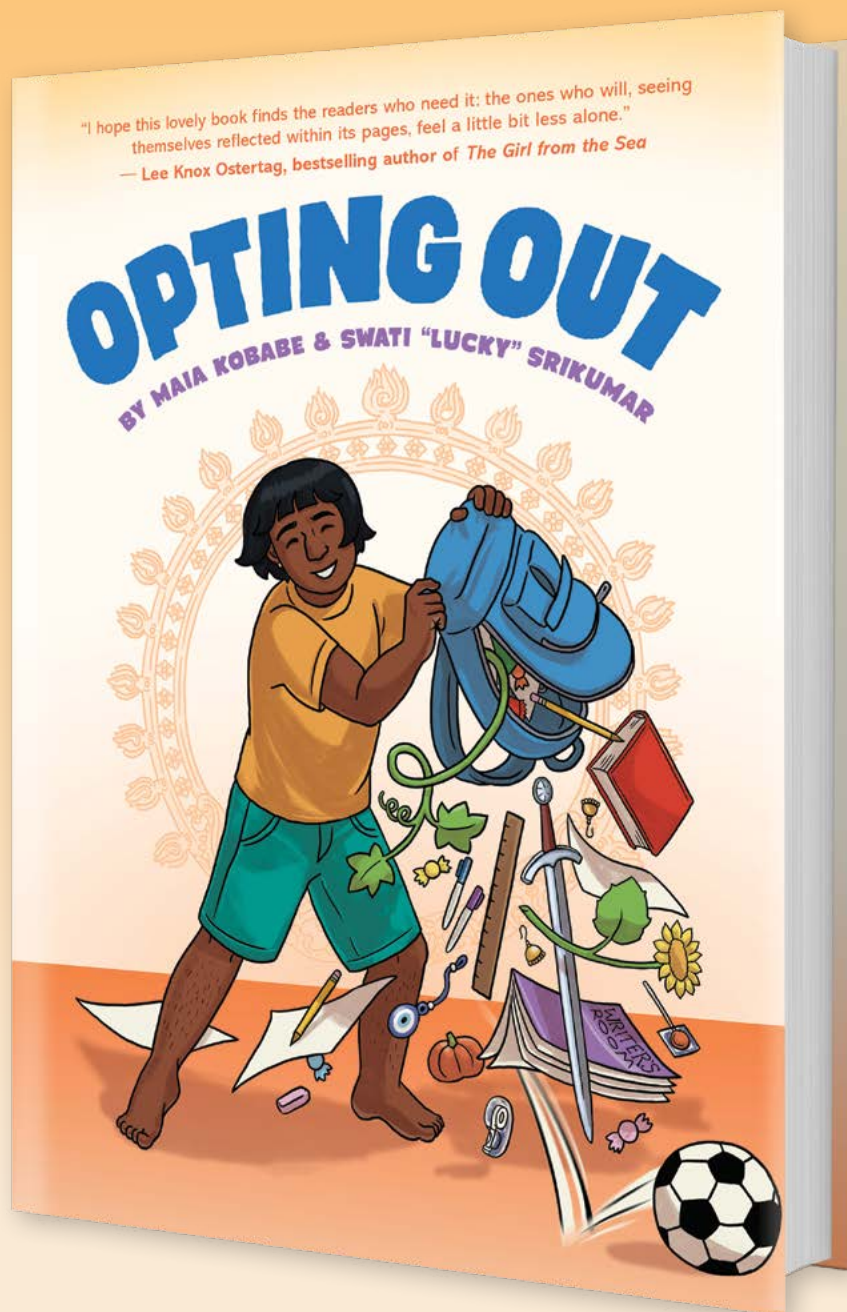


DISCUSSION GUIDE

OPTING OUT

BY MAIA KOBABE & SWATI "LUCKY" SRIKUMAR

AGES 10–12
GRADES 5–7



The
Power
of Story

Connecting Readers,
One Book at a Time

 SCHOLASTIC

graphix



ABOUT THE BOOK

Saachi is a storyteller. At school, she's surrounded by kids she's known forever—including her best friend, Lyla, who shares Saachi's love of fantasy novels and creating new worlds.

But as seventh grade starts, kids are changing. Suddenly, it matters who you like and if you can find a boyfriend or girlfriend. Even Lyla seems more interested in hanging out with her new boyfriend than in writing and drawing with Saachi anymore. Saachi's not interested in any of that boy/girl stuff. Why can't things just stay the way they were?

