**From the Back Cover…**

**NO TOYS IN THE FISH TANK.**

*Twelve-year-old Catherine just wants a normal life, which is nearly*

*impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that*

*revolves around his disability. She’s spent years trying to teach David*

*the rules from “no toys in the fish tank,” to “keep your pants on in*

*public” – in order to head off David’s embarrassing behaviors.*

*But the summer Catherine meets Jason, a surprising new sort-of*

*friend, and Kristi, the potential next-door friend she’s always wished for,*

*it’s her own shocking behavior that turns everything upside down and*

*forces her to ask: What is normal?*

*Filled with humor and warmth, Cynthia Lord’s debut novel takes*

*a candid and sensitive look at feeling different and finding acceptance –*

*beyond the rules.*

Think about what is written on the back cover. What are you thinking now? Jot

down the questions you want answered as you read Cynthia Lord’s **Rules**.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Chapter One: Follow the rules.**

1. Why is the start of summer vacation disappointing to the narrator?

2. Where does the narrator have to go? Why?

3. What is David’s relationship to the narrator?

4. The narrator says David loves to go to the video store, but, “…the hardest part is

when David kneels in the aisle to see the back of a video box a complete stranger is

holding in his hand”. Why do you think that is “the hardest part” of the visit to the

store?

5. Why do the narrator’s hands tremble when she tries to get David to walk to the car?

6. Why does the narrator lie to David about the time her father will pick him up? What

would you have done in the same situation?

7. The narrator says that one of her favorite rules is: “Sometimes you’ve gotta work

with what you’ve got.” Describe a time when this rule applied to your life.

**Chapter Two: Don’t run down the clinic hallway.**

1. List two reasons that Catherine enjoys going to occupational therapy with her

mother.

2. Name one person with whom you enjoy spending quality time. Describe your

fondest memory. Why is this time alone so special to you?

3. Who is Jason? Describe him.

4. List two reasons why Catherine decides to draw Jason.

5. In what ways does drawing help Catherine? What activities do you like to do in your

spare time?

6. Why is Jason “fighting mad”?

**Chapter Three: If it’s too loud, cover your ears or ask the other person to be quiet.**

1. What types of noises bother David? Why?

2. Why did Catherine get into a fight with Ryan at the bus stop on the last day of

school? How would you have handled the same situation?

3. Describe a time when a laugh hurt your feelings.

4. Catherine’s says, “Mom doesn’t understand how not everyone is on David’s side.”

What might it mean to be “on David’s side”? Why wouldn’t people be “on his side”?

What would you do to show David your friendship?

5. Mom wants Catherine to join in community summer activities. What sort of

activities do you find interesting in the summer?

6. In what ways have Catherine’s parents altered their lives to better support David?

What do you think of their sacrifices?

**Chapter Four: Sometimes you’ve gotta work with what you’ve got.**

1. Catherine has high hopes for her new neighbor. Why does her mother caution her

about letting hopes run too high?

2. What do you hope for in a best friend? Have you ever been let down by a friend?

Explain.

3. Once again, Catherine sees Jason at OT. What special request does Jason have for

her? How does she accommodate him?

4. On page 43, Catherine wonders how it would feel, “…to have to wait for someone

to make a word before I could use it. And to have all my words lying out in the

open, complete strangers able to walk by and see everything that mattered to me,

without even knowing my name.” Imagine you were Jason. How would you feel?

5. Why do you think Catherine chooses to draw herself the way she usually looks,

instead of the way she looks in her school picture? What might that reveal about the

ways she feels around Jason?

**Chapter Four: Sometimes you’ve gotta work with what you’ve got.**

1. Catherine has high hopes for her new neighbor. Why does her mother caution her

about letting hopes run too high?

2. What do you hope for in a best friend? Have you ever been let down by a friend?

Explain.

3. Once again, Catherine sees Jason at OT. What special request does Jason have for

her? How does she accommodate him?

4. On page 43, Catherine wonders how it would feel, “…to have to wait for someone

to make a word before I could use it. And to have all my words lying out in the

open, complete strangers able to walk by and see everything that mattered to me,

without even knowing my name.” Imagine you were Jason. How would you feel?

