

BLENDED

BY SHARON DRAPER

In *Blended*, 11-year-old Isabella splits her time between two families and two identities. Her parents are divorced. As she takes turns living with them, Isabella struggles to understand how the world sees her—and how she should see herself. Is she white, like her mother? Or is she black, like her father?

Meanwhile, Isabella is trying to make peace between her fighting parents. She dreads Sundays, when they meet to trade off custody for the week. Isabella describes these meetings as “Chocolate family meets vanilla family. . . . Caramel daughter caught helplessly between the two.”

Author **SHARON M. DRAPER** told *TIME for Kids* that she hopes readers will see themselves in Isabella’s story. “There is no such thing as a typical American family,” she says.

—By Shay Maunz

QUICK TIPS TO GET STARTED

As with every book selected for your class, it is important to be cognizant of the individual dynamics of your students. This book contains themes that should be readily accessible for most students in upper elementary. Whether you choose to use this for read-aloud, book club, or guided reading, you will want to be prepared.

- 1. Read the book.** Before introducing and leading your class in a discussion about the book, you must be prepared. Questions will arise, and you will want to be equipped to answer any and all.
- 2. Mark up the text.** While reading, annotate the text to help you go chapter by chapter and evaluate what questions to ask and how they connect to the overall theme.
- 3. Set ground rules.** Establish a set of rules with the class around what strong habits of discourse should look and sound like in your classroom. Post them for the year.
- 4. Review the questions.** Read through the question set provided. Answer the questions yourself, then adapt any questions and the order in which they are asked.
- 5. Invest your readers.** Remember, part of your role is to hype the book before, during, and after reading. This ensures your students are truly invested in the reading and will think critically and deeply about questions during discussion.

ABOUT THE BOOK

- Released in November 2018
- 208 pages
- Ages 8 and up
- Reading level: N (610L)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Draper is an author and educator. For 25 years, she taught high school English in her hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1997, she was named National Teacher of the Year. She has written more than 30 books, including the best-sellers *Out of My Mind* and *Stella by Starlight*. *Forged by Fire* and *Copper Sun* won the Coretta Scott King Award. Much like Isabella, the main character in her latest novel, *Blended*, Draper enjoys tapping out a tune on the piano.

Guiding Questions



In the novel *Blended*, 11-year-old Isabella speaks of the internal conflict she’s grappling with. She is Izzy to her mother and Isabella to her father. When her parents divorce, she finds herself juggling two very different worlds, but even those worlds have similarities.

1. After her parents divorce, Isabella feels like “a kid sliced in half.” How does the divorce open Isabella’s eyes to questions about her identity?
2. The piano plays an important role in Isabella’s life. How does she feel when playing the piano? How is the piano symbolic? In what way does playing the piano help build relationships in Isabella’s life?
3. Isabella talks about racial identity with her mom and her dad (examples include pages 90 and 112–113, respectively). How do her parents respond to these conversations? What can you learn about Isabella and her family from these interactions?
4. Relationships and experiences can help someone get clarity about his or her identity. Aside from her conversations with her mom and her dad, what helps Isabella grow more comfortable with herself?
5. Sharon Draper presents examples of both overt and subtle racism (the incident with the security guard at the mall and the one with the salesgirl at Lush, for instance). Find instances of both expressions of racism. How do these interactions make Izzy feel? How did they make you feel when you read about them?
6. At the end of chapter 70, the nurse says to Isabella, “Looks like you have a nice blended family.” What does she mean? (A blended family is made up of a couple and their children from previous marriages.) People refer to Isabella as “mixed.” Do *mixed* and *blended* have the same meaning? Which word would you use to describe Isabella?

Extension Ideas

Self-Identification

Isabella is trying to figure out her identity while being pulled between “Mom’s Izzy and Dad’s Isabella.” The reader learns that Isabella looks for clues to who she should be in conversations and by comparing herself to others.

As they skim the book, have students jot down words or phrases that describe how Isabella sees herself. Have them decide how strongly each trait represents her by ranking them. For example, on page 2, Isabella says, “When I play the piano, I rock.” The piano is an important part of her story, so Isabella would strongly identify herself as a pianist.

In the resource on page 3 of this guide, students will create a word cloud of Isabella’s traits. The largest word will be the one that most strongly represents how Isabella sees herself. Students will then have an opportunity to create a word cloud about themselves.

