

A Mango-Shaped Space Study Guide

A Mango-Shaped Space by Wendy Mass

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Plot Summary

“A Mango Shaped Space” is the story of Mia Winchell. She sees colors and shapes with every sound and letter, and she’s in the third grade when she discovers that not everyone sees the world as she does. She struggles through the ridicule of her classmates and hides her secret from everyone, including her family and her best friend, Jenna. Her life is good with one major exception – math. She struggles to get past the colors the numbers evoke in her head and can’t do any complex math. When she enters eighth grade, she also begins to struggle with Spanish because the colors and shapes of Spanish words don’t match their English counterparts. When her struggles in math become too much, Mia finally tells her parents her problem. They are skeptical only for a short time before they set out to find out what’s wrong.

Mia’s pediatrician sends her to a psychotherapist who refers Mia on to a neurologist named Jerry Weiss. Jerry tells Mia the name of her condition is synesthesia and that she isn’t alone. He explains how the condition occurs and Mia meets a group of other people who have variations of synesthesia. She begins learning to manage her condition and meets a math tutor who helps her begin to learn to manipulate numbers.

Mia’s best friend, Jenna, lives nearby and believes she and Mia have shared everything. Mia was with Jenna when Jenna’s mother died and they spend a lot of time together. When Mia has to miss school for doctor’s appointments, Jenna becomes worried. Mia finally realizes that it’s wrong to make Jenna keep worrying, and she tells her everything. Mia expects that Jenna will be sympathetic, but Jenna is furious to learn that Mia has kept something so significant a secret all these years. She feels betrayed and, in that anger, tells some of her classmates Mia’s secret. It’s soon common knowledge at school and Mia is bombarded by students asking her to tell them the color of their names. The teasing isn’t as severe as Mia feared but she feels out of place and distracted.

Mia has a cat who has a raspy wheeze when he breathes. Mia named him Mango because that’s what color she sees when she hears him breathe. Mia and her grandfather were very close and she found Mango near his grave on the day of his funeral. She believes that Mango is the host for a small piece of her grandfather’s soul, and the thought gives her comfort.

One night, Mia discovers that Mango is outside in the freezing weather. The next morning, he is very sick and dies before they can take him to the veterinarian. Mia is heartbroken, partly because she feels that her grandfather is now truly gone, but partly because she feels responsible for Mango’s death. By now, Mia has become friends with a boy named Adam she met on a synesthesia website. She believed he would understand her because of their shared synesthesia, but discovers that he’s an insensitive jerk. A boy in her class, Roger, sincerely tells her how sorry he is over Mango’s death. It’s only then that Mia learns that Roger is colorblind.



As she comes to a diagnosis, Mia wonders if she would eliminate the colors and shapes from her life if she could learn how. She sort of fears what her life would be like without the colors. When Mango dies, the colors are gone. Her neurologist assures her they'll probably return and suggests some ways to make that happen. Mia decides to leave it to fate. She meets a young boy who lives nearby who also has synesthesia. She and her mother hope they are giving the boy and his family a way to handle the situation earlier in life, a head start that Mia didn't have.

A short time after Mango's death, Mia discovers the neighbors have kittens, including one that looks very much like Mango. When Mia pets the kitten, she discovers his sounds are the color of mustard. She laughs, knowing that Mustard will be an interesting name for a kitten.



Prologue and Chapter 1

Summary

As the story opens, Mia Winchell is 13 years old. She's thinking about a day when she was in the third grade and realized that most people didn't see the world the way she did. She was at the blackboard and was supposed to be working a math problem in front of the class. There's only a little time left in class and she hopes she can stall long enough so that others don't see how much trouble she's having. She sees some colored chalk and decides on a way to stall longer. She picks up pieces of colored chalk and begins to write. Her teacher tells her to stop. Mia says the problem would be easier if she used "the right colors." Her classmates laugh and Mia is surprised. She'd expected support.

Mia then says that each number has a color, and that she thought it would be easier to solve the problem if the numbers were written in the correct color. Her classmates laugh more and someone says, "freak." Mia remembers the person stretching the word out so that it sounded like "freeeeek." Her teacher says that numbers don't have colors and Mia realizes by her classmates' reactions that she is the only one who sees numbers this way. The teacher sends Mia to the principal's office and her parents are summoned. She convinces everyone that she was only kidding around. She has to clean the erasers for a week and her teacher makes her apologize to the class. Five years have passed and things are about to change for Mia again.

In Chapter 1, Mia is in a ravine near her house with her best friend, Jenna Davis. It's very hot and the girls have explored every inch of this area, but they are roaming around in an effort to kill time. When they were young, the girls pretended the ravine was going to lead them into a magical land. Mia thinks Jenna is still searching for something like that because she's hoping to find a way to connect with her mother. Jenna's mother died 3 years earlier.

Mia says that Jenna's name is the color of a leaf, and she believes that's part of the reason she liked Jenna from their first meeting. Mia's older sister is Beth. Beth's name is "murky brown." Her younger brother's name is Zach and his name is the color of a robin's egg. Beth is 16 and she has grown away from Mia. Zach is 11 and has "strange ideas." For example, he keeps track of how many hamburgers he's eaten from McDonald's.

As Mia and Jenna continue to walk toward home, a helicopter flies low overhead. They wave. It's Mia's father, who sells and repairs small farm equipment and uses the helicopter to reach the distant farms. Mia and her siblings have been for rides in the helicopter but Jenna refuses to go, even though she's been invited. Mia's father sells farm equipment and Jenna's father is a farmer. They don't see eye-to-eye on the best use of land.



Mia is working on a painting as a gift to commemorate the anniversary of her grandfather's death. Jenna asks if she's been to the cemetery but Mia says she hasn't quite finished the painting. They talk briefly about other things, including Zack's fascination with superstition. They continue toward home and have to walk around the fields farmed by Jenna's father. They arrive at Mia's house and see her father on a ladder. Jenna asks if he's ever going to finish the house and Mia says it isn't likely. Her father and grandfather couldn't agree on a building plan so they each built what they wanted and joined the two pieces together in a hodgepodge manner. The result is a sprawling house with strange connections and hallways that don't really go anywhere.

Jenna calls out a greeting to Mr. Winchell before continuing on to her own home. Mr. Winchell says he's going to keep working until Mrs. Winchell calls him inside. Mia watches the "familiar mottled gray bursts of color" that appear as Mr. Winchell hammers.

Mia goes inside and looks for her cat, Mango the Magnificent. The cat is gray and white and Mia finds him on Beth's bed. She takes him back to her own room and finds Zack there. He has several watches in his hand and he's intently watching Mia's collection of clocks. A short time later, the clocks all strike the hour and Mia discovers that Zack has turned on the alarms and turned up the volume on every single clock in her collection. She's overcome by the colors and shapes that surround her with the extremely loud noises from the clocks. Mia doesn't know why the noise doesn't affect Zack as it affected her. When she recovers, she turns the volume down on each clock and puts on some soothing music as she finishes her grandfather's painting.

Analysis

Mia is not aware that she sees the world differently until third grade. When she realizes it, she's caught off-guard by how the other children see her. They call her a "freak" and that taunt sticks with her throughout her life. This is one of the book's themes and this difference becomes an important part of Mia's life.

Jenna was very young when her mother died of cancer and death is one of the themes seen in this story. Jenna is more aware of death than most children of her age because of this early experience. This is why Jenna comes up with the idea that Mia should make a gift for her grandfather on the anniversary of his death. Jenna takes a gift to her mother each year. There's no doubt that Jenna is a different character than she would have been if her mother had lived. She has endured the death of her mother at a young age and that changed her perspective on life. This will be important later in the book, when Jenna is worried because Mia begins seeing doctors.

There's a pretty sharp contrast between Jenna's father and Mia's father. Mr. Davis farms the land he owns. Mr. Winchell doesn't farm and is using a field for a landing spot for his helicopter. On top of that, he only flies out in his helicopter about three times a week. Mr. Davis apparently thinks Mr. Winchell should work harder at either his business or at farming. Mia notes that her father thinks Mr. Davis should "mind his own business." That thought almost makes it appear that there's some level of animosity between the two



men but they are not seen together in the book so it's impossible to either prove or deny that idea.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the incident in the third grade that made Mia realize others didn't see the colors that she saw.

Discussion Question 2

Describe the friendship between Jenna and Mia.

Discussion Question 3

How might Jenna have been different if her mother hadn't died?

Vocabulary

concentration, fragments, gawked, irate brooding, morbid, superstitious, gnarled, barter, mottled, bombarding



Chapters 2 and 3

Summary

Mia finishes the portrait of her grandfather against a blue-gray sky but feels something is missing. She decides to paint Mango on his shoulder. She has to make Mango as he looked when he was a kitten because there isn't much space, but feels that completes the picture perfectly.

Mia remembers the day she found Mango. It was the day of her grandfather's funeral. Everyone was gathered around the grave when Mia saw a tiny kitten. She believed the kitten had the same eyes as her Grandfather and immediately loved the kitten. Mia believes that her grandfather's soul has split into pieces, and that a piece of it lives in Mango. She had to beg her parents to let Mango live inside. Mia chose the name Mango because he made mango-colored sounds with his purrs and wheezes. The kitten wheezed when he breathed and the vet said it was because of a tear in the lining of one lung. It could never be fixed but Mango has survived a full year.

Mia's father stops in her room and says they are taking Beth to town. She's just returned from a summer camp in California. Mia says it's going to rain and her father laughs but tells Beth to get an umbrella, knowing that Mia is usually right.

Mia takes the painting to the cemetery and Mango tags along. The painting is still wet in places and Mango walks over it when Mia lays it on her grandfather's grave, making several paw prints. Mia knows she'll have to repair the damage later. Suddenly, a thunderstorm rises up and Mia realizes that she hasn't brought an umbrella. Mango runs away and Mia runs home. It's not until she gets there that she realizes she's left both Mango and her painting in the rain.

Beth greets Mia and gives her a hug, which is out of character. Beth then invites Mia to her room. She shows Mia things she brought back from camp, including bags of herbs and flowers. Mia considers going back to the cemetery but her mother says it's too dark. Mia's mother realizes she is out of spaghetti and plans to go to the store. Mia suggests they have hamburgers instead but her mother says Beth has become a vegetarian and that she is now refusing to eat anything that once had a face. Mia goes with her mother, hoping they can stop to retrieve her painting on the way back.

While they are waiting in line at the grocery store, a 5-year-old boy named Billy Henkle catches Mia's attention. They introduce themselves and Billy says Mia is "purple with orange stripes." Mia says that it's really "candy-apple red with a hint of light green." Then she realizes what Billy said. Billy's mother interrupts, saying that Billy has a wild imagination. Mia realizes that this might mean she isn't the only one who sees the colors.



