.199

## **LANGUAGE**

Shrieks p.3 A frantic cry

Complicated p.10 Some rules are a little more difficult to understand.

Cellar p.72 a basement in a person's home

Communication p. 19 exchanging thoughts or opinions –sending messages

Guinea pig p. 29 a small pet that is short-eared and tailless

Billowing p. 78 a large wave of water smoke or sound, smoke coming from a steam engine

Ordinary p.133 very usual, common, plain, normal

## **INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS MET BY NOVEL CONTENT**

Third grade – Eng/LA 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.3.3, 3.3.6, 3.3.8

Math 3.6.1, 3.6.2    Sci. 3.4.3                      Soc.St. 3.2.5, 3.4.2

Fourth grade – Eng/LA 4.1.1, 4.1.6, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.6, 4.3.7

Math 4.7.6    Sci. 4.4.7, 4.4.9, 4.4.10    Soc. St. 4.3.2, 4.3.4, 4.4.10

Fifth Grade – Eng/LA 5.1.1, 5.1.6, 5.2.3, 5.5.3.4, 5.3.7, 5.3.8

Math 5.7.8    Sci. 5.6.1, 5.4.9    Soc. St. 5.2.8, 5.2.9, 5.2.10

## **ANTICIPATION STATEMENTS**

Before the introduction of Rules reply to the following statements. Write A if you agree with what is said and write D if you disagree. Follow these same steps after the novel has been completed.

1. A person in a wheelchair has to get used to being talked about and stared at. \_\_\_\_
2. It's good to have a list of rules to follow during the day. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Kids should fill up their free time in the summer by taking classes or going to camp. \_\_\_\_\_
4. It really would be a difficult situation if I had a special needs brother or sister. \_\_\_\_
5. Sudden high pitched sounds or loud noises can be annoying. \_\_\_\_\_
6. It really wouldn't be so bad if a child's best friend had to leave for the summer, if they came back in the fall. \_\_\_\_\_

## **READ-ALoud PAGES-PASSAGES**

In the first chapter on p. 8 we get an inside peek at how Catherine feels. “My own hands squeeze to fists. Sometimes I wish someone would invent a pill so David'd wake up one morning without autism...And he'd be a regular brother...Someone I could yell at and he'd yell back.” This is the point when she begins to introduce the reader to her rules. She makes the rules so she and David can better function at home and elsewhere.

On p.53 the reader begins to learn about Jason needing cards to communicate. Catherine wants them to be made special. “A string of words just pop to mind, but I don't want to get in trouble with his mother. So I choose: GROSS! AWESOME! STINKS A BIG ONE!...There's a gazillion words and phrases I could choose, and none seemed worth one of my last two cards.”

## ***IF YOU LIKE RULES, YOU WILL REALLY LIKE.....***

Frog and Toad are Friends by Arnold Lobel, Harper Trophy, 2003

Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Lobel, Harper Collins, 1972

Days with Frog and Toad by Arnold Lobel, Harper Collins, 1984

Quotations from these books are used several times in Rules. David can relate to things that happen to Frog and Toad. He listens to their escapes on a tape recorder quite often during the course of the story.

Two fiction titles that are written for children with the subject of autism are:

Autism Through a Sister's Eyes, Eve Band, Future Horizons, 2001 and

Megan in Maine: Summer Surprises, Sandra Bartholomew, Story House, 1999

## ***ACROSS THE CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS***

A related activity for fifth grade social studies would be to study early Maine. Even though it wasn't one of the original 13 colonies, its history dates back to that time. Students would also locate and identify Maine on the Classroom map.

Soc St. 5.1.8, 5.3.2, 5.3.4

A science activity for fourth graders would be a study on humans making tools as they needed them. A class discussion would be held on current inventions that make it a little easier for people with disabilities. Students would brainstorm as a class to devise ideas for possible new inventions. Science 4.4.7

## ***RESOURCES***

There are many websites for further information about autism. These websites give much more insight as to the extent of and living with autism. Here are 3 I found useful:

<http://www.autism-resources.com/>

<http://cureautismnow.org>

<http://www.autism-society.org/>

Another website that offers more information is from the author herself. Cynthia Lord gives us background knowledge behind Rules, book reviews, information about her, and teacher reproducibles.

<http://www.cynthialord.com/rules.htm>

<http://www.2scholastic.com/browse/search?query=rules+by+cynthia+lord>

## **BOOK ACTIVITIES**

Student will be divided into pairs as they work. Directions will be given orally to list 20-30 words that would be pertinent to them if they were in Catherine's situation. They will be given cardstock and can create their word cards and cut them out. Pairs will share their cards with each other to determine similarities and differences.  
Eng/LL 3<sup>rd</sup> – 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 3.1.7 4<sup>th</sup> 4.1.5, 4.1.6, 4.1.7 5<sup>th</sup> 5.1.2, 5.1.4, 5.1.5

This novel has lot of connections and references to the Frog and Toad books. Individuals with laptops will be instructed to use Googlekids to research Arnold Lobel and his Frog and Toad books. Individuals will record information that will help them decide which of the books they would like to choose. On a visit to the library the students will select their book. They will read through in order to give examples of how Frog and Toad adventures can be compared to those of Catherine and David.  
Eng/LA 3<sup>rd</sup> – 3.1.3, 3.3.3 4<sup>th</sup> – 4.1.1, 4.3.3 5<sup>th</sup> – 5.1.1, 5.3.1

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