

# A Is for ELIZABETH Series

## A Teacher's Guide for the



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Vail is the author of children's books including the Justin Case series, *Sometimes I'm Bombaloo*, and *Righty and Lefty*. She is also the author of several books for teens and middle grade readers, including *If We Kiss; Unfriended; Well, That Was Awkward; Wonder*; and *Never Mind!*, which she co-wrote with Avi. Vail was born in New York City and grew up in New Rochelle, New York, just down the street from her future husband, though she didn't know that until much later. She attended Georgetown University, where she earned her BA in English and theater. She lives in New York City with her husband, their two sons, and their tortoise named Lightning.



### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Paige Keiser is an award-winning children's book artist who has illustrated *Little Chef* and *Mia Moves Out*.



### ABOUT THE SERIES

This is a new chapter book series about a little kid with huge feelings. Spun off from the award-winning *Justin Case* series, here Justin's younger sister Elizabeth takes center stage.

In *A Is for Elizabeth*, Elizabeth is excited about starting second grade, especially about getting homework. Her excitement fades when Ms. Patel gives the class their first assignment: making name posters. Elizabeth is upset because her name has a "bajillion" letters in it and her poster will require more work. To make matters worse, Ms. Patel is going to display the posters in alphabetical order and Anna's, not Elizabeth's, will be first. Elizabeth struggles with this injustice, but along the way she learns some important lessons about fairness, rules, speaking up, and being a good friend.

In *Big Mouth Elizabeth*, Elizabeth wants to be a member of the Big Mouth Club, the club for kids who have lost at least one baby tooth. She and Cali, a quiet girl in the class, have not lost any baby teeth yet. Elizabeth thinks Cali is babyish, unlike herself, and Elizabeth knows she deserves to be in the Big Mouth Club. But when she understands how bad it feels to be left out, her attitude shifts, and she learns, with Cali's help, how super it feels to fit in.



## ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guide contains discussion questions and before reading and after reading activities for each book, as well as an extended learning section at the end that contains activities for the series as a whole. Encourage students to support their responses and ideas with evidence from the books.

The guide is aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy. The standards cited throughout the guide primarily reflect the standards for grade 2, but questions and activities can be applied to grades 1 through 3. Please adapt the questions and activities to meet the needs of your students. You know them best!

## BEFORE READING ACTIVITIES

### Meet Elizabeth

Introduce the class to Elizabeth, a second-grader with big feelings and lots of big ideas, some of which get her in a bit of trouble! Tell them that Elizabeth is excited about starting second grade. Show them the cover of the book and read the title. Ask them if there is anything surprising or confusing about the title. Encourage them to think about this as they read the story.

**CCSS.RL.2.1** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.



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### Context Clues

Explain to students that readers often come across unknown words when reading and that one strategy they can use to help them figure out what a word means is to use the context (the other words in the sentence or passage). Write these two sentences from page 4 of the book on the board: “My name is Elizabeth. It has a *bajillion* letters.” Model how to use the context to figure out what *bajillion* means (Elizabeth is a long name. *Bajillion* also rhymes with *million*. It must mean her name has a lot of letters.) Encourage students to use context clues when they come across unfamiliar words while reading. Have them keep track of these words in their notebooks, writing each word, the page where they read it, and what they think it means. Review these frequently with students during reading conferences or in reading groups to provide reinforcement and correct any misconceptions.

**CCSS.L.2.4a** Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Elizabeth excited about starting second grade? What happens to change her mind?
2. Why is she upset with Anna? What does Anna mean when she tells Elizabeth, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me”?
3. Why does Elizabeth decide to make her poster out of rocks and sticks? Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?
4. How do Elizabeth’s parents react when she tells them she needs poster board the night before her poster is due? What does Mom mean when she says, “Daddy will have to drive all over Kingdom Come to find poster board at this time of night”? What does Elizabeth think this means?