That night, Mia has trouble sleeping and she keeps Mango awake as well. She gets up early and goes to the cemetery to retrieve her painting. She finds that Jenna and Mr. Davis are at the cemetery as well. They come each Wednesday to visit the grave of Jenna's mother. Jenna and Mr. Davis are talking to Mrs. Roth, a Jewish woman who lives nearby with her family.

Jenna goes with Mia to her grandfather's grave. She asks if Mia will be able to repair the damage done to her painting. Mia is surprised it isn't completely ruined. She knows she would be more upset except that she is still thinking about Billy. Jenna says that Mia can sleep over that night if she wants, then Jenna goes back to join her father.

Mia and Zack set up a lemonade stand. As they are squeezing lemons, Mia asks Zack if the color of the lemonade reminds him of anything, "like the letter a or the number 4." Zack is clearly confused but Mia just wanted to know if other people saw the colors and just didn't talk about it. She confirms that Zack doesn't know what she's talking about.

Mia and her mother take Mango to the vet for his checkup. A boy from Mia's class named Roger Carson arrives with his parents and a large, very old dog. Mia notices that the dog can barely hold up his head as the entire family gathers around, petting the dog. They are taken immediately into an exam room and Mia hears a faint whining then Roger crying loudly. Everyone in the waiting room holds a little tighter to their pets, including Mia. When Roger and his family leaves, Mia doesn't know what to say. They briefly acknowledge each other then Roger is gone. The vet gives Mia some pills for Mango to take each night.

The following Monday, Mia arrives with Jenna and Zack at Harrison Middle School. Mia has Mrs. Morris for American history and discovers she's very afraid of germs. The English teacher, Mr. Siedler, is new and assigns *Lord of the Flies* as their first reading assignment in English class. At lunch, Jenna and Mia meet with the same friends they always eat with, Kimberly, Molly, and Sara. After lunch, Mia heads for math and dreads it. She has trouble in Spanish because the colors of the English words don't match the colors of their Spanish counterparts. There's a new art teacher who says the students should call her Karen. She instructs the students to find an artist they admire from a book.

That afternoon, Billy waves at Mia from a passing car. Mia waves but decides she's going to pretend that she doesn't see colors and do her best to be normal for the entire school year.

Analysis

It's noted that Mia can tell if it's going to rain but that sense is never explained. She can apparently predict rain with a great deal of accuracy, based on her father's reaction. He laughs at the prediction but tells Beth to carry an umbrella, which indicates that he believes Mia. Interestingly, Mia doesn't follow her own advice and she's caught at the cemetery without an umbrella.



The theme of death is seen again in Mia's attitude about her grandfather's soul. Mia's idea that her grandfather's soul has splintered into several pieces is an interesting concept. She isn't from a religious home but indicates repeatedly that she and her family offer souls "up to heaven" after a person or creature dies. She believes that part of her grandfather's soul is already in heaven, dancing with her grandmother, while another lives on in Mango. It's left to the reader to decide if this is possible and whether Mia's thoughts on this are reliable.

Mia's meeting with Billy Henkle is entirely by chance. One of the book's themes is Accepting Differences and this is the first time that she realizes she might not be the only person who sees colors in the world. She's shocked and caught off guard by the situation, which means she doesn't get and give any information other than Billy's name. She will later feel driven to find him so that she can help his family begin to cope with his condition. Billy's mother seems weary of dealing with his "imagination" regarding the colors, which sounds very similar to the situation when Mia had claimed to see colors. This indicates a lack of understanding for a condition that the adults simply don't understand. Billy's mother and sister will later need to come to terms with accepting Billy's different way of seeing the world, and they'll come to accept Mia as well.

Mia knows that the weekly visits to the cemetery are difficult for Jenna, even though Jenna doesn't say how hard it is. This connection is an example of the relationship between Mia and Jenna, one of the book's themes. There are several important points in this part of the scene. First, Jenna is likely sad a lot of the time because of her mother's death but has learned to stop saying so in front of her friends. Youngsters of this age probably wouldn't know what to say to offer comfort and it likely just becomes strained if Jenna shows too much of her sadness. Even though Jenna isn't really showing sadness, Mia knows it's there. This is an important part of Mia's character and shows that she's devoted to Jenna. Another point is that Mia knows she is also keeping secrets from Jenna. This indicates that Mia recognizes that Jenna isn't sharing all her feelings about her mother's death, which is another of the book's themes. Mia never mentions this when Jenna is so angry because Mia has kept a secret. It could be that Mia recognizes that she's able to see Jenna's unhappiness, even when Jenna doesn't share it. Both characters are growing, maturing, and changing, and their interactions are a crucial part of that.

Mia's struggles with some subjects is another example of her difference. She will later have a tutor who will help her learn to learn despite these challenges. While it's important for others to accept differences, which is one of the book's themes, it's also important for Mia to accept these differences in herself. As she matures, she will find it's easier, and this coming of age is another of the book's themes.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Billy Henkle? How does Mia meet him and what's the result of that meeting?



Discussion Question 2

What are Mia's thoughts on her grandfather's soul? Do you think it's possible?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Mia decides that she's going to be normal during the entire school year?

Vocabulary

compensate, relentless, dearth, culture, theory, saunters, prancing, spirals, tentatively, interrogate, exasperation, cowering, phobia, amok



Chapter 4

Summary

By the second week of school, Mia has failed her second math quiz. She works on her homework and can't understand why she is having so much trouble with math. Mia realizes that she can't continue on this path. She goes to the living room carrying the note from her math teacher. There, she tells them everything, including that she's always seen the colors and that she can't figure out why she can't do the math. Her mother asks for more information and Mia describes it to the best of her ability. She says each letter, number, and sound has its own color and that the colors appear in various shapes, such as geometric shapes, zigzags, or swirls.

Mia's parents immediately try to explain why she is seeing the colors. There is a brief discussion of family mental illnesses and accusations about drug use. Her parents simply don't know what to say or do about this and they want to find a rational explanation. They quickly decide to take her to the pediatrician. Dr. Randolph has taken care of all the Winchell children but has recently become forgetful. Mia's parents still decide that's the best option. Her mother promises that they'll figure it out.

Mia goes to school the next morning while her parents wait to hear back from Dr. Randolph. She looks through the art book and finds an artist named Kandinsky who paints in a style that captures her attention. Mia thinks his art looks like the colors she sees when she hears music that has lots of different instruments.

In history, the class is divided into groups for a history project that will make up half their grade. Mia's group includes Roger Carson and two other students, Jonah Finley and Laura Hoffson. Roger doesn't meet Mia's eyes and Mia is glad they have weeks to complete the project.

Mia's mother picks her up at lunch for a doctor's appointment. Jenna is obviously worried but Mia assures her she's alright. Beth is with Mrs. Winchell. She's seeing the doctor for poison ivy. While Beth is being seen, Mrs. Winchell says that Mia will have to attend summer school if she can't bring her math grade up. She promises to help Mia with her math homework and Mia can't bring herself to say that more studying won't help.

When Mia is called into the office, her mother goes with her. Dr. Randolph gives her a checkup and asks questions. He slams the door and asks Mia what she sees. Mia describes it but realizes that Dr. Randolph doesn't seem to believe her. He refers them to a psychotherapist. As they leave the office, Mia says Dr. Randolph thinks she's crazy.

Mia returns to school during sixth period. They are running around the track when she sees Roger fall and it's apparent he hurt his ankle. She later sees him on the bleachers with an ice pack and asks if he's okay. He reminds her that they need to get together



soon to decide on a history project. They talk briefly about a book he's reading and he reminds her to call him that night. Mia says she will but doesn't plan to follow through.

On the bus ride home, Jenna is obviously curious but tries not to pry. After they leave the bus for the walk to their separate homes, she asks if Mia would tell her if there was something seriously wrong. Mia says she'll tell Jenna everything that weekend. When the weekend arrives, Mia tries to reassure herself that Jenna is her best friend and that she won't think Mia is a freak. She finally tells Jenna everything and feels a huge sense of relief. She's surprised when Jenna begins crying then becomes furious. She says they've been best friends for years and is angry that Mia couldn't trust her with this information. Jenna says she's shared everything with Mia and she feels betrayed. She says Mia is probably keeping more secrets and that she obviously doesn't know how to be a best friend, then she leaves. Mia is angry, then disappointed, but that turns to hurt when Jenna doesn't talk to her during school on Monday.

Analysis

When Mia's mother promises that they'll "figure out" what's causing her to see the colors, Mia jumps to the conclusion that they'll somehow eliminate that part of her life so that she sees the world like most people. She is struggling with math and Spanish and she wants to be normal so that she never hears people call her a freak again. However, she recognizes that the colors are a vital part of her life and that they add a dimension that other people lack. She can't imagine hearing Mango breath without seeing the little puffs of color with his breath, or any of the other millions of colors she sees on a daily basis. Mia already recognizes that this is an important part of who she is, and her acceptance of that part of her life is one of the themes of this book.

The friendship between Jenna and Mia is an important theme of the book and this is the first real test of that friendship. Jenna's character is not entirely typical of a girl of this age because she lost her mother. Jenna knows that death is possible and she has a first-hand knowledge of mortality. She jumps to the idea that Mia might be seriously ill when she has a doctor's appointment. She may have worried so much that she was expecting the worst when Mia told her about the colors. She may have felt a huge sense of relief to find out that Mia is not dying and the idea that she was worried about it may have contributed to her reaction. Jenna's attitude about death is one of the book's themes but it's up to the reader to decide if Jenna's reaction is warranted.

The relationships between Mia and her siblings is an important part of the story line. She and Beth were close until Beth hit her mid-teens and it seems possible that Mia might have confided in Beth at some point, but she didn't. Zack has some very strange ideas and superstitions and it seems possible that she might also have confided in Zack, but they also aren't that close. The relationship between Mia and her siblings is a symbol of Mia's relationship with the rest of the world, and they begin to accept her as other people in the world come to accept her.



Art is an important part of Mia's life. She uses it to express herself and to help her make sense of the colors prompted by sounds around her. The art is a symbol of Mia's difference and of her own struggle to accept that.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Jenna's reaction when Mia tells her about the colors. Why does she react that way and is she justified in that reaction?

Discussion Question 2

What is Mia's reaction when she considers that someone might find a way to eliminate the colors in her life?

Discussion Question 3

Describe what you know of Mia's family up to this point, including her relationships with each family member.

Vocabulary

pathetic, peers, crumpled, sputters, eccentric, chaos, pediatrician, pawing, gestures, surge, flicker, fray, posterity, morphed



Chapters 5 and 6

Summary

In Chapter 5, Mia is still thinking about her fight with Jenna when she arrives at the therapist's office. The office is all white with white carpet and oversized chairs. There's no one waiting and it's completely silent. Mia is afraid to talk loudly and asks her mother if they are being videoed. Her mother reassures her about that and that she and Jenna will make up.