Saachi also doesn't love all the ways her body is changing. What if she doesn't feel like a girl—or like a boy, either? In a world where there is so much either/or, Saachi is going to need to find her own options . . . and create her own story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Saachi is often frustrated by binaries, or situations in which there appear to be only two (often opposite) options. When thinking about how many things are divided into two categories, Saachi says, "I think I prefer things that fall in the middle" (p. 47). What possible binaries do you see in Saachi's life? Where do you see Saachi pushing back against or blurring binaries? In what way do other characters model new, less binary ways of thinking to Saachi?
2. How would you describe Saachi and Samaira's relationship at the beginning of the book compared to the end of the book? What are some specific choices or events that changed their relationship?
3. Saachi expresses thoughts, feelings, and creative energy through poetry, storytelling, and journaling. How do you like to express yourself?
4. In the carpool scene on pages 12–17, Lyla, Samaira, Saachi, and Lyla's mom talk about the different types of dreams they have. What do each of their dreams tell you about these characters?
5. When visiting their Hindu temple, Saachi's dad states that change is a natural and essential part of life. Despite this, Saachi repeatedly expresses a dislike of change and a desire for things to stay the same. Why do you think that is? What do you think "change" means to Saachi? Is there a point in the story where Saachi starts to view change as a neutral or even good thing?
6. In the scene on pages 89–91, Saachi overhears some adults at the family party talking about a relative who recently shared that she is transgender. What does Saachi's father say about Rani to those adults? What does he say when Saachi asks him about Rani on pages 91–94? How do you think his support of Rani might shape Saachi's sense of self, and how might it affect the conversation he has with Amma and Saachi later in the book?
7. After reading Saachi's soon-to-be-published poem, Amma and Pa sit down for a talk with Saachi that is affirming, open, and supportive of Saachi's creative work and Saachi's evolving sense of self. What did you think about their response to the poem, and to what Saachi told them afterwards? How did earlier scenes in the book suggest what their response might be?
8. Reread the scene on pages 203–207 in which Lyla's response to Saachi's poem sparks their big fight. How does each character feel they have been wronged? How does each character's point of view shape how they respond to the other person? What steps do you think they could each take to repair their friendship? When you first read that scene, what did you think would happen with Saachi and Lyla's relationship? Where does their friendship stand at the end of the book, and how do you feel about that?
9. Saachi has a challenging relationship with Isaac. Why do you think they have such a hard time getting along? How does Saachi describe their relationship, and do you think Isaac would describe it the same way? How has their relationship evolved by the end of the book, and what do you think their relationship will be in the future?
10. Pick a scene from the book to examine closely. How do the characters' facial expressions and body language reinforce or intentionally contradict the dialogue? Why do you think the creators might show a character acting in a way that doesn't align with what they're saying aloud?



EXTENSION ACTIVITY PROMPTS

1. Saachi's story is told as a graphic novel, and Saachi uses poetry, storytelling, and journaling as tools for self-expression. Choose a scene from the book and rewrite it using a different creative style (prose, poetry, journal entry, etc.) or from the perspective of a different character.
2. At the end of the book, Saachi says "I know I'll make the right choice as long as I choose to be me" (p. 255). Think about what "being me" feels like for you. Create a comic, illustration, poem, or prose writing to share some of what that feels like.
3. At the end of the book, Saachi says "I don't know what will happen next, but I'm not scared anymore. There are so many more paths forward than I thought" (p. 254). Think about what some of these paths forward for Saachi could look like, and write or illustrate what you imagine.
4. *Opting Out* explores the idea of telling or retelling stories in ways that authentically represent different identities: Saachi adds a feminist twist to European fairy tale tropes in a story; Samaira and her friends incorporate their cultural identities into their Queens game; and Saachi reads an interview with a nonbinary Nigerian author who writes fantasy that incorporates several aspects of their identity. Pick a fairy tale and retell it to incorporate some aspect(s) of your identity.
5. Saachi is so excited to have pieces of creative writing published in the yearbook and magazine. Work as a group to create a magazine that collects and shares the art, stories, poetry, and comics your group has made. Consider ways to share it with family, friends, or your communities, and think about how to invite submissions or involvement from those groups.

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

Becoming Who We Are: Real Stories About Growing Up Trans edited by Sammy Lisel and Hazel Newlevant
(A Wave Blue World, ages 8–12)

The Book of Radical Answers: Real Questions from Real Kids Just Like You by Sonya Renee Taylor
(Dial Books, ages 10–14)

Breathe: Journeys to Healthy Binding by Maia Kobabe and Sarah Peitzmeier, PhD
(Dutton Books for Young Readers, ages 14+)

Growing into You!: An Inclusive, Shame-Busting, Get-Real Guide to Your Changing Body and Mind by Melissa Pintor Carnagey, illustrated by Brianna Gilmartin
(Quirk Books, ages 10–14)

Homebody: A Graphic Memoir of Gender Identity Exploration by Theo Parish
(HarperAlley, ages 14+)