Social Identity

The way the world views a person is not the same as the way a person views herself. Reread chapter 11 as a class. Isabella’s dad says, “The world looks at Black people differently.” Open up a discussion of this sentence. Ask students to cite examples of this in the book.

Then have students read the poem “A Young Man,” by Jericho Brown, on page 4 of this guide.

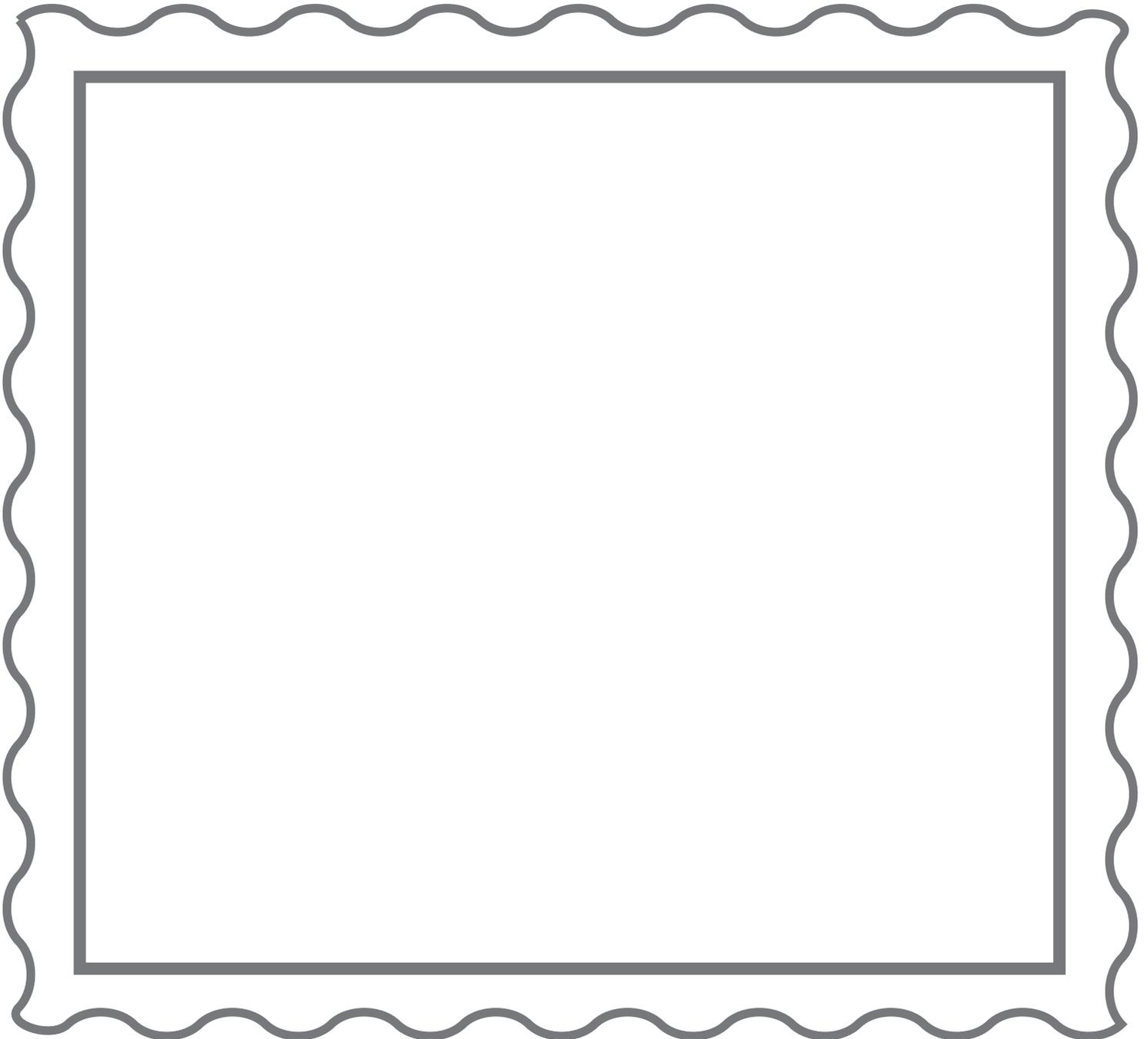
Ask them to use the margins to note any thoughts and feelings they have while reading. After sufficient time, ask them to share some of their notes. Ask: How does the narrator view his children? How does the narrator close the poem? Analyze the final line. Have students draw comparisons between this poem and the poems the author includes in Chapter 28 of the book. Ask them to reflect on how the subjects and the narrators of the poem are similar and how they are different.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____



I Am Me!