5. Why do you think Catherine chooses to draw herself the way she usually looks,

instead of the way she looks in her school picture? What might that reveal about the

ways she feels around Jason?

**Chapter Five: If you don’t have the words you need borrow someone else’s.**

1. What is Catherine’s dream for her future? What is your dream? How do you hope to

achieve it?

2. Describe Catherine’s room. What does it reveal about her character? If someone

were to take a picture of your room, what things would they discover about you and

your character?

3. Catherine decides on six of her seven words/phrases for Jason’s communication

board: Drawing, Guinea Pig, Gross!, Awesome!, Stinks a big one!!!, Rule. Create one

picture that you think best represents each word.

4. Before Catherine can create the last word, David interrupts her. What rule does he

break? How does Catherine try to help?

**Chapter Six: Sometimes things work out, but don’t count on it.**

1. Mom wants to invite the new neighbors to the family barbeque. Why is Catherine

hesitant to have them over?

2. Catherine needs new colored pencils. Mom suggests Catherine earn the money to

buy them for herself. Catherine thinks Mom’s reaction would be different if David

asked for something. In your opinion, should Mom’s reaction be different if David

were asking? Explain.

3. What disappointing news does Catherine find out from her next door neighbor?

4. Why doesn’t Catherine ask the neighbors over for the barbeque as her mom

suggested? What would you have done in the same circumstance?

**Chapter Seven: Saying you’ll do something means you have to do it – unless you**

**have a very good excuse.**

1. Why does Catherine get uneasy when Jason refers to her as a friend on his

communication board?

2. As Catherine shares the new words for Jason’s communication board, they begin to

“talk”. What things do Jason and Catherine have in common?

3. What does Catherine volunteer to do for Jason on page 74?

4. At the end of the chapter, Catherine adds a new rule to her collection: “Some

people think they know who you are, when really they don’t”. Why did she make up

this rule?

**Chapter Eight: If you can only choose one, pick carefully.**

1. As Catherine waits for her new neighbor to arrive next door, she busies herself by

making cards for Jason. Where does she get the inspiration for creating the cards?

2. Why is babysitting David sometimes a hard job for Catherine?

3. Kristi and Catherine finally meet. Describe Kristi. Why do you think Catherine

assumes she will be popular? Why does Catherine also assume Kristi would not like

to play with flashlights and practice Morse-code?

4. Why are Kristi and Catherine’s views of Ryan different?

5. In what ways does David almost “ruin” Catherine’s visit with Kristi?

**Chapter Nine: At someone else’s house, you have to follow their rules.**

1. Compare and contrast life at Catherine’s house with life at Kristi’s house. Which

lifestyle does Catherine prefer? Why?

2. Why does Catherine feel she has to watch what she says around Kristi?

3. When Kristi suggests Catherine take Jason to a dance, Catherine changes the subject.

Why doesn’t Catherine want to reveal information about Jason?

4. In this chapter, we learn that Kristi’s parents are separated. How does Kristi feel

about her parent’s situation? How do you know?

**Chapter Ten: If it fits in your mouth, it’s food.**

1. What does Catherine do to mend her relationship with Jason?

2. How does Jason feel about her surprise? How do you know?

3. Catherine also makes Jason more cards. In what ways are the new cards helping

Jason?

4. Why does Catherine want to make Jason more words? Explain.

5. What do Catherine’s actions in this chapter signify about her character?

**Chapter Eleven: Sometimes people laugh when they like you. But sometimes they**

**laugh to hurt you.**

1. Why does Mom buy Catherine the colored pencils she has been wanting?

2. As Mom, Catherine and David approach home, they spot Kristi and Ryan playing

basketball. What is Catherine’s dilemma? What choice should she make?

3. What does Ryan do to create conflict?

**Chapter Twelve: Open closet doors carefully. Sometimes things fall out.**

1. As Catherine waits for Jason at occupational therapy, explain the reasons she feels

worried about the new words she has prepared.

2. Catherine presents the words to Jason, despite her worry. Why might these “bad”

words be good for Jason to have in his communication book?