5. What does Justin think of Elizabeth’s poster? Why does he get so frustrated with her?
6. What does Elizabeth mean when she tells her parents her poster is an abstract version? Do you think her parents like it?
7. How does Elizabeth feel about presenting her poster to the class? Why?
8. When Elizabeth tells the class she thinks alphabetical order is unfair, how do they respond? What does she mean when she says her name poster is really a protest sign?
9. How does Fiona save the day? Does her idea for solving the conflict work? How does Ms. Patel respect everyone’s suggestions?
10. What lesson do you think Elizabeth learns in this story?

**CCSS.RL.2.1** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

**CCSS.RL.2.3** Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

**CCSS.RL.2.6** Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

## **AFTER READING ACTIVITIES**

### Authors and Illustrators as Partners

Explain to students that the illustrations in a book help the reader to better understand what is going on in the story and how the characters are feeling. Tell students to choose a favorite illustration of Elizabeth from the book and write a brief description of how she is feeling and how the illustrator showed this. Allow them to share their responses with a partner.

**CCSS.RL.2.7** Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

### Connecting to the Text

Ask students to think about a time in their own lives when they felt they were treated unfairly. Have them write about that experience, describing what happened, how they felt about it, and if they were able to resolve the problem. Then have them add an illustration that shows how they felt. Provide time for them to share their stories with the class.

**CCSS.W.2.3** Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.

### Alphabetical Order and Other Options

Lead a discussion with students about how Fiona helped to solve the conflict in Ms. Patel’s class. What was her solution? Did it work? Tell them they will have the opportunity to order the students in their own classroom in different ways, too. Distribute a random class list of students’ first names with their birthdays beside each name. First, they should alphabetize the names. Then they should order the class by birthdays as they occur in the calendar year. During math class, they should measure one another and



order the class from shortest to tallest and tallest to shortest. Encourage them to think about other ways they can order the class. Refer to these for different options for students to line up during the school day.

**CCSS.RL.2.1** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

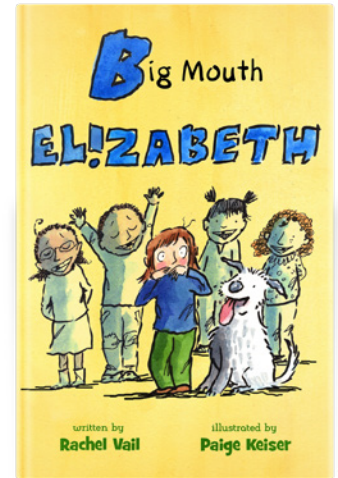
**CCSS.SL.2.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

## BEFORE READING ACTIVITIES

### Preview the Text

Show students the cover of the book. Read the title. Ask students what the term “big mouth” usually means. Is it a positive or negative thing to call someone? Tell them the illustration on the cover provides a clue to what Elizabeth’s problem is in the story. Using the title and illustration, have students write a prediction about what they feel the problem in the story will be. While they are reading, they should confirm or discount their predictions.

**CCSS.RL.2.1** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.



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### Context Clues

(See Before Reading Activities for *A Is For Elizabeth*.)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Elizabeth find it a challenge to be friends with Anna, Dan, and Cali? Why does she find it easy to be friends with Bucky?
2. What is the Big Mouth Club? Why can't Elizabeth be a member of this club? How does this make her feel?
3. What does Elizabeth think about Mallory's suggestion that she and Cali could make a Baby Mouth Club? Why do you think she feels this way?
4. What does Mom mean when she says everyone does things at a different pace? Why does she feel that challenges are a good thing?
5. How do the new reading groups make Elizabeth feel even more left out? What does Bucky say about being left out?
6. How does Elizabeth's opinion of Cali change on the playdate? What was Cali trying to prove by sliding down the stairs?
7. What does Mom say to Elizabeth on the way home from Cali's house? How does this make Elizabeth feel about calling Cali names?
8. Why do you think Cali chooses not to be in the Big Mouth Club? What is her idea for a new club?





9. How does Elizabeth show she is brave at the end?

10. What lesson do you think Elizabeth learns in this story?

**CCSS.RL.2.1** Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

**CCSS.RL.2.3** Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

**CCSS.RL.2.6** Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

## AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

### Story Map

Provide students with a graphic organizer to create a map of the story. It should include the following: characters, setting, problem, and solution, and three boxes for the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Model how to use a story map with a story they are familiar with, such as a fairy tale. Give students the option to use words or drawings for describing the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Have students use their story maps to retell the story to a partner.

