

BLUE STARS

THE VICE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM

MISSION 1

ABOUT THE BOOK

When cousins Riley Halfmoon and Maya Dawn move to Urbanopolis to live with their activist grandma, they get off to a rocky start. Outgoing Riley misses her Muscogee cousins but is sure that she and Maya will be instant BFFs. Meanwhile, introvert Maya misses her parents, on active military duty in Japan, and just wants some space to herself. At school, Maya joins Robotics Club and Riley bonds with fellow gymnasts. Just when they start to feel at home, their school culture is threatened by an influential foe in disguise. Joining student council feels like a way to help, so both cousins toss their hats in the ring for sixth-grade class president. But when they realize what they're up against—money, power, and lies—they quickly shift from competition to cooperation, joining forces as superheroes. Riley is savvy with people; Maya is a whiz with gadgets. In no time, this dazzling duo is off to save the day! Relatable and rich in themes of family, community, and compromise, the Blue Stars series will entertain and empower, inspiring readers to be the stars *they* are.



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COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever moved to a new place? What was it like? Did you move far? Who did you leave behind? If you've never moved, would you like to? Where would you go? Why?
2. Maya travels to the United States without her parents to live with family she hasn't visited since she was three. How would you feel if you were in Maya's shoes? What advice might you give Maya to help her with the transition?
3. Maya and Riley's grandmother reminds them to "be the stars you are" on several occasions. What does she mean by this? Do the adults in your life have a saying that they repeat? What is it? What impact does it have on you?
4. What is the significance of the name *Blue Stars*? Why is it a good name for Maya and Riley?
5. The girls' school has surveillance cameras everywhere. Does your school have surveillance cameras? If so, how do they make you feel about going to school? If not, how might you feel if your school did? Do schools need surveillance cameras?
6. Why would the vice principal choose to fund detentions over after-school clubs and activities? Which do you think is more important: order and discipline or opportunities for enrichment? Why do you think so? Do you think it is possible to have both?
7. What activities and clubs does your school have? Do you participate? Do you wish there were other clubs or activities?
8. What is something in your community or school that you would like to change? What are some steps you can take to make change? Who are the people that you can call on to help?
9. What qualities does a superhero have? Based on the qualities you identified, are Maya and Riley superheroes?
10. How does the graphic novel format affect the story? How is the artwork a storytelling element? How might the story be different if it were written in prose?
11. The girls' grandmother reminds them that they have a voice. Research kids who have made a difference in their community. What did those kids do? Could you do something similar?
12. Riley is from Muscogee Nation, one of the largest Indigenous nations (in terms of population) within the United States. What do we learn from the story about her relationship to her tribe?
13. Because of her parents' work, Maya has lived in many places. What do you know about military families? What are unique challenges a child of parents serving could face? What might be some advantages? What do we learn about Maya's experiences?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

14. Maya never thought she would live in one place and calls wherever she lives home. Where is home for you? What makes a place home?
15. On page 159, Vice Principal Balderdash says, “This isn’t over!” What do you think he means? What do you think he will do?
16. Maya and Riley secretly record Vice Principal Balderdash. Do you think it is OK to record someone secretly? Is it ever not OK? What makes it OK or not? Are Maya and Riley’s actions acceptable because they use the information for good? What does the law where you live say about secret recordings?
17. On page 54, Maya tells Riley that popularity isn’t everything. What ultimately matters most to the girls?
18. Maya and Riley struggle to get along in the beginning. Have you ever struggled to get along with someone? Did you ever work through your differences? If so, what did you do to strengthen the relationship?



ABOUT KEKLA MAGOON

Kekla Magoon is the renowned author of numerous fiction and nonfiction titles for young readers, including *Revolution in Our Time: The Black Panther Party’s Promise to the People*; *X: A Novel*, cowritten with Ilyasah Shabazz; *How It Went Down*; and *The Season of Styx Malone*. She has received a Margaret A. Edwards Award, a John Steptoe New Talent Award, an NAACP Image Award, a *Boston Globe–Horn Book* Award, a Michael L. Printz Honor, and four Coretta Scott King Honors, among other accolades. Kekla Magoon lives in Montpelier, Vermont, and teaches at Vermont College of Fine Arts.



ABOUT CYNTHIA LEITICH SMITH

Cynthia Leitich Smith is an NSK Neustadt Laureate and the acclaimed author of *Hearts Unbroken*, winner of the American Indian Youth Literature Award; *Harvest House*; *Sisters of the Neversea*; the *New York Times* best-selling Tantalize and Feral series; *Rain Is Not My Indian Name*; and *Jingle Dancer*, illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu. She also edited the anthology *Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids*, is the author-curator of the Native-focused children’s and YA imprint Heartdrum, and served as the inaugural Katherine Paterson Chair at Vermont College of Fine Arts. A Muscogee Nation citizen, Cynthia Leitich Smith lives in Austin, Texas.



ABOUT MOLLY MURAKAMI

Molly Murakami is a cartoonist, illustrator, writer, and creator of several webcomics. *Blue Stars: Mission One: The Vice Principal Problem* is her children’s book debut. She lives in Minnesota.

These questions were prepared by Dr. Nicholl Montgomery, a former middle and high school English teacher for Boston Public Schools. She teaches children’s literature courses at Simmons University and education courses at Boston College.

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