3. Describe Jason’s wish.

**Chapter Thirteen: Sometimes people don’t answer because they didn’t hear you.**

**Other times it’s because they don’t want to hear you.**

1. Why does Catherine run up her driveway, even though she is tired of running?

2. What words would you use to describe the feeling you get from running?

3. Why is Catherine jealous of her father’s tomatoes? Explain whether or not her

jealousy is justified.

**Chapter Fourteen: No toys in the fish tank.**

1. Kristi calls Catherine to hang out. What do they decide to do?

2. Catherine takes awhile to decide what to wear. Why do you think this is so?

3. When Kristi arrives, she asks Catherine to get her a towel. What strange thing does

Kristi notice when they enter Catherine’s house? Why does Catherine ignore it?

4. Do you think Kristi will like the pond? Why or why not?

**Chapter Fifteen: Solving one problem can create another.**

1. What did Jason’s parents buy him as a birthday gift? Why might this be a good gift

for Jason?

2. In what ways has Jason changed since he met Catherine?

3. Jason wants to take a walk. Where does he ask Catherine to go with him? Why is

Catherine uneasy on their walk? How would you feel?

4. Why does Catherine pretend she does not see Kristi?

**Chapter Sixteen: No dancing unless I am alone in my room or it is pitch-black dark.**

1. As Catherine sits on the porch with David, her mind races with concerns. Predict the

answers to the questions she asks herself on page 156:

\_ What’ll happen in September?

\_ Will Kristi stand with me (Catherine) at the bus stop or with Ryan?

\_ And what’ll happen when I (Catherine) don’t see Jason every week?

\_ Will our friendship disappear?

2. Catherine gets a phone call from Kristi. As she walks down the hall to answer the

call, she says, “The walk through the living room and down the hallway to the phone

feels extra long”. What is Catherine feeling? Why?

**Chapter Seventeen: Not everything worth keeping has to be useful.**

1. Why does Catherine go to Elliot’s Antiques?

2. When Catherine sees Jason at occupational therapy, he invites both David and Kristi

to the party. Why is Catherine hesitant to ask either person?

3. Later, Catherine presents Jason with words from their outing at the water. Why does

he get upset when she shows him the communication card for the word ‘together’?

Would you be upset if you were Jason? Why did Catherine make the card this way?

**Chapter Eighteen: Pantless brothers are not my problem.**

1. Catherine and her family make their way to Jason’s birthday party. How does

Catherine prepare David?

2. Why is Catherine nervous? How do you know she feels this way?

3. When Catherine first sees Jason, she wonders if he is still angry with her. How does

she apologize to him?

4. Do you think Jason likes his birthday gift? How can you tell?

**Chapter Nineteen: Some people think they know who you are, when really they**

**don’t.**

1. Mom asks Catherine for the reason she left the party in such a rush. Catherine

admits to being embarrassed by both David and Jason. What is the cause for her

embarrassment?

2. Mom says, “Just because other people think something, that doesn’t make it true.”

Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

3. Why does Catherine miss Melissa?

4. Catherine is alone watching David when his cassette snaps. Catherine “snaps” as

well. What is she *really* upset about? What does she realize?

**Chapter Twenty: Late doesn’t mean not coming.**

1. Catherine recognizes that David is different and may have special needs, but (as she

tells her father), “…that doesn’t mean I don’t need anything at all!” Do you agree or

disagree with her point? Explain.

2. How might her honesty with her father help Catherine with her family relationships?

3. Catherine and David make a wish on the lights in the gym because they look like

stars. What is David’s wish?

**Chapter Twenty-one: A real conversation takes two people.**

1. At the dance, Catherine thinks, “It hurts how life goes on, unknowing.” What is she

waiting for? What is she worried about?

2. Jason finally arrives and Catherine has to apologize. What does she admit about

herself? What was she really afraid of?

3. Catherine finally comes face to face with Kristi and Ryan. Why is Kristi upset with

Catherine? Is she correct?

**Chapter Twenty-two: If you need to borrow words, Arnold Lobel wrote some good**

**ones.**

1. What do you think Catherine will tell Melissa about her summer when she returns?

2. Why does Catherine come to the realization that David needs to use his own words?

3. In what ways has Catherine’s relationship with David changed? Why do you think

this is so? How is the relationship better?