The therapist is named Ms. Finn and she says she is a therapist but not a doctor. She asks to talk to Mia alone first. She asks Mia questions, such as whether the colors are there when Mia gets mad at her parents and whether Mia feels left out because she's the middle child of the family. Ms. Finn says some children create elaborate ways of getting their parents' attention. Mia realizes this is yet another person who probably doesn't believe her. They talk for awhile longer before Mia goes to the waiting room and Ms. Finn summons Mrs. Winchell. Mia goes to the door to listen and hears her mother say the words "brain tumor." Ms. Finn says a neurologist can test Mia's brain functions. Mia goes back to the waiting room and tries to figure out how she got to this point.

Outside, Mrs. Winchell says Mia is going to see a neurologist at the University of Chicago. It's obvious they are both worried but they agree not to worry.

Early the next morning, Mia's parents wake her to say they've talked to the neurologist and that he feels certain Mia doesn't have a brain tumor because she's had the condition her entire life without any other symptoms. They tell her she's going to see the neurologist in person in a week.

Mia goes to Jenna's house the next morning. She says she understands why Jenna was mad but needs Jenna's support. Jenna says that isn't a real apology but Mia says Jenna should apologize for getting so angry. Jenna says she was really afraid that there was something serious wrong with Mia. Mia realizes she hadn't thought of that from Jenna's point of view. Then Jenna reveals that she told Kimberly about Mia's condition while she was still mad at Mia. Mia is horrified that now everyone will know. Jenna feels guilty for sharing the information but says she believes everyone will be curious but won't make fun of Mia.

Back at home, Mia finds Zack and their conversation turns to Mango. Zack says Mango has acted strange lately and peed on the couch. Mia is upset as she gets ready to catch the bus.

In Chapter 6, Mia gets through only English class before people start bombarding her with questions. Most want to know the color of their names but there are lots of other questions as well. At lunch, lots of people stop to talk to Mia. There's a side of her interested in the attention but she feels like a "circus sideshow." One girl, later identified



as Amy, says Mia should be careful because she might get moved to a class for “special kids.”

When she gets home, Zack has heard about it and wants to know why he and Beth don't have it. He thinks it's “pretty neat” and says Mia is now the “strangest one in the family.” Mr. Winchell says Mia's appointment with the neurologist is the following Friday.

She arrives at the university and meets Dr. Jerry Weiss. He is young and insists they call him Jerry. He says his focus of study is perception and says Mia's condition is known as synesthesia, which means “senses coming together.” There are variations of the condition. He questions Mia about various things, including how she views a calendar. Her mother is surprised at her answer and Mia is surprised that everyone doesn't view it this way. Though it's uncommon, there are others who have it. He says there is no cure but that she can learn to compensate. He directs her to a website dedicated to people with synesthesia. As they leave, Mia feels that she has to find Billy and tell his mother about this.

Analysis

The term synesthesia is real and the author includes references and support groups at the end of the book. The book is fiction and it's up to the reader to decide what details are believable.

When Jenna and Mia talk after their fight, it's clear that Jenna's perspective on the situation is something Mia hadn't considered. The death of Jenna's mother has impacted her so that she now realizes it's possible for young people to become sick and die. Mia knows this about Jenna but it hadn't occurred to her that Jenna might jump to this conclusion about Mia. The friendship between Mia and Jenna is one of the book's themes and death is another. Both these themes play an important role in this scene of the book.

Mia and Jenna each wear a friendship bracelet that Jenna's mother bought them when they were young. They are rope bracelets and the girls have grown so much that they can no longer get the bracelets off their wrists. They still wear them faithfully. Mia admits that hers is frayed and even a little smelly, but she refuses to cut it off. The bracelets are a symbol of their friendship and this is important as their friendship is tested.

Mia is relieved to learn that her condition has a name and that she isn't the only person with this condition, another example of the need to accept differences. She has felt like a freak since she was in third grade and she feels a huge sense of relief when she learns that other people are dealing with the same condition. However, Mia isn't really thinking about the fact that children can be mean and that the condition is so rare that none of her classmates are dealing with it. The fact that she's not alone won't diminish the fact that her classmates don't understand this and won't know how to deal with her. Though Mia doesn't seem to be treated badly by her classmates, a child in this situation in most schools would find themselves ridiculed.



Mia's descriptions of her condition up to this point has focused on colors associated with numbers, letters, and sounds. At Jerry's request, she explains how she envisions a calendar of a year. She describes it as being shaped like a Ferris Wheel that lies flat in the summer and gradually rises in the fall to its full height in the winter. These alternative ways Mia sees the world is one of the book's themes.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Mia's meeting with Dr. Jerry Weiss and what she learns.

Discussion Question 2

How does Mia's life change immediately after learning that her condition has a name and that there are others also dealing with it?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Mia better understands Jenna after she and Jenna make up from their fight.

Vocabulary

insanely, confidential, syndrome, valiantly, betrayal, clamoring, perception, contorted, auditory, compensate, uncanny, traits



Chapters 7 and 8

Summary

In Chapter 7, Jenna returns for a follow-up appointment with Jerry. A graduate student named Debbie works as his assistant. Jerry says that those with synesthesia are called synesthetes. Jerry begins to explain what's known about synesthesia. He says most people who see colors and shapes with letters and sounds don't see the same colors, though they usually see very similar shapes. Mia realizes that some people might see a name with one color while another synesthete might see it with another color, which explains why Billy didn't see Mia's name the same way she sees it.

At one point, Jerry assures Mrs. Winchell that they can help Mia work around her colors. Mia says she wants to be able to pass her classes but can't imagine her life without colors. Jerry says stimulants lessen the colors while depressants enhance them and a traumatic event might dramatically change them. He also says older people have weaker synesthesia. He sets Mia up with a tutor to help her learn to do better in math.

When she arrives home, Beth wants to know all about the situation. Mia finally gives in and tells her and is surprised that Beth is positive and says she's glad Mia shared. Mia rushes through dinner and asks to use the computer. She lies, saying she's finished her homework, and her mother allows it. Mia logs onto the website Jerry gave her and is surprised to find a lot of information. Most of it is too technical for her to follow but she finds a chat board and registers.

Roger Carson calls while Mia is online. She takes the call but is too distracted to really grasp that he is planning for their group to meet the following Monday during lunch. Several times during this period, Mia forgets things she's supposed to do and breaks promises because of it.

In Chapter 8, Mia rides her bike to the grocery store on Sunday morning. She asks a clerk if she remembers Billy Henkle and his mother but the clerk doesn't. Back at home, she discovers she has an email from a boy named Adam who also is a synesthete. He is a year older than Mia. Mia responds and obviously thinks Adam is nice. Zack demands a turn on the computer so Mia goes to her room to pain. She works on a book report and then goes outside for awhile. Later, it occurs to her that Adam might be pretending to be a 14-year-old boy and she sends him another email. She asks how she can be sure he's 14 and asks what her name looks like to him.

Later that evening, Mia gets 3 emails from Adam. In the first, he talks some about his synesthesia, including that foods evoke colors for him. He mentions that he broke curfew the previous night and Mia realizes he must live a more exciting life than she. In the second, he asks what she looks like then says never mind. In the third, he says he hit the send button instead of the delete button by accident. He describes himself and says he "doesn't usually sound this stupid." Mia responds, saying she's interested in the



food/color aspect of his synesthesia. She describes herself and shuts down the computer as her mother enters, asking about Roger's phone call. Mia tells her mom about the history project and her mother is upset that she hasn't yet started on it.

Monday morning, Jenna says Mia was supposed to call her because they had a mission to get a love potion for Kimberly. Mia has no memory of the conversation they had planning that but she apologizes. Mia sits with her friends at lunch but Roger interrupts, reminding Mia that they were going to work on their history project over the lunch period.

When they settle in, the four students begin to discuss possible topics. They are supposed to choose something that's a shameful piece of American history. Roger remembers that Mia had done a project on the Ibos for a previous history project. Mia has the ability to recall dates, names, and places by associating them with their colors, and she recites the story of the Ibos, a group of people who drowned themselves rather than submitting to their new role as slaves. They agree to focus on this for their project and break up the work so that everyone has an assignment.

Mia is barely paying attention by the end of their meeting. She is thinking about an article she read in which a woman talks about the dramatic colors she saw after undergoing acupuncture. Mia knows that Roger is undergoing acupuncture to help his ankle heal and she asks him about it.

Mia goes to math class. There's a quiz involving formulas they were supposed to memorize. Mia's first instinct is to hide until the quiz is over but she then cheats. She uses colored markers to make patterns on her pants that are the key to the formulas. She passes the quiz and "forgets" to be ashamed that she cheated.

Analysis

Mia's forgetfulness is seen on several occasions all of a sudden in this section. She simply doesn't remember conversations and things she's supposed to do. Part of that is that she's dealing with the doctors and the worry over her condition but a bigger part seems to be that she's suddenly interested in Adam to the exclusion of everything else. For a short period, Mia will become so caught up in the colors and experiencing variations of the colors that she doesn't seem to care about anything else.

These memory lapses may be the author's attempt to make the reader believe there's something more serious about to happen. The reader sees Mia's sudden memory lapses and most will wonder if this is some side effect of the synesthesia. It isn't and the reader eventually learns that it's just a short period during which Mia can't seem to concentrate.

Sara says Mia is being irresponsible when she doesn't remember to sit with Roger and the others to begin her history project. Mia responds that she has other things going on in her life at the moment and that school work simply isn't her top priority. Mia's attitude seems a bit selfish on the surface but the reader should remember that she's been



keeping the colors a secret for a long time. Now that the secret is out and she's dealing with the issue head on, she is caught up in that. However, she seems even more caught up in her new friendship with Adam, and in that respect, she is being irresponsible. It's left to the reader to decide Mia's motivations and whether she's ultimately acting irresponsibly.

On the surface, Adam seems like a nice boy. The only clue that isn't the case is seen in his reference to missing his curfew. That will later prove to be an important piece of information and Mia will eventually learn that he isn't as wonderful as he seems. Mia likes him because he sees the world differently, as she does. Adam embraces Mia's descriptions of her colors and this acceptance of her differences, which is one of the book's themes.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Mia's forgetfulness. What do you think it means?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think about Mia cheating on her math quiz by drawing colors on her pants that will give her the answers?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Mia meets Adam. Make a prediction about their future relationship.

Vocabulary

substances, wistfully, grudgingly, vibes, curfew, pursing, composition, lurches, priority



Chapter 9

Summary

Adam writes an email, saying Mia's idea for acupuncture sounds "great." He says he got drunk once to try to enhance his synesthesia, but that he was just sick afterward. He suggests she fake an earache to get the acupuncture and offers to write her a fake doctor's note. Jerry announces that he's having a gathering of synesthetes the weekend after Thanksgiving and invites Mia to join them. She agrees.

