AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO

Andromeda Diaz and the Reasonable Doubt

by EMILY GALVIN ALMANZA



TEN SPEED YOUNG READERS

About the Book

Andromeda Diaz and the Reasonable Doubt follows fifth-grader Andromeda Diaz as she investigates the suspension of a classmate she believes has been wrongly accused. Drawing on the skills she has absorbed from her public defender parents, Andromeda breaks down the accusation, questions assumptions, interviews witnesses, evaluates evidence, and uncovers the truth.

Age Range:

8–12 years | Grades 3–7

Themes:

Fairness -Justice -Accountability -Friendship



This guide was written by award-winning author Wendy Shang.

TALK ABOUT IT:

1. The title of this book is *Andromeda Diaz and the Reasonable Doubt*. What do you think "reasonable doubt" means?

2. This book is about someone who may be falsely accused of doing something wrong. Has this ever happened to you or someone you know? How did it make you feel? Have you ever mistakenly accused someone of something that they didn't do?

3. This book is also about helping someone who cannot solve their problems by themselves. Do you think it is important to help people, even if you don't know them well? Why or why not? What are ways you or your family have helped someone?

4. Vocabulary words to know:

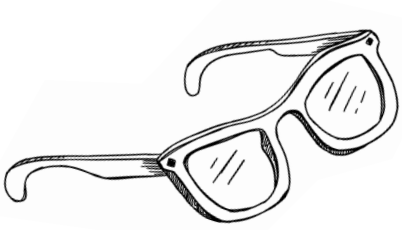
Justice **Investigation** **Community**

Bias **Responsibility** **Witness**

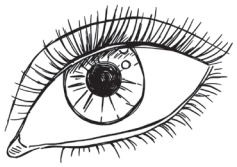
Accountability **Evidence** **Assumption**

Fairness **Advocate**

THINK ABOUT IT: How are the concepts of justice and fairness alike and different? Accountability and responsibility?



During Reading



Chapters 1–4: Getting to Know Andromeda, Danny, and Benji

Andromeda and Danny are best friends, but they have different personalities. How are they different? How are they alike? Do you think best friends tend to be more similar or different? What is their impression of Benji?

Andromeda and Danny are not that close to Benji, the boy in their class who is accused of stealing. In spite of that, they want to help him. Why is that? Do you think it's strange to want to help someone you don't know well?

Andromeda and Danny talk to Andromeda's parents about accusations, assumptions, and getting all sides of a story. Andromeda's mother tells them to be skeptical when they hear someone is accused of something. Why is that?

They also discuss facts beyond change—things that they know for sure. What are the facts beyond change you know right now? What assumption worries Andromeda and Danny the most?

Chapters 5–9: Gathering Evidence

In these chapters, Andromeda and Danny spend a lot of time gathering evidence and figuring out what other types of evidence they need, which means they need to talk to lots of different people. Would this be easy or hard for you? Why?

After comparing the information they received, Andromeda and Danny realize they've found a hole in the information. What is it? Why is the difference between circumstantial and direct evidence so important?

When Andromeda goes to visit Benji at his house, she can see the consequences of the accusations against Benji. He is not allowed to go to school, and he is grounded at home. Benji and his family seem upset. Do you think this is what normally happens when someone is suspended from school?

Chapters 10–12: Putting Together a Different Story

When Andromeda and Danny talk to Benji again, they have a hard conversation about something in Benji's past that might make him seem untrustworthy to others. What is it? How much should

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we think about someone's past when considering their future? Do you think it's important to give people second chances when they've made a mistake?

Andromeda realizes that Benji has been mistaken for another student. What makes two people look alike? Have you ever been mistaken for someone else?

In order to understand the information she has gathered, Andromeda uses visual organizers, such as a timeline, map, and a diagram to sort the types of evidence she has. What kinds of visual organizers do you like to use? Was one of Andromeda's organizers more useful to you than others? What are ways you like to sort through information?

When Andromeda talks to Ms. Norwell, the vice principal, to rethink the charges against Benji, Ms. Norwell tells her, "There is always a measure of uncertainty when someone is in trouble." Do you think this is fair? Why do you think she said that?

Chapters 13–15: Problem Solving

Andromeda says, "People can always tell when someone isn't being themselves." Do you think this is true? Do you ever find it hard to be your true self?