Isabella Thornton openly discusses her confusion about her identity. Not only is Isabella, or Izzy, working through her parents' recent divorce and being split between two households, she is also seeking her racial identity. After reading the story, go back through the book and make a list of words or phrases that Isabella uses to describe herself. Then create a word cloud below.



TRY IT! Have a partner sketch a silhouette of you on a separate piece of paper. Then create a list of words and phrases you would use to identify yourself and fill the silhouette with them.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____



Through My Eyes

In Chapter 28 of *Blended*, Mr. Kazilly asks the class to search for a poem that speaks to them. Read through the poem below by Jericho Brown and note your thoughts and feelings in the margins. Then search for a poem that speaks to you and write a similar poem yourself.

**“A Young Man”
By Jericho Brown**

We stand together on our block, me and my son,
Neighbors saying our face is the same, but I know
He’s better than me: when other children move

Toward my daughter, he lurches like a brother
Meant to put them down. He is a bodyguard
on the playground. He won’t turn apart from her,

Empties any enemy, leaves them flimsy, me
Confounded. I never fought for so much—
I calmed my daughter when I could cradle

My daughter; my son swaggers about her.
He won’t have to heal a girl he won’t let free.
They are so small. And I, still, am a young man.

In him lives my black anger made red.
They play. He is not yet incarcerated.

TRY IT! Research and read through a set of poems to find one that resonates with you. Then use the poem as a model to write a similar poem on the back of this page.

BOOK QUIZ

Use *Blended* to answer the questions. Chapters have been provided to guide you.

CHAPTERS 1–76: Genre (RL.10)

1. What is the genre of the book?

- A. poetry
- B. fiction
- C. nonfiction
- D. realistic fiction

CHAPTER 1: Make Inferences (RL.1)

2. If Isabella's life were a piece of music, she would likely describe the music as

- A. harmonious.
- B. lively.
- C. off-key.
- D. soothing.

CHAPTER 10: Analyze Point of View (RL.6)

3. How does Isabella feel when she says her middle name, Badia, aloud?

- A. ashamed
- B. daring
- C. fearful
- D. proud

CHAPTER 18: Define Words and Phrases (RL.4)

4. What does the word *territorial* mean, on page 64?

- A. showing kindness toward others
- B. guarding what belongs to you
- C. showing a willingness to compromise
- D. appearing calm and relaxed

CHAPTER 36: Cite Evidence (RL.8)

5. What is the first big decision Isabella is able to make or weigh in on?

- A. She gets to decide when she stays with her mom and when she stays with her dad.
- B. John Mark asks Isabella if it's okay to ask for her mother's hand in marriage.
- C. She gets to choose the date of her parents' weddings.
- D. She decides the terms of the custody agreement.

CHAPTER 41: Read for Details (RL.1)

6. Why do Imani and Isabella agree not to tell their parents about the security guard at Prestige?

- A. They don't think their parents will believe them.
- B. They don't understand what happened.
- C. They don't want their parents to worry.
- D. They're not bothered by what happened.

CHAPTER 67: Read for Detail (RL.1)

7. What detail would *not* be included in a summary of this chapter?

- A. Darren and Isabella go to the ice cream shop.
- B. A man runs into Darren.
- C. Police pull Darren over.
- D. Isabella drops her ice cream on her recital dress.

CHAPTERS 70–76: Analyze Characters (RL.3)

8. Isabella's ordinarily argumentative parents have become

- A. extremely bitter by the end of the story.
- B. much more friendly by the end of the story.
- C. even more argumentative by the end of the story.
- D. more easygoing by the end of the story.

CHAPTERS 1 and 76: Analyze Structure (RL.5)

9. The descriptions of piano playing on the first and last pages of the book show that Isabella's sense of self

- A. has become clearer over the course of the novel.
- B. has become even more confused by the novel's end.
- C. has remained the same over the course of the novel.
- D. has diminished over the course of the novel.

CHAPTERS 1–76: Identify Central Theme (RL.2)

10. What is *Blended's* central theme?

- A. identity
- B. friendship
- C. grief
- D. jealousy