A tutor named Samantha arrives that afternoon and promises she can help Mia get through math. Mia doesn't really feel that it's as important anymore, especially since she recently cheated to make an A on a quiz.

Mia read about a woman who said colors take on a new dimension when viewed through the steam of a hot bath. Mia takes a candle and some matches from Beth's room without permission and lights a candle in the bathroom, then runs a tub of hot water. She then puts on some music and stays in the tub until the water becomes cold. She's enthralled by the experience.

One Sunday, Mia calls Roger and asks if he can set her up with his acupuncturist. He hesitates but finally agrees that she can go with him to his next appointment and that his mother will drive Mia home. He reminds her that she's going to have to pay for the session. Mia hears her parents arguing about whether she's making any progress and her mother mentions the quiz she passed. Her mother is confused that Mia passed the quiz before she began to work with Samantha. Mia wants to take another hot bath but has promised to go to Jenna's because Jenna is excited about her upcoming birthday party.

Analysis

When Samantha shows up to help Mia with math, Mia notices that Samantha is really excited about math. Mia can't match her enthusiasm and she now feels that she isn't really all that worried about math because she made an A on the last quiz. She doesn't stop to think about the fact that she had to cheat to get that grade and that her method of cheating won't really help her when she's back to working problems rather than memorizing formulas. This is a symbol of Mia's changing attitudes. This seems uncharacteristic and is an indication that Mia is getting so caught up in the idea that other people share her condition that she isn't able to focus on the things that really matter in her everyday life. Her need to find new experiences is one of the book's theme.

There's an important look at the family dynamics in this chapter. Zack tells his mother that Mia has two boyfriends – Roger and Adam. His mother asks Mia about it which upsets Mia. She denies that either of them is a boyfriend and is angry at Zack for his



action. Later, Mia confronts Zack and he says he made it up to get back at Mia, but he can't say what he wanted to get back at her for. It seems likely that Zack is feeling at least a little left out. He's the youngest of the family and is used to having more of his mother's attention. When she's suddenly so focused on Mia and Mia's situation, Zack is probably jealous. While it's not a major theme, this family dynamic is an undercurrent that drives a great deal of the action in the book.

As Mia is leaving her house headed to Jenna's, she snags her friendship bracelet on the door and rips it a little. This bracelet is a symbol of the friendship between Jenna and Mia, and the fact that it ripped is a symbol of the current situation between Jenna and Mia. She hopes Jenna won't notice. Mia wonders if she and Jenna are getting too old for the bracelets, which is an important step for Mia. It's a sign that she's questioning her friendship with Jenna, but not in a good way. She's becoming so caught up in other things related to synesthesia that she's ready to put many of the important things in her life on hold. Mia has denied this aspect of herself for so long that she's now going overboard, seeking out new experiences, which is one of the book's themes.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mia get in a hot tub of water? Why does she plan to do acupuncture? What does this say about her?

Discussion Question 2

What is Mia's state of mind at this point in the book? Why is she so distracted and what is the effect of that?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Zack tell his mother that Mia has two boyfriends? What's Mia's reaction?

Vocabulary

obsessed, manipulating, giddy, mesmerized, wafts, unspoken



Chapters 10 and 11

Summary

In Chapter 10, Jenna seems surprised to see Mia. She says she expected Mia to ignore her as she has been recently. Mia asks to use the computer for some research, saying she can't get it done at home because she has to fight with Zack over the computer. Jenna introduces Mia to Rebecca, a friend of Mr. Davis. It's obvious Jenna doesn't like her and is angry at her presence. Mia assures Jenna that Rebecca is Mr. Davis' first girlfriend and that they won't get married.

In Jenna's room, Mia tells Jenna all that's been happening, including the emails from Adam. Mia assures Jenna that Jerry's meeting will be over in time for Mia to help Jenna get ready for her birthday party.

At school, Roger says his mother arranged for Mia to have an appointment right after his on Wednesday. In math class, Mia again uses her markers to get the answers for her math quiz, this time making the colored marks on the bottoms of her tennis shoes.

Tuesday afternoon, Mia meets with her history group at Roger's house. Laura is confused when she sees a dog bowl but Roger says they don't have a dog. Mia realizes it means Roger's family isn't yet ready to let go of the memory of their dog.

Wednesday, Mia goes with Roger to his acupuncture appointment. The acupuncturist introduces herself as Faith. She assures Mia that the needles are so small that the holes close up as soon as the needles are removed. Mia claims to have an earache that won't go away and Faith inserts 6 needles. Mia is amazed by the way the colors are enhanced. The article she read doesn't do the experience justice. As Mia finishes the session, she notices that everyone has a colored aura around them. Mia asks Roger if he ever sees "anything" after an acupuncture session. He says he doesn't, affirming that Mia is the only one having this experience. Mia is euphoric.

In Chapter 11, Mia looks at herself when she wakes the following morning and sees that the aura is gone. Mango's aura had been mango-colored and Mia misses it as she rubs him. Mia figures out how long it will be until her next appointment for acupuncture. She's dismayed to figure out it's 144 hours and doesn't even take time to be happy that she is now able to do that kind of math in her head, thanks to techniques Samantha taught her.

Mia confronts Roger at school, asking if he can get their appointments moved up. He refuses. In history class, they break into groups and work on their projects. Mia's group convinces her to make a painting of the ship on which the slaves traveled to America. She's angry, saying she's done her share of research. They plead with her and she gives in, thinking that she'll at least have something to help pass the time until her next acupuncture appointment.



Mia learns that the entire family is going to help box up food for needy families that evening. She meets Billy's mother there and tries to talk to her about Billy. His mother says she's sick of Billy's imagination and that he's nothing like his sister. She says Billy's sister is about Mia's age but Mia isn't interested in that. Mia says there's going to be a meeting of people like her and Billy but quickly realizes that his mother isn't willing to listen. She gives up and tries to convince herself that Billy will be okay. Before they are leaving, Billy spots Mia and rushes to her. They talk for only a minute and Mia is sad when she leaves.

When she gets home, she has an email from Adam who talks about what he's learned about the auras. He says Mia's experience must have been interesting and asks for more details. Mia learns from Roger that their appointments have been moved up a day because of the Thanksgiving holiday. This time, the acupuncturist puts electrical currents to the needles and the experience is even greater than before.

Analysis

When Mia leaves the acupuncturist's office, she notices the auras that surround everyone. She's amazed at the brilliance of the colors and the experience is euphoric for her. She notices that Roger's aura reaches toward her but doesn't think about what it might mean. Actually, Roger likes Mia by this point but he won't tell her that until much later in the book. Mia also sees that the auras of Beth and her friend Brent are intermingling and she immediately makes the connection that it means they like each other. It's interesting that she doesn't make that connection with Roger. Mia is happy that Beth has found someone, which is an important part of the family dynamic but is also an example of this new level of Mia's world as she becomes so caught up in the experiences of her synesthesia. These new experiences are one of the themes of the book.

The website for synesthesia should be a very positive resource for Mia but she seems to be losing control. She seems, by this point, to be addicted to the acupuncture sessions, which she learned about on the website. She doesn't seem to care about much of anything other than enhancing her synesthesia experiences. That focus on the next experience is very much like an addiction of any kind. Mia will soon realize that her focus comes with her very high cost and she'll learn that she has to pay attention to more than just her own needs. This is all part of the maturing process, which is one of the themes of the story.

Mia continues to be very concerned about Billy because she knows what he's going to be going through in the coming years. She wants to help him but she doesn't yet know how. She is sad when she has to say good-bye to him when she's boxing up food for needy families. She tries to tell herself that he's going to be alright without her help, and it seems likely that he would be because Mia has managed to survive. Billy will return to the story later and Mia's family will be able to help them. It's important to note that Mia is concerned about Billy, a fellow synesthete, while she is ignoring most of the people who are very important to her. This is because she is seeking out people who see the world



as she does. Mia is focused on people who accept her for who she is, which is one of the themes of the story.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Mia's first visit with the acupuncturist and why she can't wait to go again.

Discussion Question 2

List all the things you know about Roger at this point. Keep the list and add to it at the end of the book.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mia feel that she needs to help Billy?

Vocabulary

vehemently, abducted, miserably, sociable, nonchalantly, muster, loon, undulating, jubilation, verge, profusely, feat, fidgety



Chapters 12 and 13

Summary

In Chapter 12, Mia is aware that all the colors she normally sees are much more brilliant and that the auras are also more vibrant than the first time she went through the acupuncture session. Mia has lied to her parents about where she is and what she's doing but when she experiences the colors, she immediately loses any sign of guilt about that lie. When she leaves the office, she notices that there are smears of colors on everything people have touched. She almost walks into traffic and Roger has to stop her. He seems concerned but they don't talk about it.

At home, Mia can tell where each member of her family has been recently. She notices that Mango has hardly been out of bed. She immediately thinks that no one in her family would believe her if she told them about this experience.

Mia arrives at school on the day of the history presentation. Roger and Laura want to see the painting before the presentation. Mia realizes she's forgotten it at home. She rushes away without an explanation and calls her father. She begs him to stop what he's doing and bring her the painting, and he agrees. She hides out until he arrives and rushes out to take it from him. Mia's group is second to present and she arrives at the assembly just in time. The others present the information, as agreed. Then Mrs. Morris asks Mia to tell them about the painting. Mia panics but sees that her three classmates are offering up silent support. She talks about her choice of paint and the scene, and Mrs. Morris says she's going to put it on the classroom wall.

Thanksgiving dinner arrives and the family is having tofu loaf instead of turkey. Beth made the suggestion and Zack and Mia agreed, which prompted this change from their typical meal. Mia notes that the auras have faded but Mangos is brighter than any of the humans. By now, Mia has learned that Adam is going to be at the upcoming synesthesia event hosted by Jerry. She's excited that she's going to get to meet him. Zack makes a rude comment about Mia's "freak show" and has to apologize for it. Beth says she thinks it's "groovy" and everyone is amazed at this show of support.

In Chapter 13, Mia worries a great deal about the synesthesia event. When she arrives, she finds there is a mixture of men and women but that she and Adam are the youngest two present. The members of the group introduce themselves and talk about their personal experiences, including a debate between some about the personalities of numbers and how that made math even more difficult. One man says he has to turn off the radio in order to concentrate while he's driving and Mia decides she needs to remember that tip for when she starts driving. There is an argument about what the name Jerry looks like. Mia is very interested and feels that she has finally found somewhere she belongs.