When Andromeda's parents offer to help her with Benji's case, Andromeda doesn't want them to take over. How do you like adults to offer help? When is it helpful, and when is it a problem?

In order to gather more evidence, Danny lies to Officer Duncan to get access to the school's security tapes. Do you think it was okay for him to lie? Why or why not? Was Danny brave for risking his "good student" reputation in order to help someone?

Chapter 16–18: Achieving Justice

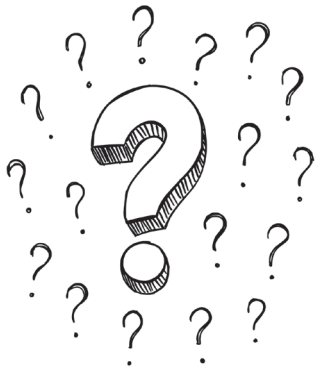


Andromeda and Danny bring adults and kids together so that the adults in charge can hear from each witness directly. Why is that important? Is this a good way to find out the truth?

What kinds of mistakes led to Benji being falsely accused? How can the school avoid these kinds of mistakes in the future?

Do you think adults and kids do a good job of listening to each other? Why or why not?

After Reading



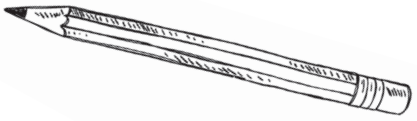
Benji is suspended from school for stealing. Is that the best way to discipline kids? Why or why not? What would you do if you were in charge? What values (such as accountability, fairness, and repairing harm) would you emphasize?

Many of the adults at school were reluctant to talk about Benji's case because of Benji's right to privacy. At the same time, Benji's right to an education was taken away. What should people do when rights come into conflict?

While you were reading the book, did you question any assumptions you had? Did you find yourself rethinking any of your ideas?



Activities



Fact, Opinion, Assumption, Evidence

As you read the book, pick two chapters to organize the different types of information into four categories: fact, opinion, assumption, and evidence. For example, in the first chapter, the following happens:

- Andromeda notices that Benji is missing.
- Danny tells her that Benji has actually been out of school all week.
- Danny tells her that he saw Benji coming out of the main office with his parents and they looked unhappy.
- Danny tells her he heard the principal say the word “suspended.”
- Andromeda thinks that Benji is nice and needs help.

Look at the different types of evidence from the book. This includes eyewitness testimony, objects, and videos. Make a chart showing what the evidence is intended to show and also what might be a flaw with the evidence.

	Description of information	Is it fact, opinion, assumption, or evidence?	What is this evidence intended to show? What might be wrong with it?
Chapter 9	Angie says she saw Benji coming out of the gym	Evidence	The evidence shows that Benji had access to the watch. But it might not be Benji.





	Description of information	Is it fact, opinion, assumption, or evidence?	What is this evidence intended to show? What might be wrong with it?
Chapter _____			
Chapter _____			

Recognizing Biases

Many mistakes in thinking are the result of cognitive biases or mental shortcuts. Match the type of bias with the mistake in thinking:

TYPE OF BIAS



Anchoring Bias
Relying heavily on the first piece of information you receive



Confirmation Bias
Focusing on evidence that confirms your existing beliefs and not evidence that challenges your beliefs



Misinformation Effect
When a person is given false or misleading information, that information might distort what they actually remember



Authority Bias
Giving greater weight to influential or powerful people, without considering the content of their message



Negativity Bias
Remembering bad experiences more often than positive ones

	1. Officer Duncan tells Coach Lee that they caught someone trying to steal his watch.
	2. Andromeda and Danny are worried that the adults won't believe Benji because he has done something wrong in the past, even though Benji has been a good student.
	3. After Benji gets in trouble for stealing the watch, Angie remembers she saw him coming out of the gym at a weird time of day.
	4. Coach Lee does not think about how his watch could have disappeared after being told Benji was caught stealing it.
	5. Ms. Norwell discounts Andromeda's information that Benji was not in the gym and has two witnesses to say so.

1. Authority Bias, 2. Negativity Bias, 3. Misinformation Effect, 4. Anchoring Bias, 5. Confirmation Bias

SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Testing Witness Reliability:

Have another adult pretend to “interrupt” the group by coming in, making a small action (such as handing the teacher an object) and having a brief conversation. Afterward, have the students write down everything they remember about what happened. What did the person look like? What did they say and do?

