



Discussion Guide For **PINK HAIR AND OTHER TERRIBLE IDEAS**

by **Andrea Pyros**

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Twelve-year-old Josephine has a lot on her plate: best-friend issues, twin-brother issues, divorced-parent issues ... not to mention first-crush issues. And then her mom hits her with news that shakes her to her core: a breast cancer diagnosis. Josephine doesn't want anyone to know, not even her best friend. Sharing the news means it's actually real, and that's something she's not ready to face. Unfortunately for Josephine, her brother, Chance, doesn't feel the same way. And when he dyes his hair pink in a show of support, it's all anyone can talk about. Suddenly Josephine has to rethink her priorities. Does getting an invite to the party of the year matter when her mom is sick? And what if it does matter? Does that make her a monster? Equal parts heartwarming and humorous, *Pink Hair and Other Terrible Ideas* is a pitch-perfect middle-grade novel full of voice and personality you won't be able to resist.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Andrea Pyros is the author of *My Year of Epic Rock*, which was called "a perfect read for anyone who feels BFF-challenged" by *Booklist* and "a charming addition to upper elementary and

middle school collections" by *School Library Journal*. Andrea is a contributor to the popular website From The Mixed -Up Files of Middle Grade Authors and has written extensively for young adults, starting with her stint as co-founder of the pop culture website Girls on Film and then as a senior-level editor at a variety of teen magazines. For more information, visit her at www.andreapyros.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When her mother tells her that she has been diagnosed with breast cancer, Josephine decides not to tell anyone about it—not even Makayla, her best friend. Using examples from the book, explain why Josephine wants to keep this a secret from her friends.
2. Josephine’s mother suggests that her children attend a support group for kids whose parents have cancer. Does it seem as if Josephine wants to do that? Discuss why or why not.
3. On page 105, Josephine says, “I’m keeping so many secrets from everyone: from Chance about how I like Diego; from Makayla about Mom’s cancer and upcoming surgery; from Mom that I’m thinking about things besides her. Am I being myself with anyone?” Can you understand why Josephine feels this way?
4. Talk about how Josephine copes with her mother’s cancer diagnosis. Give a few examples from the book that illustrate her feelings.
5. Josephine and Chance are twins, but that doesn’t mean they handle things the same way. In what ways are they different?
6. Josephine’s father is supposed to take her and Chance to see their mother in the hospital after her surgery. But he’s late, and the twins are forced to find another way to get to the hospital. How do Josephine and Chance feel about this? Find instances in the book that show how they react toward their father.
7. Dyeing her hair was a brave decision for Josephine. What is something brave you’ve done in your life? How did the situation turn out?
8. Josephine seems to worry about her mother, even before she tells them she’s sick. Why do you think that is? Are there examples from the book that show why Josephine worries about her mom?
9. On page 215, Makayla admits that she wishes Josephine would talk to her more. She says, “I feel like I’m always saying stuff to you, and you don’t say anything important back.” Think about the dynamic in their friendship. Do you think it’s important for both people in a friendship to share personal things about their lives?
10. What happens at Autumn’s birthday party? After it’s all over, discuss how Josephine feels about the evening.
11. One theme of the book is that it can be helpful to have friends or family to lean on for support and to help you cope. What do you think some of the benefits are to having a support system when life gets hard?
12. What are some changes Josephine made in her life that show her growth? Make sure to use examples from the book to back up your opinions.



BEYOND THE BOOK WITH ANGEL FOUNDATION:

For readers with a parent with cancer, here are some ideas for further discussion after reading the book.

1. Based on your personal experience, what advice would you offer to Josephine?
2. Have you ever attended a group for kids who have a parent with cancer?
3. In the book, Josephine sees her mom paying medical bills and filling out insurance forms. Have there been times when you've seen your parent doing something for their cancer diagnosis that you had questions about? What kinds of questions did you ask?
4. Do you see any similarities in the way that Josephine coped with her mom's cancer diagnosis and how you coped in your family?
5. In the book, Josephine's mom talks about needing chemotherapy. How did your parent explain to you about their cancer treatment plan? What questions did you ask to better understand what was happening?
6. Josephine feels guilty for attending Autumn's party and leaving her mom home. Did she talk about her feelings with her mom, and what did her mom say? Explain a time that you felt guilty for leaving your loved one.
7. Cancer affects the entire family. How does having a support system help when a family is hit with a cancer diagnosis?
8. What strengths did you gain that were unexpected throughout the cancer diagnosis?

The Angel Foundation is a Minnesota non-profit organization providing emergency financial assistance, education and support for families facing cancer.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

I started writing *Pink Hair and Other Terrible Ideas* after seeing a few articles about students getting suspended from school for dyeing their hair pink. I was amazed—and really impressed—that these kids were brave enough to speak up and ask for support when they had a sick parent. When I was eleven and my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, I didn't want to dye my hair pink or do *ANYTHING* to call attention to her illness. I was embarrassed and confused and kept it a secret.

Pink Hair is the book I wished I'd had to read when I was a middle schooler. Though I was old enough to be worried about my mom, I wasn't mature enough to be able to communicate that with my friends or family, so I felt very alone. I also worried that there was something wrong with me for continuing to care about the other stuff in my life, things like friends, crushes, going away to sleepaway camp, etc. I wish I'd known that it was totally normal and totally okay to continue living your own life, even if your parent is sick. I also wish I'd known that talking about my feelings with the people in my life would have helped, rather than keeping everything all bottled up.

PRAISE FOR PINK HAIR AND OTHER TERRIBLE IDEAS:

“Cancer is dealt with in a gentle, age-appropriate manner.... An empathetic story about learning to face problems both great and small.”

— *Foreword Reviews*

“Truly heartwarming, charming and poignant.”

— *Sarah J. Manes, MS, CCLS, Vice President, Angel Cancer Foundation*

“This book does a phenomenal job of expressing the common emotions, feelings, and actions of an adolescent as they begin to cope with the reality of cancer.”

— *Emily Rezac, Facing Cancer Together Program Manager, Angel Cancer Foundation*

