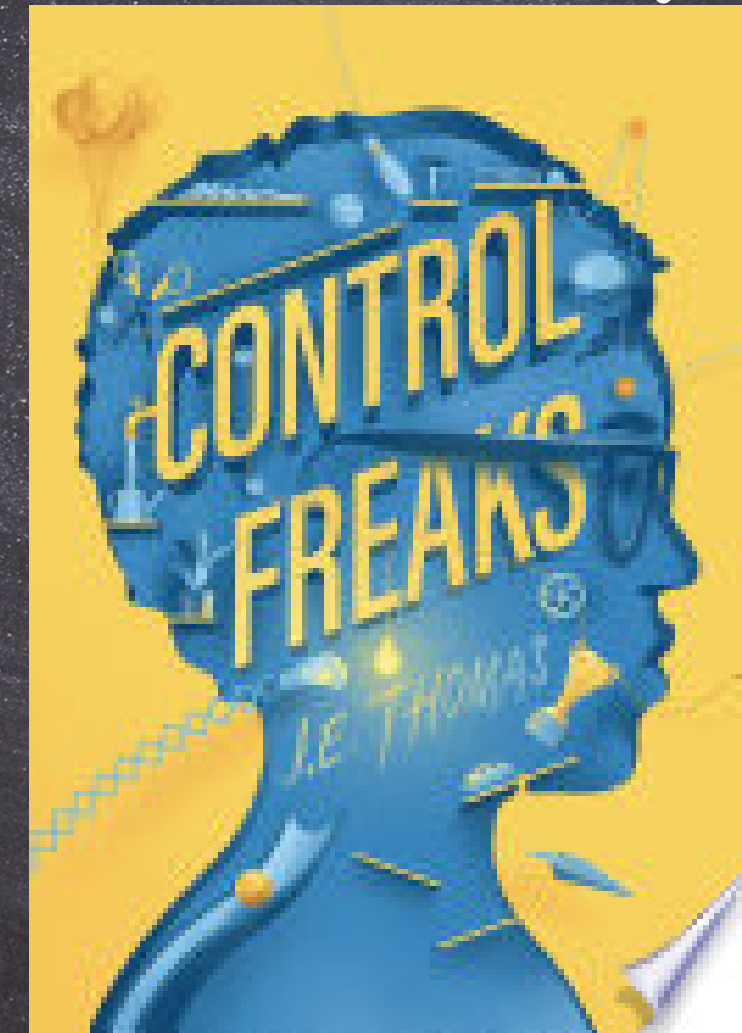


CONTROL FREAKS

J. E. THOMAS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE: 10 - 13



Discussion Guide developed by Gabl Stern & Kailynn Renfro for CU Boulder's Children's Book Festival 2023, Open Education Resource, Creative Commons. Available at colorado.edu/event/bookfest

SUMMARY

In the book *Control Freaks*, a group of competitive students are made to cooperate during a week-long STEAMS competition. Doug, the main character, is currently in seventh grade. He is a talented innovator with a fierce sense of rivalry. When their principal announces the competition, Doug was determined to win the whole thing. The students are put into teams, but there's a catch: Doug ends up with a group of students that no one else wants to be paired with. Though he is angry and dissatisfied, he understands that if he wants to succeed, he must cooperate with the rest of his team. Doug and his team learn to cooperate and respect one another's skills during the competition. They discover that it's acceptable to occasionally relinquish control and seek assistance. Doug and his teammates ultimately finish in second place, but he learns that success isn't everything. Along with making new friends, he has gained important knowledge about cooperation and teamwork. *Control Freaks* is a fun and heartwarming story about the importance of teamwork and friendship. It is also a reminder that it's okay to not be perfect and to ask for help when you need it.

BEFORE READING

1. What does the term “control freak” mean to you? Does it have a good or bad connotation?
2. How does the cover make you feel? What does it make you think about?
3. Putting together all that you’ve just talked about, what do you think the book will be about?
4. Are you looking forward to reading this book?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Doug and his best friend Huey have a secret handshake. What would a secret handshake between you and your best friend look like?
2. What is Doug's relationship with his father like?
3. How does having separated parents and a step-family affect Doug?
4. Doug initially states: "I'm allergic to team competitions." What do you think are some of the advantages and disadvantages of team work? Do you share Doug's "allergy?"
5. Many of the characters in this book are fiercely competitive. Is this a good quality? How does being competitive impact the characters? Feel free to share your own experiences with competitiveness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, CONTINUED

6. In chapter 3, Huey says “I’m pretty sure the one thing Mom, Dad, and the steps agree on is that it’s not cool to fail.” What are your thoughts on failure? Can failure be “cool”? In other words, can it be beneficial?
7. How does the title, “Control Freaks,” relate to what occurs in the book?
8. After reading this book, what moment or aspect stood out most to you? Why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Families can create a STEAMS challenge at home. This could be a simple challenge, such as building a bridge out of toothpicks and marshmallows, or a more complex challenge, such as designing a robot to complete a maze. The goal is to get children working together to solve a problem using their creativity and ingenuity.
- Have a Control Freaks debate. Teachers can divide the class into two teams and have them debate the following topic: "Is it important to be a control freak?" Each team should present their arguments and evidence, and the class should vote on which team won.
- Teachers can also host a Control Freaks dress-up day. Have children come to school dressed up as their favorite character from the book. This is a fun way to celebrate the book and to encourage children to be creative.