

SCHOOL & LIBRARY GUIDE

REASONS

FRATE
ME

SUSAN METALLO

Dear fellow librarians and educators,

When I was in high school, I hated myself. I cringed at my appearance, my complete lack of social skills, the ways my brain wasn't like everyone else's (and at sometimes being proud that my brain wasn't like everyone else's). I agonized over being "not straight." I didn't have a word yet for what I was, just for that seemingly crucial thing I wasn't.

Some of those old scars prickled when I was writing *Reasons to Hate Me*, the story of a teenage girl who is very good at laughing at herself and less good at loving herself. But with the vestiges of adolescent self-loathing came the memory of places I felt safe as a closeted queer, undiagnosed neurodivergent teen: English classrooms at lunchtime; the school auditorium at night; the public library always. In these spaces that I felt most free to be myself, I was also free to be not myself—to take a break from the weight of being me and process the world through a character's eyes for a while.

As a librarian, I saw echoes of myself in the teens who came into my library—those who spent Monday nights with me in YA book club or made a bee-line to the reference desk after school to gush about a book they were reading. I remember being the kid who needed that librarian who would listen and affirm without judgment, and I remember being the kid who found hope and acceptance in an author's imagined world between the pages of a book.

I hope you know how profoundly your work affects teens, and I would be honored if you share *Reasons to Hate Me* with your students. Whether or not their identity or journey resembles my characters', I hope this book helps them see that underneath the epic fails and fatal flaws, each of them—whoever they are and whoever they aren't—is someone the world desperately needs.

With warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Metcalfe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

English Language Arts

(Standards Listed: Common Core / Virginia SOL)

This book has multiple antagonists who push back against Jess meeting her goals. Who seems like the biggest opponent at the beginning? What other opponents are revealed throughout the story? Is Jess ever an antagonist to herself? [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-12.3 / 9-12.RL.1C]

Early in the book, Jess claims she is being honest with readers of her blog, but later, she identifies herself as an unreliable narrator. Where in the story do you realize something Jess hasn't directly told you? Did you ever figure something out that Jess hadn't yet realized herself? [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-12.1 / 11-12.RL.1C]

Jess's story is told through blog posts. How does structure affect how you experience the story? How would the story be different if it were told in third person? Would the story be different if it started with Memorial Day and unfolded in chronological order without the flashbacks? [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-12.5 / 10-12.RL.1B]

Storytelling is a major theme in the book, particularly the theme of whose stories get believed and why. Why did Chloe believe Noah's story? Why did Jess believe Noah's version of the story? What prejudices or misconceptions about Jess or teen girls in general help Noah's story take root? [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-12.2 / 9-12.RL.1A]

At the end of *Reasons*, Jess and her friends go to see the play *Richard III*, about a king who cleverly manipulates his way into power but gradually loses supporters, his crown, and eventually his life as his ruthless behavior gets the better of him. Shakespeare based his play on the version history told by the person who killed Richard III and took over the throne, Henry Tudor, who emphasized Richard's disabilities and linked "deformity" to evil. How does the play relate to the themes of Jess's story? How does the true story of Richard and Henry relate to the themes of Jess's story? [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9 / 11-12.RL.3A]

Theatre Arts

(Standards Listed: National Core Arts Standards / Virginia Theatre Art SOL)

How does Jess describe herself physically? What are some examples of her body language throughout the book? How does her physicality help you understand what she is feeling emotionally? [NCAS 4 / TI.3.3]

Jess writes and stages a short play, "Restraint," to help her process the harmful ways that people talk and think about women. How do her choices for stage directions and blocking contribute to making her point? If you were staging the play, would you have made different choices? [NCAS 7-9 / TI.3.1]

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

English Language Arts

(Standards Listed: Common Core / Virginia SOL)

When Chloe tears up Jess's notebook, Jess remembers watching *Little Women* together and connects that memory to a specific sensory detail: "The smell of the popcorn and the bits of kernel my tongue kept finding as it ran over my teeth." Think of an event in your past, and write down all of the strong sensory details you remember—the more specific the better! Then, trade with a partner and write or draw a scene from *their* sensory details. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.D / 9-12.W.2]

Working as a class, create a "Reasons to Hate Us" poster. Ask yourselves: what makes a person "lovable"? What are some of the ways teens are expected to look or act? What are you expected to be good at? Fill a large sheet of paper with words or pictures of the expectations and ideals. Then, anonymously write "reasons to hate me" that you might include on your own blog—whether they're funny or serious. Mix up the "Reasons to Hate Us," and add them to the poster. Are there any duplicates? Does one surprise you? What would you say to the person who wrote it? [SEL]

The whole book is from Jess's point of view, which means everything we see is colored by her bias. Choose one of the following chapters and rewrite it from another character's point of view: "Reason #3 from Emily's POV (p. 19); "Reason #26" from Cam's POV (p. 156); "Reason #49" from Chloe's POV (p. 278). [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.A / 9-12.W.2]

