

# TURTLE BOY

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



The author, M. Evan Wolkenstein, based *Turtle Boy* on his own experiences as a child with a facial difference.

How does this affect the way you think about Will's character?



RJ writes a bucket list of adventures he wants to have, like owning a pet, going on a roller coaster, and swimming in the ocean. What would be on your list?



When RJ is too sick to complete his bucket list, Will takes over instead. Why do you think it helps RJ to hear about the adventures Will is having?



Will knows that it's illegal to keep wild turtles at home, but he still goes behind his mom and Ms. Kuper's backs to catch his specimens. Why do you think he finds it so hard to let them go?



Why do you think Rabbi Harris thought that Will and RJ would benefit from spending time together? Do you think he was right?



Rabbi Harris keeps his car glove compartment full of snacks, for after his hospital visits. Why do you think this routine helps him? What do you use to cheer you up on difficult days?



When they're being picked on, Will and Max sometimes turn on each other and Shira, instead of sticking together against the bullies. Why do you think this is?



Will calls the Blanding's turtle "it", but RJ names it Grampy and always refers to it as "him". Why do you think they have different attitudes towards the turtle?



Will is terrified of performing in the talent show, but when he's on stage he lets his mask drop. What do you think gives him the courage? Do you have a hobby or talent that makes you feel brave?



Shirah kisses her fist and thinks of her grandmother's encouraging words when she's nervous. What are some things you use to calm you down at big moments?



Will, Ms. Kuper, and friends fight to save the Back 40, to conserve the habitat of the turtles that live there and to help future science classes learn about the natural

ecosystem. Why is this important? Are there any natural environments in your area that you think need to be protected?



At the beginning of the novel, Will is terrified of the idea of surgery. What do you think makes him finally able to face it?



Memory is an important theme of *Turtle Boy*, as at the beginning of the novel, Will can't remember anything about his father, but as he gets closer to RJ some of his childhood memories come back to him. Discuss the idea of memory, and think about what sorts of things trigger Will to remember events he thought he'd forgotten.



From the very first time we meet RJ, the reader and Will know that he is going to die. Does it still come as a shock when he passes away?



A major theme of *Turtle Boy* is memory - remembering things you've forgotten and forgetting things you thought you remembered. Are there memories from a long time ago which you cherish and you hope you never forget?



Are there experiences you've had, which you wish you could remember better (or at all)?



Will invents several new Jewish rituals for himself, including the "Drummer's Kaddish." Are there ways you or your family have invented or innovated special traditions (Jewish or general)?



Will and his friends Shirah and Max go through some rough spots - as he does with his Mother.



Do you feel that they emerge more strongly as a result?



Have you ever gone through a rough time with friends? What effect did it have on your relationship?



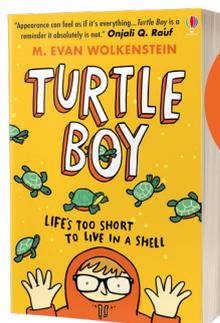
Is there a character in *Turtle Boy* you felt especially fond of? Why? What did they do or say that struck you?



Sometimes, a mishap and proper apology will help a relationship grow more strongly than if the mishap never happened. Why do you think that is?



Has an adult (a parent, teacher, Rabbi) ever apologized to you? What did that feel like?



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