During a break, Adam introduces himself and kisses Mia's hand. He suggests they go for a walk in the garden and sit on a bench for only a minute before he asks if he can kiss Mia. She agrees and they share a brief kiss. Her mother interrupts and makes Mia leave. On the way home, Mia considers whether she wants Adam to be her boyfriend.

At home, Mia has something to eat and heads for bed, knowing she has to get up very early for the next morning's session. She has noticed that the auras of everyone else has faded but she can still clearly see Mango's. She sees that his food dish remains full but expects that he's full because Zack fed him so much at their Thanksgiving meal.

Mia suddenly has the urge to go outside and she spends a little time sitting on the step, thinking about her day and about Adam. About 3:30 the next morning, thunder wakes Mia. She looks for Mango, knowing that he's always afraid during a storm, but there's only a "Mango-shaped space" at the foot of her bed. She follows his trail and discovers him outside the front door, cold and frightened. She suddenly realizes she might not have given him his pill the previous evening. She knows that Mango probably slipped outside when she was on the porch and knows that he doesn't know any better, but she knows that her grandfather should have been smart enough to resist the open door.

Mia falls asleep with Mango and wakes a few hours later. Mango is twitching and his wheeze is drastic. She gets her mother who agrees they need to get Mango to the vet. When Mrs. Winchell calls the vet, she learns that there are flooded roads. They decide that they'll use the helicopter to go directly to the vet's house. Mr. Winchell gets the helicopter ready but by the time they are ready to take off, Mango is dead. Mia begins to scream.

Analysis

The second session with the acupuncturist is a phenomenal experience for her and it makes her even more reluctant to return to her "normal" life. Again, her response to these experiences make her act like an addict and she is even more irresponsible in the days after this session. This time, the effects last longer and Mia spends even more time thinking about the colors than she has previously. This desire for new experiences is a recurring theme.

Mia arrives home after this acupuncture session and notices that Mango has hardly been out of bed the entire day. The vet said the medicine might make him sleepy but Mia is suddenly aware that he is hardly moving around at all. Before she can even process this thought, she's thinking about something else and she never thinks about it again. This is an important aspect of her character at the moment. She loves Mango but has become so possessed by the experiences that she doesn't care about his well-being. It's a mistake that will end in Mango's death and it's only then that Mia will realize how selfish she's being. Mia's relationship with Mango is one of the book's themes, and the reader can clearly see that the relationship is changing. This is also a foreshadowing of Mango's death. Mia senses that there's something wrong but moves on to other things without taking any action.



There's another important look at the family dynamic on Thanksgiving. Mia's event with the other synesthetes is coming up and Zack refers to it as a "freak show." Again, this seems to be an indication that Zack is jealous of Mia's attention. Then Beth shows an uncharacteristic level of support, which gets their father's attention. This is one of several examples of the coming-of-age theme seen in this story.

Mia feels very much at home with the group of synesthetes gathered for Jerry's event. This sense of belonging is understandable because Mia has spent most of her life hiding this part of herself. Here, she and others can talk openly about their synesthesia with people who truly understand. This longing for acceptance is a major part of Mia's character and gives the reader an important look at who she really is.

The time at Jerry's event is the only time Adam is seen in the story, though he will communicate with Mia one more time via email. He seems extremely pushy, asking her for a kiss when they've only known each other a few hours. Mia's mother is upset that Mia is outside with Adam and rushes her away, which seems a reasonable action considering the circumstances. It seems that Mia, at this moment in her life, could be swayed by someone like Adam. The fact that she has a very limited contact with him before she learns more about his true character is probably a good thing for Mia.

Discussion Question 1

What happens to Mia when she undergoes acupuncture? Why does she go for a second session?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Mango's death and Mia's first reaction.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mia feel that she fits in with the group of synesthetes? Do you understand that feeling of belonging?

Vocabulary

pulsating, vestige, perceptive, captivated, tendrils, gestures, mutely, engrossed, babble, elite, mortified



Chapters 14 and 15

Summary

In Chapter 14, Mia stays in the helicopter for a long time, until her father urges her to go inside. She knows that she isn't seeing colors and that the ice hitting the helicopter is making gray blobs instead of colors. She believes that she has long everything that's important to her, meaning Mango and her colors. When she gets to her room, she changes into dry clothes and sees "a colorless Mango-shaped space" and Mango's favorite toy, a Tweety Bird. She begins to cry and wonders if Mango knew how much she loved him. She sleeps most of the day. Her mother wakes her when Adam calls but Mia refuses to talk to him.

Later, Zack asks Mia to come to Beth's room. He says they are going to hold a healing circle. It's Beth's idea to make them all feel better after losing Mango. Mia becomes angry. She says they didn't love Mango as much as she loved him, and that they don't have to deal with the guilt of knowing they killed him. Mia goes back to her room.

Later, Jenna calls. Mrs. Winchell says Mia should tell Jenna what happened. When Mia gets on the phone, Jenna is angry that Mia hasn't come to her party. She doesn't give Mia a chance to explain before hanging up on her. Mia gives in when her mother insists she eat something. As she's waiting for food, she realizes that she doesn't have her grandfather's soul in her cat and she no longer sees colors. She feels empty and believes this is how other people feel all the time.

Mia realizes Mango's food bowl is missing and she grows angry. She learns that Mango's body is in the shed and rushes out there. She can't bring herself to look at him but cries out that she's sorry. Mia's mother says that Mango has always been sick and that Mia gave him a wonderful life. When she learns Mia is no longer seeing colors, she reminds Mia that Jerry said trauma can sometimes affect the colors. Mia says she doesn't deserve to have them back.

Mia's father makes her eat again and says they are having a memorial service for Mango when they bury him. Mia says she won't go. Zack wakes her but Mia insists she won't go to the service. She watches from her window as her father struggles to dig a grave, then rushes out with Mango's Tweety Bird. Mia's father says he'll put the toy in the little box that is Mango's casket.

Mia later puts on heavy clothes and runs to the cemetery where she realizes that she has never really mourned her grandfather's death because she always felt she had a piece of his soul with her. She's still there when Jenna, Molly, and Kimberly arrive. Jenna says Mrs. Winchell told them where they'd likely find Mia. Jenna says she's sorry she didn't give Mia a chance to tell her about Mango. Mia asks about the party and Jenna says she missed Mia. They say Roger asked about Mia.



They talk for a few more minutes and Mia says she has to go. Jenna says it's okay for Mia to be sad but Mia says Jenna can't possibly understand what she's feeling. Jenna is angry but Mia says that Jenna isn't responsible for her mother's death like Mia was responsible for Mango's death.

In Chapter 15, Mrs. Winchell calls a family meeting and insists that everyone gather for it. Mr. Winchell says that Mango has always been sick and that his death is no one's fault. Mia insists that she's to blame but Zack says that he went outside and he believes Mango might have gone out then. Mia insists that she is to blame, pointing out that she might have missed some of Mango's pills. Mr. Winchell speaks up, saying that he noticed Mango wasn't eating much and knew that was a sign of a problem, but that he didn't do anything about it. He urges everyone in the family to remember that they loved Mango and that he gave love in return. Mia continues to blame herself.

Mia doesn't go to school on Monday. She receives an email from Adam. He says he heard about her cat but that she should have attended the event anyway. Mia doesn't understand his attitude and is angry. She thinks that if she hadn't been sitting on the porch thinking about Adam and their kiss, Mango might still be alive.

Zack arrives home from school and says some girl asked if Mia really saw colors. Zack doesn't know the girl's name but says he told her that Mia's claim was real. Mia believes that people will stop "paying attention" to her now that she no longer sees colors.

Tuesday, Mia's parents make her go back to school. At the bus stop, Jenna cuts the friendship bracelet from Mia's wrist. The act is unexpected and Mia asks if Jenna is mad at her. Jenna gives Mia a pretty gold bracelet, saying it was her 14th birthday gift from her mother.

In gym, Mia takes a seat on the bleachers next to Roger. He asks why she didn't attend Jenna's party. She says her cat died and Roger immediately understands. He says he knows how she feels and Mia realizes that Roger probably does. Roger talks about his dog, Oscar. The family had Oscar even before Roger was born and he compares losing Oscar to losing a brother. Roger promises that it's going to get easier. Just then, a boy named Doug arrives and asks what color his name is. Mia tells him from memory without mentioning that she no longer sees colors. When he's gone, she asks Roger why he never asked her about the color of his name. Roger says he's colorblind. Mia laughs but assures Roger she isn't making fun of him. She says her colors are gone.

She plans to stay home the following weekend and Jerry calls to check up on her. He suggests some things she can do to bring the colors back but she decides she's going to leave it up to fate. Mia later finds the painting she did of her grandfather. His eyes aren't the way she painted them and she notices that Mango's paw prints go right off the top of the canvas. She imagines that it's as if they are headed toward heaven. Mia hangs the painting on her wall so that it's the first thing she sees when she wakes each morning.



Saturday morning, Mia hears the doorbell. Her mother says Billy Henkle and his sister and mother are downstairs. Mrs. Winchell says the girl attends Harrison Middle School and that's how they found the Winchell house. Mia recognizes Billy's sister. Her name is Amy and she is the girl who told Mia she might wind up in a special class. Billy is struggling in school and some of his teachers are talking about putting him into a special class. Mrs. Henkle refers to the condition as a "disease" but Zack jumps into the conversation. He says it's a gift.

Billy captures Mia's attention by asking what color his name is. Mia tells him, suddenly realizing that she's again seeing colors and shapes. Amy is nice to Mia as the family is leaving. Mrs. Winchell says Mia was able to help give Billy a head start that she didn't have.

Mrs. Winchell admits that she feels guilty for not having helped Mia more. She says Mia's grandmother talked about colors but Mrs. Winchell dismissed it, even when she once saw Mia and her grandmother dancing and talking about the colors of the music. Mia wonders what her life would have been like if her grandmother had lived. She realizes her grandfather probably knew about it, too.

Later, Mrs. Winchell announces that the family will be joining the Roth's that evening for their first night of Hanukkah. After the candles are lit, Mia sees Zack sneaking from the room. He quickly reappears and insists that Mia follow him. In another room, they discover that the Roth's cat has a litter of kittens. One of them looks very much like Mango. Mr. Roth says they'll be looking for homes for the kittens once they're weaned. Zack says they want one but Mia says they don't. After Mr. Roth leaves the room, Zack says that the kitten is Mango's son or daughter, and that they have to take it. Mia points out that if that one kitten is Mango's, they all are, and she knows that Zack is working on a plan to get their parents to take all the kittens.

Mia goes to the kitten and touches it lightly. She's surprised when it "lets out a surprisingly strong mustard colored meow" before settling back down. Mia can't imagine that anyone has heard of a cat named Mustard.

