



## Blurb

Hero doesn't feel like a hero, but sometimes she feels as if the universe is asking her to be one.

When Aria, a mysterious boy who never EVER speaks, starts at school and is picked on by His Royal Thug-ness Doofus (Rufus), Hero and her bestie Jaz feel compelled to help. But they're far too chicken to actually do anything heroic, so they befriend Aria and try to uncover the truth about him.

What happened to his voice?

Where did he come from?

What are those three dents on his middle finger?

This is the story of a 12-year-old refugee who's trying to establish a new life in Australia, grapple with his past and, most importantly, find his voice.

'Cos, boy, does he have a story to tell.

## About Maryam Master

Maryam Master was born in Iran and moved to Australia when she was nine. She is a screenwriter and playwright who loves creating shows for young audiences.

Maryam has adapted three of David Walliams' books for the stage - *Mr Stink*, *Billionaire Boy* and *The Midnight Gang* - as well as Oliver Jeffers' *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*, all of which premiered at the Sydney Opera House and toured across Australia. She also collaborated with Australian Children's Laureate Leigh Hobbs on *Horrible Harriet: Live on Stage*.

Maryam is the author of *Exit Through the Gift Shop. No Words* is her second novel.

## Notes

1. 'Words have power.' (page 65)
  - a. As a class, discuss how words have power. How does *No Words* explore the power of words? Aria's family fled an oppressive regime, so what does his inability to speak represent?
  - b. Which words have the most power, and why? Make a list of five powerful (non-offensive) words and share it with the class.
  - c. Hero dedicates a whole chapter to silly words (pages 71-72). Make a list of five silly words and compare it to your list of powerful ones. Are there any similarities or differences? Why do you think these words are silly? What do you think makes a silly word? Do you think silly words have power too? Why or why not?
2. "Have you ever been transported by a story, Hero? . . . Stories are an escape, an adventure! A place where we lose and find ourselves," he said.' (page 68)
  - a. Like words, stories also have power. Hero's dad believes stories can alter your perception on life, the universe and everything. As a class, discuss what Hero's dad means by this. Why do you think Hero's dad uses stories to heal himself in his DOWN periods?
  - b. Thinking about themes, plot and characters, list the ways in which *No Words* altered your perception. How does your list compare to the rest of the class? Are there similarities and differences? Why do you think it touched each person in a different way?
  - c. Hero's dad lists the books that have made him want to be a better person (page 68). What kind of stories are you drawn to? Have *you* ever been transported by a story? Have you lost or found yourself in a story? Share your favourite book with a small group and explain why it's your favourite. How does your favourite compare to the others in your group?
3. **There are many ways people can communicate without speech and words.**
  - a. As a class, brainstorm the ways people can communicate without words.
  - b. Break into small groups and learn a short conversation in sign language (AUSLAN).
  - c. Jaz says she has 'verbal diarrhoea' (page 21). As a class discuss situations when is it good not to speak and to listen instead. Why can listening be more helpful than talking?
4. **Aria uses slam poetry as a vehicle to express himself and find his voice.**
  - a. Research slam poetry, asking yourself: What is slam poetry? What are the elements of slam poetry? What makes a good spoken word poet?
  - b. Why does Aria use slam poetry to explore his trauma? Why is this a good outlet not just for him, but for others who wish to express themselves?
  - c. Look up a slam poetry event on the internet and choose your favourite spoken word poet. Why is this poet your favourite? What themes do they explore? Can you relate to them, and why?
  - d. Using the elements of slam poetry, create a spoken word poem and perform it for the class.