Theatre Arts

(Standards Listed: National Core Arts Standards / Virginia Theatre Art SOL)

Throughout the story, Jess uses short scripts to stage an exaggerated, humorous version of how she imagines a confrontation would unfold. Choose one of the following scenes: Cam and the Cyberbullies (pp. 8-10); Mom and Julia (pp. 83-84); Jess, Mr. Barton, Cam, and Hannah (pp. 101-102). With your partner or group, stage the scene twice, once from Jess's script, and once how you imagine the scene might have played out in real life. [NCAS 4-6; TI.2]

Jess writes a monologue from the perspective of her mother to help imagine what her mother felt about the divorce. Think of someone that has made a choice you disagree with or don't understand. Imagine their motivation, and write your own "(Maybe) Fictional Monologue." [NCAS 1-3 & NCAS 10 / TI.3.4]

Jess and Chloe write a murder mystery play inspired by their chemistry class, with all of the characters being different elements on the periodic table. Working in groups, choose one of your core classes and a genre (e.g., mystery, romance, adventure). What would the characters be like? Can you think of some jokes or dramatic lines that would relate to the subject area? [NCAS 1-3 & NCAS 11 / TI.3.4 & TI.7]

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1 Some of the embarrassing moments that Jess shares give readers a glimpse into her happy memories with Chloe, such as the Cake Dropping Incident and the Jewelry Heist. Do you have a favorite funny moment with a friend or a former friend? Do you feel the same way about the “Incident” now as you did when it first happened?

2 As Jess and Chloe grow farther apart, Jess and her sister, Julia, are growing closer together. What do you think Jess learns about Julia during the book that helps them become closer? What does Julia learn about Jess?

3 Jess tells us at the beginning of the story that she is posting true stories about herself on the blog, but later, her friend Cam questions whether she’s being completely truthful. (“So you just make up everything I say and do?”) Jess responds that her blog is “eighty percent accurate,” with the rest being “artistic choices.” How much did you trust Jess as a narrator? Are there things you think she is untruthful about?

4 If Jess from the end of the book could go back in time to the beginning of the book, what do you think she’d tell herself?

5 Jess frequently compares her life to plays and movies. Have you ever seen a play or movie or read a book that helped you make sense of something in your real life? Has something in your real life ever helped you make sense of a book?

6 The author says she writes books about girls “claiming space in the world.” How does Jess “claim space” in this story? How does Chloe?

7 Did you like the ending of the book? Do you think Jess should have forgiven Chloe right away? Do you think Jess should be staying farther away from Chloe?

8 Jess struggles to communicate with Chloe throughout the book, sometimes because Chloe won’t respond to her calls and texts and sometimes because she doesn’t know what to say. She even tries to express how she’s feeling through plays and poetry. If you had something difficult to communicate with someone who betrayed your trust, how would you approach it?

9 When Noah tells his version of what happened on Memorial Day, everyone believes him—even Jess. Have you ever had an experience where someone else’s perspective was different from how you perceived it? How did you tell your side of the story?

10 Jess has a number of friends in the book, some of whom are good friends throughout the whole story and others who are not. What qualities do you think are important in a good friend? Which of Jess’s friends do you think was the best to her? To whom was *Jess* the best friend?

HAVE SUSAN TAKE A LESSON

Book a School or Library Visit

Susan lives for school and library visits! She can lead one of the activities or discussions in this guide, lead a writing workshop, or talk about writing, publishing, or careers in the arts (making art vs. making money from art).

EMAIL

susan@susanmetallo.com
for more information.

Book a FREE Virtual Visit

Buying a set of books for your YA book club? Or want to work with a local independent bookseller to help your students purchase books? If you or your students purchase 12 books or more, Susan can do a virtual visit with your students for free! She can do a virtual writing workshop, an author Q&A, or work something else out that will meet your students' needs.



Susan Metallo is a Young Adult author and Youth Services librarian with over 15 years of professional experience presenting educational programs to teenagers. She is a graduate of the College of William and Mary (B.A.) and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (M.S.L.S.). Her literary works include *REASONS TO HATE ME* (Candlewick Press, 2025) and *HEARTS ON THE TABLE* (Candlewick Press, 2026), as well as short fiction and poetry published by Cricket Media Group. She has also contributed journalistic articles to [Publishers Weekly](#).

REASONS TO HATE ME is a hilarious and heartfelt novel about a neurodivergent theater nerd that tackles slut-shaming, what it means to be a friend, and the power of forgiving others—and yourself. The novel follows witty autistic theatre nerd Jess Lanza who decides to take on the school bullies by posting her own most embarrassing fails and flaws publicly on the internet, inadvertently shining a light on the ways that stories other people tell about us can become stories we believe about ourselves. Learn more and read reviews at susanmetallo.com/books.

Susan Metallo
AUTHOR

susanmetallo.com