

CRITICAL: THEME 1 –KEEPING SECRETS

Understanding

The O'Brien family decides to keep a big secret (see pages 48-51). Find examples of when Maryn keeps the O'Brien family secret (see pages 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 73, 83, 86, 91-92, 97-98, 106-107, 113, 119, 126-127, 130-131, 139, and 162). Find examples of when Maryn decides to trust people with the secret (see pages 55, 63, 66, 89-93, 104-105, 125-126, 140, 148-149, 164-167, and 186-187).

Thinking

On the one hand, keeping the O'Brien family secret has positive impacts in the book. On the other hand, keeping the same secret sometimes has negative impacts. Cite a few examples from *Critical* to illustrate these positive and negative impacts. Do you believe that it can sometimes be appropriate to keep a secret? Or do you believe that keeping a secret is never appropriate? What is the difference between keeping a secret and keeping information private? Do you believe that people have a right to privacy? Why do you think the way you do?

Creating

As a society, we seem to have a fascination with secrets—consider all of the literature (poems, short stories, plays, and novels), songs, and films about them! Consider today's array of gossip columns, sites, blogs, and TV shows. Name a few.

Using the fictional characters from *Critical* as your subjects, draw up a list of secrets you might include in a gossip column or broadcast, and then create one. Afterwards, reflect on how you felt as you planned, wrote, produced, and presented your piece.

THEME 2 – SIBLING RIVALRY

Understanding

Sibling rivalry is the feeling of jealousy and/or competitiveness that sometimes exists between brothers and sisters. Although Maryn and her brother Gil get along very well for siblings who are just ten months apart, they do experience sibling rivalry. Locate examples in which Maryn keeps these feelings to herself (see pages 12, 14, and 97).

Locate examples in which she openly expresses these feelings (see pages 26, 79-80, 175-177, and 211).

Thinking

Do you believe that sibling rivalry is a necessary and important part of life? Do you believe that sibling rivalry can be a serious problem? What do you think causes sibling rivalry? Where do you think children without siblings (so-called “only children”) fit into the picture?

Creating

An acrostic is a poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a word. See the following example:

Cuddly
Autonomous
Tenacious
Soft

On the theme of sibling rivalry, write an acrostic poem about Maryn and Gil, using their names as the vertical words. For more of a challenge, use their last names too.

THEME 3 – MENTORSHIP

Understanding

A mentor is a trusted advisor or guide—usually an older, more experienced person—who helps somebody over time. In *Critical*, Maryn has more than one mentor. Locate examples of Maryn being mentored (see pages 18-19, 31-35, 37, 55-56, 62-63, 67-70, 73-76, 82-83, 99-102, 111-113, 114-115, 117-119, 122-123, 132-133, 141-142, 148-149, 150-152, 174, 191-194, 197, 198-200, 205, and 213-214). In the book, Maryn also acts as a mentor herself. Locate examples of Maryn acting as a mentor (see pages 1-6, 10-11, 169-170, and 209-210).

Thinking

What qualities do you think make a good mentor? Do you think a parent can be a mentor? Why do you think the way you do?

Creating

Write a classified advertisement for a newspaper or something like Craigslist or Kijiji seeking a mentor for one of the characters in the book; or, take a more personal approach, and write the ad looking for a mentor for yourself.

THEME 4 – GOAL SETTING, PRIORITIZATION, AND TIME MANAGEMENT (CRITICAL PATH)

Understanding

Maryn is serious about her goal of become an Olympic mountain bike racer. To support her in achieving this goal, she creates a giant critical path in her bedroom to map out the steps she must take in order to achieve this. Locate the descriptions of how to create a critical path (see pages 32-35, and 37-39).

Thinking

When Maryn's personal life becomes more complicated because of a serious health challenge in her family, her Olympic goal is threatened. At first, Maryn tries to continue following the critical path she has mapped out. But, over time, she eventually changes her priorities to provide support to her family and begins managing her time differently. This approach takes her off her original path. What do you think about the approach that Maryn takes? For example, do you admire her for the choices she makes? Or do you believe she could have handled things differently? Why do you think the way you do?

Creating

Either set an imaginary goal or use a real goal and create a critical path to map out how to achieve it. Use Maryn's approach (see pages) as a guide.

THEME 5 – HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Understanding

Find examples of characters in the book engaging in activities that contribute to good health and wellness (see pages 1-7, 14, 19-21, 25, 31-35, 62-63, 65, 73-75, 77-78, 129, 141-142, 157, 174, 186, and 209). Find examples of characters facing serious health challenges (see pages 44-46, 76, 96-98, 100, 108-109, 114-115, 124-125, 13, 133-135, 150-152, 153-157, 188-189, 190-194, 195, and 198-200).

Thinking

Do you believe that making excellent choices for your health and wellness guarantees good health? Tell us why you think the way you do. Do you think that some of the health challenges presented in the book resulted in positive developments? Provide examples to support your argument.

Creating

Find and interview someone who has experienced a life-changing health-related event. This can include a harmful event such as an injury or an illness, but it can also include a positive event like a dietary or environmental change. Write an article or prepare a short podcast capturing the essence of this change in your subject's life.

THEME 6 – FRIENDSHIP

Understanding

Throughout the book, we see that Maryn and Janey share a friendship. How do we know that they are important friends to one another? (see pages 9-13, 17, 21, 26, 53-54, 57-58, 84, 86-87, 89-93, 104-105, 125-127, 131, 171-173, 186-187, and 205-207).

Thinking

Did it surprise you that a senior citizen and a teenager could become friends? Do you think that Janey is a good friend to Maryn? Do you think that Maryn is a good friend to Liam? Why do you think the way you do?

Creating

Create any piece of art (literary, visual, dance-related, or musical) that you feel demonstrates the ideals of a true friendship.