5. *No Words* is told from two perspectives: Hero's and Aria's.
- Read up to page 29, to the end of Aria's first chapter. Compare Aria's first chapter with Hero's previous ones. Both characters talk about Rufus bullying Aria, but what makes their voices different from one another? Why is using multiple perspectives an effective storytelling device?
  - Pretend you are another character in the story observing Rufus bully Aria. You could be Jaz or Alfie Toogood, for example. Write a chapter from their perspective. Think about the character's voice and perspective. How would they write? What would they think seeing this interaction?
6. *'Hero saw Rufus push me around this morning. She looked scared. I wanted to tell her not to worry. I've been through much harder things. This is nothing.'* (page 29) Discuss Rufus bullying Aria in the playground and how it compares to the oppression that Aria's family experienced. Why could this be considered a metaphor?
7. **Hero says the butterfly effect is 'kind of a mind-blowing idea that everything is interconnected somehow. That a butterfly flapping its wings in one part of the world can cause a typhoon in another. Clearly, it can't literally do that. But the point is that every small thing we do – or don't do – causes something else to happen – or not happen. Our destiny is made up of tiny acts, not big, earth-shattering ones. So, everything matters. We are not puny, insignificant nobodies.'** (page 18)
- How does *No Words* explore the butterfly effect? How does Hero and Jaz's small action of becoming friends with Aria inform the outcome of the novel?
  - Similarly, can you think of any literal or metaphorical examples of the butterfly effect in history? What about in your life?
8. *'Being called Hero is truly a curse. The pressure is intense. I wonder if Usain Bolt ever felt the pressure of his name. Did the fastest man on earth ever have slow days? When his feet felt cemented to the ground? Like he was traipsing through sludge? Did he ever come last in a school race? Or was he always a speed demon, a lightning BOLT?'* (page 9) All names have meaning.
- What is the significance of Hero's name in *No Words*? What does her name represent? Write your own definition of a hero, including a list of all the ways to be a hero. Do you think Hero lives up to her name? Why or why not?
  - Research the meaning of your name. Like Aria's name, does your name have different meanings in different languages? Do you think your name represents you and your personality? Why or why not? If not, what would you like to be called?
9. Hero's mum has a superpower – her sense of smell. But every character – Hero, Aria, Jaz, Hero's dad, Aria's mum – has a superpower. What are their superpowers, and why?
10. *'Doofus's main hanger-on-er-er is Alfie Toogood. Yes, that's his real name. Although, he's everything but good. Too tall. Too dim. Too much of an all-round general loser. Follows his bruiser buddy around like a bad smell, never really saying or doing anything. Big waste of space, really.'* (page 14) How does your perception of Alfie Toogood change throughout the novel? Why is it important not to judge people by first impressions, and to allow people the space to change?

11. *'Whenever he's like this, everything is exaggerated. Bigger. Better. Hyper-real. Un-real. Like a movie.'* (page 4) Hero's dad has UP moods and DOWN moods. Hero says, *'He's perfectly normal. Just not your definition of it.'* (page 28) Research the word 'neurodivergent' and what it means. Why is there no such thing as 'normal'? Why is 'normal' a problematic concept? How is this explored through Hero's dad? Why is it important that literature has diverse voices and views?
12. *'I listened as she spoke about the power of love. Revolutionary love. Radical love.'* (page 160)
- Read the words of Aria's mum and think about her thoughts on the power of love (pages 160–161). Discuss her thoughts. What does she mean by the power of love? Why and how does love have power?
  - Define 'revolutionary love' and 'radical love'. How are these themes of love explored through Aria's story? List other kinds of love that are explored in *No Words*, and give examples. Do powerful acts of love need to be grand gestures? Or do subtle gestures carry power too? Why or why not?
  - Aria's poem is called 'I am love'. What does Aria's mum mean when she says *'A love so big, that it can swallow "hate" whole and burp out a rainbow'*? (page 161) The words create an incredibly strong visual image. How does it make you feel? Why does Aria choose to use this as the anchor of his poem?
13. *'It's customary in our culture to offer sweets when something good happens.'* (page 174)
- No Words* is partly set in Iran. Discuss *taarof* and the other Persian customs that Aria explores in *No Words*. How do these customs, as well as Aria's descriptions of his vibrant life in Shiraz, help transport you to another place?
  - Think about your own family and culture. Is there something unique that your family or culture does for special occasions or even just on a regular day? Does this have meaning for you? Do you enjoy this custom, and why? Using images and words from magazines, newspapers or the internet, create an artistic collage to express this to the class.
14. Early in the book, Hero sees Rufus bullying Aria, and she succumbs to the 'bystander effect'. Describe the bystander effect, and explain why you think Hero feels bad about it.
- What else could Hero have done in that situation?
  - One obvious example of being helpful as a bystander would be calling Triple Zero (000) if you see a fire. Can you think of some other examples of how to help as a bystander?
  - Imagine you hear one of your friends say something mean about another friend behind their back. What would you do?