That night, Mia's father gives her Mango's favorite blanket. She is surprised but he says he thought she might want it. When she goes to sleep, she dreams of being at the county fair with Zack and Beth. Beth is stuck at the top of the Ferris Wheel and she and Zack are eating hot dogs with mustard. When Mia wakes, she "can still taste the mustard on my tongue." She says she knows that that means.

Analysis

Mia learns an important lesson in how Roger and Adam react to the news that Mango died. Adam is pretty callous in his response, saying that he doesn't like cats and that Mia should have come to the event anyway. He doesn't at all understand the attitude Mia has about her beloved pet. Roger, on the other hand, has experienced this kind of



loss first hand. He sympathizes with Mia and she realizes that he does understand what she's going through, perhaps more than anyone else.

Mia thinks she is the only one who feels guilty about Mango's death. She is surprised to learn that Zack thinks he might have been the one who let Mango outside and her father thinks he should have paid attention to the fact that Mango wasn't eating right. While others may have played a role, there's no doubt that Mia had been too distracted recently to take good care of Mango, especially since Mango had health problems. It's left to the reader to decide whether Mia is really responsible or if she is feeling guilty for no reason. This is yet another new level of the relationship between Mia and Mango, which is one of the book's themes.

The friendship between Mia and Jenna is an important theme in the story and it's seen again in this section. Jenna snips off Mia's friendship bracelet without first explaining why and Mia is caught off guard. She asks if Jenna is mad at her again and seems to fully expect Jenna to say she doesn't want to be friends anymore. She's surprised when Jenna offers up a new friendship bracelet, which was her mother's birthday present on this year. The letter that accompanied the gift said the girls were probably needing new friendship bracelets by this point. Jenna's mother seems to have recognized that the friendship between Jenna and Mia would survive the test of time. The new friendship bracelets are symbols of the new, more mature friendship, between the girls.

The kittens are symbols that life continues and of hope in the future. Mango's death leaves a gaping hole in Mia's life and she learns who are true friends are by the people who are kind during her grief. The fact that Mia is likely to have a new kitten to care for means she'll have a new relationship with new experiences, both important to Mia.

Discussion Question 1

What is the dream Mia has at the end of the book? What do you think it means that she can still taste the mustard from her dream?

Discussion Question 2

Describe what happens when Billy and his family arrive at the Winchell's house. What do you think might happen to Billy now?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the reactions of Mia and each member of her family to Mango's death.

Vocabulary

taunt, rifling, vigorously, confirmation, incredulously, deflated, blobs, accompany, hurl, muffled, numbly, misconceptions, appropriate, obnoxious, gape, stricken, expression, impatiently, gape, hurtful, ignored



Characters

Mia Winchell

Mia is an eighth grader during this story and has lived most of her life with a secret. When she was in the third grade, she discovered that other people didn't see the colors and shapes that she sees when she hears and sees sounds, letters, and numbers. When she talks about the colors, someone in the class calls her a freak and she soon realizes that she sees something that other people don't see. She hides her secret but knows that her life would be empty without this. An important part of Mia's character is that she keeps this a secret. She is only 8 years old when she makes this discovery and not many children that young would be able to live up to the decision to never talk about something that's so important in her life.

Another important part of Mia's character is her devotion to her best friend, Jenna. Mia was a constant presence in Jenna's life when Jenna's mother died at a very young age. Mia is conscious of Jenna's thoughts and attitudes with regard to her mother. Mia is aware that Jenna's mother left gifts for Jenna for each birthday over the coming years, and she also knows that there will come a day when there won't be any more gifts. She knows that first birthday without a gift from her mother will be extremely sad for Jenna. This exhibits a level of compassion that isn't always seen in children this young, meaning Mia is, in many ways, mature for her age.

One of the most important aspects of Mia's character is her attitude toward the colors and shapes. She loves music because of the colors and shapes prompted by the musical sounds. She loves art because it's a way for her to express herself. After she is diagnosed with synesthesia, Mia has to consider that she might find a way to live without the colors. She decides that the positive aspects of the colors far outweigh the difficulties. When Mango dies, Mia is heartbroken and the colors come to an abrupt end. She feels so guilty about Mango's death that she feels she doesn't deserve to have the colors in her life. The colors return when she begins talking with a young boy who also has synesthesia. Mia is relieved to have the colors back and she discovers that she's not upset about being different.

Jenna Davis

Jenna is Mia's best friend and has been since the girls were only about 5 years old. She is outgoing and happy but deals with the sadness left behind by her mother's death. Jenna is devoted to Mia and is terribly worried when Mia has a series of appointments with doctors. Mia doesn't want to tell Jenna about her synesthesia because it has become second nature to keep it secret from everyone. When Jenna asks Mia about the appointments, Mia promises to tell her in a few days. Jenna immediately jumps to the conclusion that Jenna might be very sick. Few youngsters would jump that that



conclusion but the death of Jenna's mother has given Jenna a different perspective than most young children.

Jenna's home life is vastly different from Mia's as well. Jenna is the only child and she lives with her father. When her father begins to date, Jenna is upset and she really hates a woman named Rebecca who is dating her father about the time Mia's secret comes out.

When Jenna learns that Mia has kept a secret from her for years, she is furious. In Jenna's mind, Mia didn't trust her enough to share the information. Jenna's immediate reaction is to tell some of their friends, which means the information spreads immediately through the school. Jenna goes through a rough time in the weeks and months after learning Mia's secret. It takes time for her to come to terms with the new level of friendship she has with Mia but Jenna does get there and the girls emerge from this crisis with their friendship intact.

Roger

Roger is a boy in Mia's grade at school. The first time is seen in the story, he and his parents are putting their dog, Oscar, to sleep at the vet's office. He is very upset and cries during and after Oscar's death. Later, Roger reveals that he is a compassionate youngster. When Mango dies, Roger expresses heartfelt sympathy. Roger is also the only person in Mia's class who doesn't ask Mia what color their name is. Mia asks him one day about that and Roger reveals that he is colorblind. While Mia's world is filled with color, Roger's world is devoid.

Beth

Beth is Mia's older sister. She is 16 and is undergoing many changes herself as Mia faces the crisis of telling everyone about the synesthesia. Beth is not always nice to Mia and Mia is surprised when there are a few times of amity with Beth. Beth is interested in alternative ways of thinking, including superstitions and the use of candles and herbs.

Zack

Zack is Mia's younger brother. He is 11 at the time of this story. He and Mia often argue. He is very superstitious, which puzzles Mia. She doesn't understand him and they often call each other names, at least partly because they don't understand each other. When someone refers to Mia's condition as a handicap, Zack surprises Mia by quickly pointing out that it's a gift.



Mrs. Winchell

Mia's mother is a former science teacher. She is serious and meticulous. She cleans often and hates it when other members of the family make a mess. After it's clear that Mia has synesthesia and that she's not making up a story about it, Mrs. Winchell remembers hearing Mia's grandmother talk about the colors as she danced to music. With that, Mrs. Winchell feels guilty that she didn't pay more attention and that she wasn't more open to the idea that Mia might be experiencing colors when she first made the claim in third grade. She is a positive character who wants what's best for others.

Mr. Winchell

Mr. Winchell is somewhat scattered, especially compared to his wife. He works with farmers and reaches the farms with a helicopter. He is constantly working on the family's home, which is a hodgepodge of random walls, rooms, and hallways built by Mr. Winchell and his father without any real plan. He wants what's best for his family and is immediately ready to help Mia when she reveals her secret.

Mia's Grandfather

Mia's grandfather died prior to the beginning of this book, but he remains an important part of Mia's life long after his death. He was a kind man and Mia believes a part of his soul returned to her in the form of Mango as a means of keeping her grandfather close to her.

Adam

Adam is one of Dr. Jerry Weiss's patients who has synesthesia. He and Mia meet when Mia becomes active on a synesthesia website. He is a little older than Mia and it initially seems that she might have a lot in common with him because they both have the same condition. Mia looks forward to meeting him but is surprised when he almost immediately asks if he can kiss her. He is a jerk when he contacts her after Mango dies, dismissing her pain at the loss of a mere cat.

Dr. Jerry Weiss

Jerry is a neurologist who accepts Mia as a patient. He is young and handsome, and has spent his life studying synesthesia. He helps Mia realize that she's not alone because others also have her condition. He helps her connect with others who deal with synesthesia and who help her discover new aspects of her condition. He's also the first who wants to help Mia cope rather than saying that there has to be a way to rid her of the colors.



Billy Henkle

Billy is 5 years old when Mia meets him at the grocery store. She thinks he's a cute little boy and strikes up a conversation with him. He describes the color of Mia's name. This is the first time Mia realizes that she might not be the only person who sees the colors. Later, Billy's mother come to Mia for advice and Billy probably gets off to a better start than Mia because of that.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Mango Shaped Space

When Mia undergoes acupuncture, she sees auras surrounding every living thing, including Mango. When Mango moves away, there is basically an outline of the cat that remains in Mia's vision for a brief time. When Mango dies, Mia temporarily loses all her colors, meaning she can't see any impressions left by Mango. She later recovers her colors. Though she can no longer see his impression, there is a Mango-shaped space left vacant by his absence. This represents the loss of Mango and the fact that Mia is finally dealing with the loss of her grandfather.

Mango

Mango is a cat that belongs to Mia. Mia believes that a small piece of her grandfather's soul lives on in Mango, meaning she still has her grandfather with her even though he died. She found Mango near her grandfather's grave on the day of his funeral. Mango was ill from the start and died only a little more than a year later. Mia named him Mango because that's the color she saw when he made noises. Mango's death affects her on a deep level because it's sort of like losing her grandfather again, and because Mia blames herself for not taking good care of Mango.

Mango's Kittens

The Roths live in Mia's neighborhood and they have a litter of kittens as the book comes to a close. One of the kittens looks very much like Mango and Zack immediately makes it clear he's going to convince their parents to let them have one or all of the kittens. The kitten that looks like Mango makes sounds the color of mustard and Mia laughs, knowing that Mustard is a strange name for a kitten. The kittens represent hope and the idea that Mia will emerge from her most recent tragedy as a stronger person.

Synesthesia

This is the condition Mia has. She believes she's the only one with the condition but learns that there are other people who also have it, and she finds a level of comfort in support in that. Synesthesia is basically a condition in which two or more of a person's senses merge in a specific situation. For example, Mia sees colors and shapes when she hears sounds. Some with this condition also taste specific things when they hear or see something. For some, there is a combination of associations. The condition is real and the author includes information, including websites associated with the disorder, at the end of the book.



Acupuncture

Acupuncture is an alternative medicine process that uses needles to realign the chi, prompting the body to heal itself more quickly than it would otherwise have done. Roger is undergoing acupuncture because of a sprained ankle. Mia learns that someone with synesthesia describes an incredible experience following acupuncture and Mia spends her own money to have two sessions. They do create incredible colors and she is even able to see pheromones wafting off people after her second session.