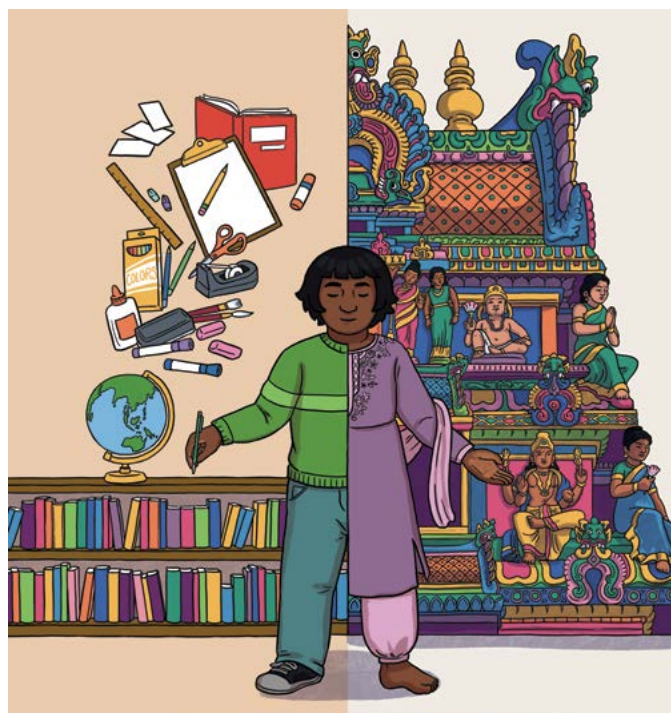
Advocates for Trans Equality | Trans 101 Resources
transequality.org/trans-101

NCTE | Guidelines for Affirming Gender Diversity through ELA Curriculum and Pedagogy
ncte.org/statement/guidelines-for-affirming-gender-diversity-through-ela-curriculum-and-pedagogy

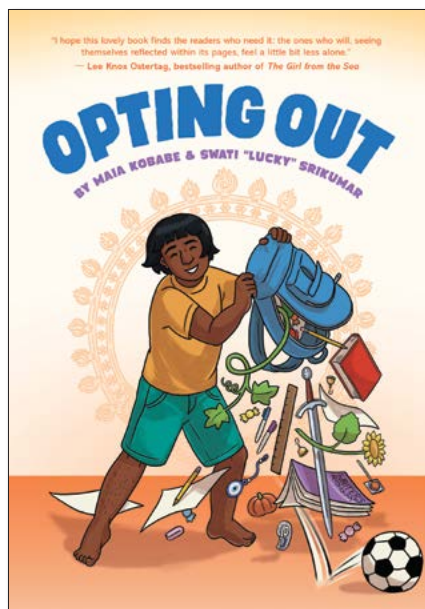
NCTE | Position Statement on Supporting Teachers and Students in Discussing Complex Topics
ncte.org/statement/position-statement-on-supporting-teachers-and-students-in-discussing-complex-topics

PFLAG | Asexual and Aromantic Resources
pflag.org/resource/ace-ar0-resources

The Trevor Project | Resources About Gender Identity
thetrevorproject.org/resources/category/gender-identity



PRAISE FOR *OPTING OUT*



HC: 9781546110125 • \$25.99
PB: 9781339012247 • \$14.99
Ages 10–12 • Grades 5–7
Also available in ebook

★ “Kobabe [and Srikumar] expertly craft Saachi as a sometimes frustrating, often relatable, and very real tween . . . Nuanced, necessary, and heartfelt.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “Saachi’s internal monologue, journal entries, and poetry provide multiple avenues across which the creators reflect on themes of identity and adolescence . . . in this tender and intimate portrait.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Saachi is a character in which many readers will recognize themselves . . . a tween friendly gateway to the topics of gender identity and expression.”

—*School Library Journal*

“I hope this lovely book finds the readers who need it: the ones who will, seeing themselves reflected within its pages, feel a little bit less alone.”

—Lee Knox Ostertag, bestselling creator of *The Girl from the Sea*

“A brave, kind, and deeply necessary story.”

—Gale Galligan, bestselling creator of *Fresh Start*

ABOUT THE CREATORS



Photo © M. Ruddell

MAIA KOBABE is an author and illustrator from the Bay Area, California. This is her first book for middle-grade readers. E is also the author of two books for young adults. *Gender Queer: A Memoir* won a Stonewall Honor and an Alex Award from the American Library Association in

2020 and was also the most challenged book in the US in 2021, 2022, and 2023. *Breathe: Journeys to Healthy Binding* was created with Dr. Sarah Peitzmeier. When not drawing or writing, Maia is usually listening to K-pop music, practicing Taekwondo, studying Spanish, or picking up books from the library.



Photo © Lucky Srikumar

SWATI “LUCKY” SRIKUMAR was raised as a third-culture kid born in Singapore to Indian immigrant parents. At age nineteen, they moved to California, where they’ve resided ever since. They draw comics about the ever-changing aspects of their identity, including

queerness, race, disability, and cat ownership. They love to build community and find common ground with all kinds of people through humor and art. They enjoy knitting, bird-watching, and puns. *Opting Out* is their first book.

About the writer of this guide: Kazia Berkley-Cramer is a children’s librarian outside of Boston, MA. They hold an MS in Library and Information Science and an MA in Children’s Literature.



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