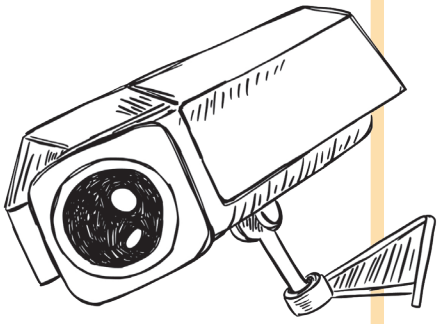
Then, after some period of time, introduce a false piece of evidence, such as recalling a detail that did not exist (“what a beautiful necklace she was wearing!”) or subtly influencing the framework (“what did you notice when he burst through the door?”). Then encourage the students to add any details to their description.

At the end, share the actual events with the students, and reflect on what mistakes in perception they made.

Community Helpers:

For many students, this book offers their first glimpse of a public defender and their role in the community. Brainstorm a list of professions that solve problems in communities and what their responsibilities include. What would the community look like without these helpers? Invite students to identify their communities and what role they might see for themselves as a community helper. These might include:

- Public defenders
- Teachers
- Nurses
- Sanitation workers
- Mail carriers
- Bus drivers
- Counselors
- Firefighters



Hold a Fairy Tale Mock Trial:

You may adapt these resources to suit your own needs. Here is one explanation of how one mock trial operated:
pabar.org/public/education/lawday/MockTrials-FairyTales.PDF

Same Planet, Different World:

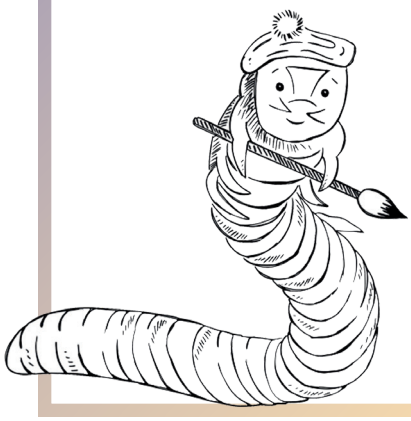
This exercise encourages students to consider how the same object might look to different people. Randomly assign students to draw a pool from the perspective of one of the following.

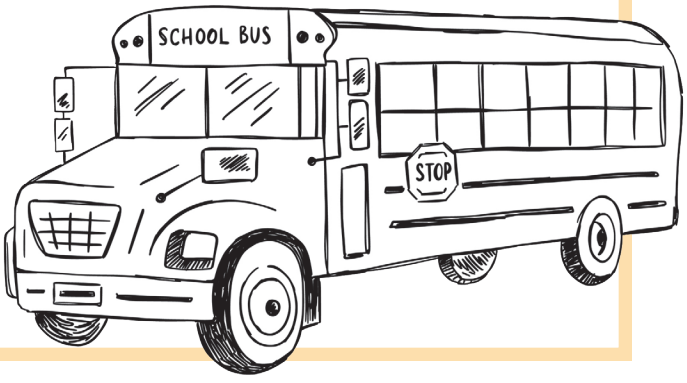
- A person entering the pool area
- A person who is underwater
- A bird flying overhead

Have the students compare drawings. What is something that each perspective sees that the other can't? Then, invite the students to write about how they feel about the pool from the perspective of:

- A person who does not know how to swim
- A person who won a race at the pool last week
- The lifeguard
- A person who lives next to the pool

This exercise can also be done in groups. Have the students share their pieces and discuss which perspective surprised them the most. Ask them to identify other places where people might be having very different perspectives of the same object.





About the Author and Illustrator

Emily Galvin Almanza loved mysteries and big ideas long before she became a lawyer. She wrote her very first book in third grade that the school library even bound into a real book! Now, Emily is a former public defender who works to help people receive fair treatment in the justice system.

There is one thing Emily still believes that she learned as a kid: Young people often have the biggest and bravest ideas. Emily's family celebrates Bolivian traditions at home, which inspired many of the foods and cultural details in ***Andromeda Diaz and the Reasonable Doubt***. When she's not writing, she loves barrel racing, eating Parmigiano-Reggiano, cheering for FC Barcelona, and imagining new adventures for Andromeda.