The Painting of Mia's Grandfather

Mia paints a portrait of her grandfather as a gift to him on the first anniversary of his death. She finds the painting again after Mango's death and is surprised to find that the eyes on the painting have changed.

The Friendship Bracelets

Mia and Jenna wear friendship bracelets that they made years earlier. The bracelets are frayed and in poor condition, but the girls never take them off. Jenna's fourteenth birthday present from her mother is a new set of bracelets and a letter saying the old ones must need replacing by now. The bracelets represent a commitment Mia and Jenna have made to be friends forever, and the new bracelets are an indication that their friendship has endured its first real test.

Math

Math is difficult for Mia because she has trouble getting past the colors she sees to solve the actual math problems. When she becomes certain she's going to fail pre-algebra, she is forced to talk to her parents about her issues, which leads to her discovery that she has synesthesia.

Oscar

Oscar is a dog that belonged to Roger and his family. Roger and his family love the dog deeply and Roger says they'd had the dog since before he was born. Early in the story, Roger is in the vet's office with his family and Oscar, and it's during this visit that Oscar is put to sleep. Roger's love for Oscar makes him more compassionate when Mango dies, and he is able to give Mia advice about dealing with the process of grieving over Mango's death.

The Tweety Bird Toy

This is Mango's favorite toy and the item Mia gives to her father to bury with Mango's body.



Settings

Harrison Middle School

This is where Mia attends classes. The school seems fairly typical. There are only a few descriptions of specific places within the school, including the cafeteria. That becomes an important setting because of events that take place there. This is where Mia sits each day with Jenna and a few other friends. It's also where other students begin pestering Mia to tell them the color of their names. The cafeteria is where Mia sits with Roger and the other students from her history group one day to work on their project.

Mia's House

Mia's house is a hodgepodge of rooms, walls, and hallways. Her father and grandfather built the house without coming to any agreement on a plan for the building. The result is that they each built what they wanted and "met in the middle." Mia has discovered random passages that lead to nowhere and one that allows her to overhear what's going on in Beth's room. The house is strange but provides a place of safety for Mia and her family. Mia hides in her room for days after Mango's death.

The Cemetery

This is where Mia's grandfather and Jenna's mother are buried. The cemetery is typical and believable. Mia and Jenna each spend some time there, visiting the graves of their loved ones. Jenna and her father visit weekly. Mia takes a painting as a gift to her grandfather on the anniversary of his death. A sudden rainstorm catches her unaware and she rushes home, leaving the painting behind. She returns for it after the rain stops.

The Therapist's Office

Mia is worried about her visit with the therapist and the appearance of the office catches her off guard. The waiting room is all white and she sinks into the chairs. She has a somewhat irrational thought upon her arrival, that she's glad she doesn't have a glass of grape juice. The therapist's office is described only briefly. There is a couch where Mia sits and a bowl of jelly beans on the desk. The office appears in the story only one time.

Jenna's House

Jenna's house is near Mia's house but it is smaller than Mia's. Jenna lives there with her father. Jenna's house is the setting for Jenna's birthday party. The house seems typical of the time and place.



Themes and Motifs

Mia's Relationship with Mango

Mia has a cat named Mango the Magnificent. She first saw Mango when she was at her grandfather's funeral and from that first moment, she believed she could see her grandfather's eyes looking at her from Mango. Mia believes that her grandfather's soul has splintered into several pieces and that a part of him now resides in Mango. This is the main reason that Mia has such a close relationship with Mango and it explains why Mia's grief over Mango's death is so profound. Mia admits that she never really grieved over her grandfather because she always felt she had a piece of him with her in the form of Mango.

Mia had to beg her parents to allow Mango inside. Prior to this, there was a strict rule of no pets inside the house. Once he's part of the family, Mia spends a great deal of time with him. From the beginning, Mango's health was poor. He had a tear in one of his lungs and the result was a wheeze whenever he breathed. These wheezes had the color of a mango, which is how Mia chose his name. Mango became a beloved part of the family even though Mia felt she had a closer relationship to him than everyone else. This may have been true, but the limited perspective means the reader will never know how Zack and the other family members really felt about Mango compared to how Mia felt. There's no doubt that Zack was hurt when Mango died and that he felt that it might have been his fault. This guilt and his reaction when they discover that Mango has fathered some kittens indicate that Zack also loved Mango.

Mango sleeps with Mia and she finds comfort in Mango's presence. After Mia has the acupuncture session, she sees auras around all living things, including Mango. She's surprised to discover that she continues to see Mango's aura after she has stopped seeing the auras of everyone else. The fact that she can follow the trail of an aura is how she discovers Mango is outside during the storm. It's left to the reader to decide why Mia continues to see Mango's aura longer than any other.

An important aspect of this theme is seen in Mia's lack of attention to Mango during the weeks after learning that her condition has a name and that she's not the only one with synesthesia. Though she still spends some time with Mango, she pays him less attention as she is caught up in other aspects of her life. This seems a typical reaction to what's going on in Mia's life, but it makes her feel doubly guilty after Mango's death. It takes Mango's death to make Mia realize that she has to pay attention to what's important. Mango's death is also the event that makes Mia reevaluate her new attraction to Adam and to realize that Roger is a very nice boy who is genuinely sympathetic over Mango's death.

A final example of this theme is seen when Mia and Zack learn that Mango is the father of a litter of kittens. One kitten looks very much like Mango and both Mia and Zack are immediately drawn to the kitten.



Accepting Differences

Mia sees the world differently than almost everyone she knows, and that greatly impacts her character. When she is in third grade, Mia discovers this difference when someone says the word “freak” as she's explaining about her colors. She doesn't want to be anything other than normal and decides to hide this aspect of herself. She successfully hides it for 5 years. During that time, the colors continue to be a very important part of her life but she doesn't share this with anyone. This seems extreme but people with differences often go out of their way to hide those differences so they don't have to deal with others judging them.

An important part of this theme is seen when Mia first gets the synesthesia diagnosis. Her mother clearly wants to eliminate the colors from Mia's life so that she can do well in school and can function in a normal society. Dr. Jerry Weiss, the neurologist who makes the diagnosis, realizes from experience that Mia might not want the same thing. He asks what she wants and Mia admits that she isn't certain that she would want to eliminate the colors, even if there was a way to do that.

Another important part of the theme is seen when Mia attends the event hosted by Jerry. There are several people who attend and all live with various stages and states of synesthesia. Mia is enthralled as she watches the others talk about their personal experiences. Though the exact nature of the synesthesia varies from one person to the next, the fact that they are all synesthetes makes Mia feel that she's finally found somewhere she belongs and can be herself. This is not an uncommon feeling for people who have differences. It's human nature to enjoy being with like-minded people. People like to have the opportunity to talk to others who can understand their experiences.

When most of her classmates learn about Mia's situation, they are curious. They want to know about the colors and many ask Mia to describe the colors of their names. Mia says that she would almost enjoy all this attention if it didn't resemble a circus sideshow. One girl named Amy makes fun of Mia and says she might wind up in a special class, indicating she views the synesthesia as a learning disability. Later, the reader learns that this girl is Billy's older sister and that some of his teachers want to put Billy in a special class. This shows that Billy is also dealing with a lack of understanding about his synesthesia and that Amy has suddenly learned, first-hand, that it's important to accept others who are different.

A final example is seen in the final scene between Mia and Roger. She asks why he has never asked her to describe the color of his name. Roger says that he's colorblind and Mia immediately laughs. She isn't laughing at Roger because he's colorblind, but because they are exact opposites in this respect. However, Roger jumps to the conclusion that Mia is making fun of him for being colorblind. This indicates that Roger has faced difficulties as well.



Coming of Age

Mia seems very mature from the beginning of the book and one major example of that maturity is seen in her ability to hide her synesthesia. Mia has always dealt with the colors and she is in third grade before she discovers that other people don't see the colors. From that point, she hides her secret for 5 years. That's a very long time in the life of a child but Mia sticks with her determination to keep the secret until her grades make it necessary for her to seek her parents' help. The fact that Mia seeks out her parents for help when she can no longer handle the situation is yet another sign of her emerging maturity. She tells them honestly about seeing the colors. It's significant that her parents question her but don't really doubt her story. That's a sign that Mia has acted responsibly in the past, thereby earning her parents' trust.

While this shows a level of maturity, Mia is not as mature and responsible in all aspects of her life. For example, she is responsible for Mango's care and is supposed to give him a pill each night. She soon becomes distracted and sometimes forgets or can't remember if she gave him the pill. This shows an incredible level of irresponsibility that Mia later realizes may have contributed to Mango's death. The fact that she acknowledges her role in Mango's death means that she's mature enough to accept responsibility for the mistake. While that doesn't bring Mango back, it does indicate that she's learned from the mistake, which is another sign of her maturity.

After Mango's death, Mia is heartbroken and she doesn't attend Jerry's synesthesia event. Before this, she had been very interested in Adam and had even considered whether she would want him as a boyfriend. Mia didn't see Adam for what he really was until she received his reaction to Mango's death. He shows his own selfishness and immaturity when he doesn't demonstrate any real sympathy for Mia's loss. With that, Mia fully sees that selfishness for the first time and knows that she won't be romantically interested in Adam after that point. Roger is a stark contrast to Adam with regard to maturity. He is focused on making a good grade on his history project and shows appropriate sympathy for Mia, indicating that he is mature enough to think about others before himself.

Beth is another example of this theme. Beth is Mia's older sister and they were close when they were younger. However, Beth is now 16 and she is often bossy and intolerant of Mia. She seems to have matured some over the summer and at one point she shows a high level of support for Mia's synesthesia. That kind of support shows that Beth is growing up and is realizing that being tolerant is necessary.

Mia's Friendship with Jenna

Mia and Jenna have been friends since they were 5 and they are very close. Their friendship bracelets are an important symbol in the book and are evidence that the girls are devoted to each other on a deep level. They know a lot about each other and have been there through serious situations, including the death of Jenna's mother and the death of Mia's grandfather. These trials have undoubtedly made the girls even closer



than they otherwise would be. The friendship is tested, however, when Mia misses a couple of days of school to see doctors. Mia doesn't tell Jenna the details immediately. Jenna's mother died, meaning Jenna is more aware of death than most girls of her age. When Mia has to attend doctor's appointments, Jenna immediately assumes the worst and she worries a great deal. When Mia finally tells Jenna everything about the colors, Jenna is furious for two reasons.

One of those is that Jenna has worried about Mia, fearing that she might be seriously ill and that Jenna might lose another important person in her life. Mia doesn't even consider that Jenna might feel that way, which is an indication that Mia is lacking a level of maturity that Jenna has because of her mother's death. This maturity is discussed further in another of the book's themes, Coming of Age.