**CCSS.RL.2.5** Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

**CCSS.SL.2.2** Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

### Connecting to the Character

Remind students that Elizabeth learns that words and actions can cause someone to feel left out or included. Have students brainstorm scenarios that would cause someone to feel left out. List their responses on the board. Instruct each student to choose one of these examples, and on the left half of a folded piece of paper, draw a scene showing someone who is feeling left out and what is causing them to feel that way. On the right half, they should draw a scene where someone is doing something that helps the person to feel included. Encourage the students to use speech balloons to add dialogue. Display these in the classroom or compile them in a book for the classroom library.

**CCSS.RL.2.7** Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

### Reading Dialogue

Explain to students that when characters talk to one another in stories it is called dialogue and is usually shown with quotation marks. Good readers try to sound like the different characters when they read dialogue aloud. This helps them to understand how each character is feeling and thinking. Use a document camera to display Chapter 3 on the screen. Model how it sounds to read the dialogue differently for each character. Divide the class into pairs and assign each pair a chapter to read. Have them practice reading it to themselves first, then take turns reading it to their partner. Partners can then give each other specific feedback about their reading.



**CCSS.RL.2.6** Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

**CCSS.RF.2.4** Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

## EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR THE WHOLE SERIES

### Theme

Tell students that the theme in a story is an important lesson about life that the author wants the reader to learn. The author conveys this lesson through the plot and characters. Stories may have more than one theme. Tell students to choose one of the A Is for Elizabeth books and create a theme statement for that book, including evidence to support their claim. Provide them with a strip of paper with the following sentence starters: The theme in (name of book) is \_\_\_\_\_. My evidence from the story is \_\_\_\_\_. Students share their statements with the class. Their classmates respectfully agree or disagree with the statements and refer to the text to support their opinions.

**CCSS.RL.2.2** Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

**CCSS.SL.2.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

### Thinking About the Characters

#### OPTION 1:

Have students choose two of their favorite characters from the A Is for Elizabeth books. They should then create a Venn diagram that shows how these two characters are similar and how they are different and then present them to the class. Their classmates can ask questions about the diagrams, and the presenter must be prepared to provide specific evidence from the books to support what they've written.

#### OPTION 2:

Provide students with a list of character traits. Explain that traits describe what a character is like as a person and that characters can have many character traits, both positive and negative. Have students choose one of the characters from the A Is for Elizabeth books and write three traits they feel best describe that character. They should present these to the class by reading the traits and asking their classmates to guess which character they're describing. They must be able to provide specific evidence from the books to support their choices.

**CCSS.RL.2.3** Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

**CCSS.SL.2.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

**CCSS.SL.2.3** Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.



## Connecting to Writing Workshop

Explain to students that authors use different text features to help the reader know which words to stress when they are reading a text. Some examples of these are exclamation points, boldface words, words with all uppercase letters, stretching words out, and italics. These features help readers to read fluently and better understand the text. Share some examples of each of these features in the books and model how it affects your reading of the text. Give students the option of revising one of their personal narratives to incorporate some of these features or to write a brief narrative where they include them.

**CCSS.RL.2.7** Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

## Connecting to the Justin Case Books

Tell students that Rachel Vail has also written a series about Elizabeth’s brother, Justin. Those stories are written from his point of view. Provide copies of these books: *Justin Case: School, Drool, and Other Daily Disasters*; *Justin Case: Shells, Smells, and the Horrible Flip-Flops of Doom*; and *Justin Case: Rules, Tools, and Maybe a Bully*. Have students meet in book clubs to read and discuss the books. Encourage them to make connections with the A Is for Elizabeth books and to explain how the point of view of the narrator affects the story.

**CCSS.RL.2.9** Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures.

**CCSS.SL.2.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

This guide was written by Barbara McLaughlin, MEd, MA, Literacy Consultant and former Senior Program Director for Elementary ELA in the Boston Public Schools.