The other reason Jenna is angry is that she feels Mia has left her out of an important aspect of her life. Jenna says that she can't believe Mia kept something so important a secret. She likely understands why Mia didn't tell other people, but doesn't understand why Mia would keep the information secret from Jenna. Jenna says that she doesn't have any secrets from Mia and this secret hurts her feelings. Jenna goes so far as to say that Mia might not know what true friendship is. This hurts Mia though she understands the basis for Jenna's statement.

The friendship bracelets are an important part of the relationship between Mia and Jenna. They wear rope friendship bracelets that they've had since before Jenna's mother died. Neither girl takes off the bracelets, even though Mia's mother has apparently pointed out that it's frayed and smelly. Jenna's mother has left gifts for Jenna's birthdays and Mia's mother sends them to Jenna each year. On Jenna's 14th birthday, she gets a new set of friendship bracelets from her mother. Mia and Jenna have argued and cried over the weeks leading up to Jenna's birthday but it never occurs to Jenna that Mia wouldn't still be her best friend. Jenna unceremoniously snips the rope bracelet from Mia's wrist and for a moment Mia wonders if it means Jenna is mad at her again. When Mia hands over the new bracelet – a pretty chain – Mia accepts without a second thought, indicating that both girls believe their friendship is intact.

Seeking New Experiences

Mia has hidden her colors most of her life for fear that people would make fun of her. She fears that people will think she's a freak if she reveals that she sees colors whenever she hears a sound. Mia feels completed with the colors and doesn't know how she would live her life without them. When Dr. Jerry Weiss offers up the diagnosis, Mia's mother immediately wants to know if there's a way to make the colors go away so that Mia can live a normal life. Jerry realizes that Mia might not want this new experience. In fact, Mia has that experience after Mango's death when she loses the colors for a short time. She feels empty because of Mango's death but also because of the lack of color. She says she can't imagine that people live with that lack of color all the time.



Once Mia has a diagnosis and begins to learn about the condition, she discovers that some people do things to make their synesthesia more intense. Adam says he once drank a lot of alcohol to see what it would do to the colors, but that he was disappointed. When Mia begins reading online, she learns that one synesthete talks about the way colors look when viewed through the steam of a hot bath. Mia immediately sets out to try it. She's amazed by the effect and remains in the tub until the water is cold. She wants to return to the experience as often as possible but doesn't have a lot of opportunities.

Mia also learns that one synesthete experienced an intense reaction to acupuncture. Mia manages to get an appointment with an acupuncturist even though she has to pay for it with her own allowance money and lie to her parents about what she's doing when she has an appointment. She is so enthralled by the experience that she counts the hours until her next appointment. She tries to get Roger to move their appointments up so that she doesn't have to wait so long for the experience. In some ways, Mia is like a drug addict waiting for her next opportunity to get high during this time.

Another example of this theme is seen when Mia wants to spend time with other synesthetes. She believes that the shared experience of synesthesia makes them compatible with her. She is drawn to Adam because of this connection but eventually realizes that there are other things more important in a person than the ability to see colors. Though Mia would probably enjoy the opportunity to spend time with others who see colors, she learns that there are things more important than this experience.

To a lesser degree, the other students in Mia's school are examples of this theme. When they learn that Mia sees colors when she hears sounds, almost everyone in school asks Mia to describe the color of their names. Mia says she almost enjoys the attention even though it feels like the other kids think she's strange. The fact that other students want to know what their name looks like in Mia's mind indicates that they are interested in a new experience. It seems likely that most people would choose to experience the colors, though only for a short time.

Styles

Point of View

The story is written in first person from Mia's perspective. The limited perspective means the reader doesn't know anything until Mia does. For example, Mia blames herself for Mango's death and she believes that there's no explanation other than the possibility that she left Mango outside the previous evening. Other members of the family are also suffering, each thinking they might have been responsible for Mango's death, but Mia doesn't know this until she reveals her own guilt. It's only then that she learns that Zack might have let Mango outside and that her father realized Mango wasn't eating but felt he didn't pay enough attention to that.

An important part of the perspective is seen in Mia's decision to keep her synesthesia secret from everyone, including Jenna. Mia believes that no one else sees the colors and shapes, and that no one else will believe her story. In her mind, she believes she's keeping the information secret because she doesn't want to be labeled as a freak. She doesn't believe that anyone can understand, including Jenna. From Jenna's perspective, Mia has kept a secret because she didn't trust Jenna to accept. Jenna feels this is a clear violation of their friendship and she feels betrayed.

Mia seems to be a reliable character, making her perspective believable and appropriate. The reader sees Mia's thoughts and ideas, even when she doesn't express them to others. She seems to give all her thoughts honestly.

One important aspect of the perspective is seen when Mia goes through a period of being easily distracted. She talks to Roger on the phone and agrees to meet him to work on their history project. The reader hears the entire conversation and sees Mia hang up the phone, but Mia later doesn't remember any of it. This indicates something more than the limited perspective, but the majority of the perspective remains fully limited.

Language and Meaning

The book is written in modern-day English. The modern English reader with an average vocabulary will likely understand the entire book and will find few unfamiliar words and phrases. One glaring exception is the word synesthesia. This term is introduced by Dr. Jerry Weiss, who diagnoses Mia as having this condition. The word is real and is used in psychology and neuroscience as a way to describe the situation when a person has overlapping sense experiences. For example, Mia sees colors and shapes when she hears sounds. Other people describe other levels of synesthesia, including taste. The ideas and terms used in connection with Mia's condition are fully described so that readers will understand the concepts being discussed.



The book is divided into dialogue and narrative. The narrative is used to express Mia's thoughts and events that happen to her. In some cases, the narrative provides background in the form of memories, especially in the case of Mia's grandfather. The dialogue generally includes Mia but some conversations are held while Mia listens. Because of the limited perspective, there are no conversations revealed outside Mia's hearing. This dialogue is clearly meant to mimic the conversations of modern-day Americans. The conversations seem realistic and believable.

There are some literary devices seen in the book, such as foreshadowing. For example, the prologue opens with Mia remembering a scene from third grade in which she had first realized that other people didn't see the colors she saw. The prologue ends with Mia realizing that "everything is about to change" and that she can't do anything to stop the changes that are coming.

Structure

The book is divided into 15 chapters and a prologue. The lengths vary slightly and chapters break in appropriate places. The chapters are titled by number only. There are no titles to indicate what is coming in that chapter. The Prologue is set in the current time, when Mia is 13 years old, but she is recalling a memory of an event that happened during her third grade year. In the prologue, the reader learns a very basic version of Mia's synesthesia, though she doesn't yet have a name for it. There is more information about that condition revealed in upcoming chapters, but this gives the reader the first look that there's something wrong. The reader also learns in the prologue that Mia has kept the condition a secret from everyone because she believes it will make her a "freak."

The remainder of the book is presented in chronological order. In the first lines of the first chapter, the reader is introduced to Jenna Davis, Mia's best friend. Jenna is a major character in the book and it's appropriate that she's the first character introduced. The reader also gets a first look at Mia's family and learns some basic information about Mia. Another early introduction is Mango the Magnificent, Mia's cat. Over the course of the next chapters, Mia's synesthesia becomes common knowledge and she deals with that fallout, then begins to experiment with the synesthesia to the point of losing touch with those most important to her, including Mango.

In Chapter 14, Mango dies and Mia begins to deal with the grief and the guilt. In the final chapter, Mia begins the healing process when she helps another young synesthete and when she realizes that her friendship with Jenna has survived the recent trials.

The structure is straightforward in the chronological presentation. There are several common literary devices used and these are appropriate to the story and the intended audience.



Quotes

The color of the leaf is exactly the same color as Jenna's name – a bright shimmering shade of green with some yellow highlights.”

-- Mia (chapter 1 paragraph 7)

Importance: This is the first time Mia has described the color of a name and it's the reader's first look at this aspect of Mia's synesthesia. Mia goes on to say that she likes the color of Jenna's name and that might have had something to do with the fact that they became friends so quickly.

Part of his soul is right next to me, stored safe and sound inside Mango. I knew this as soon as I saw the little kitten sitting by Grandpa's grave that day, looking up at me with Grandpa's eyes.”

-- Mia (chapter 2 paragraph 21)

Importance: Mia is explaining how and why she believes that a portion of her grandfather's soul lives inside Mango. This explains both Mia's attachment to Mango and the fact that she grieves so deeply when Mango dies.

I hurry back to the house thinking of all the things we keep from other people. Even our best friends.”

-- Mia (chapter 3 paragraph 21)

Importance: Mia has just seen Jenna at the cemetery where Jenna is visiting her mother's grave. Jenna doesn't talk about how difficult these visits are for her but Mia knows. She seems to be making a comparison between Jenna's silent pain and Mia's secret about the colors.

I tried to, back in third grade. No one believed me, remember?”

-- Mia (chapter 4 paragraph 76)

Importance: Mia has just explained about seeing the colors and her mother asked why Mia hasn't told them before now. Mia says that she tried but reminds them that no one believed her. This is important because that event in third grade was a defining moment for Mia, and was one that she couldn't escape until many years later.

I wouldn't talk so much if I were you,' a girl with long blond hair announces as she passes our table. 'They might stick you in a class for special kids.'”

-- Amy (chapter 6 paragraph 5)

Importance: Mia doesn't know this girl when the conversation takes place but she later learns that this girl is Billy Henkle's sister. The irony here is that Billy's teachers begin talking about putting Billy in a class for special students, which is why Billy's mother later finds Mia's family, asking for advice.



The initial theory was that if some people, like you, can see a color when they hear a sound, that must mean that the sound actually has color but that only a rare few people can see it. But we quickly found that in reality it doesn't happen that way.”

-- Dr. Jerry Weiss (chapter 7 paragraph 3)

Importance: This is the first time Mia and her mother are learning that synesthesia has been documented and studied, and that Mia isn't the only person who sees the world like this.

Maybe we should try to find a doctor who can clear this up faster.”

-- Mia's mother (chapter 8 paragraph 67)

Importance: Mia's mom is still looking at the synesthesia as something that can be cured at this point. She doesn't yet fully accept that this is a vital part of Mia's makeup and that Mia doesn't want the colors to go away. Mia is horrified that her mother would make this suggestion and she's frankly relieved later when Dr. Jerry Weiss says it isn't something that can be cured.

I suppose I could try to use the methods Samantha taught me, but that seems more trouble that it's worth. After all, I'm already prepared with the markers, and it hardly feels like cheating anymore.”

-- Mia (chapter 10 paragraph 122)

Importance: Mia is using colored markers to cheat on her math quiz, making rainbows of colors so that she doesn't have to memorize the formulas on the quiz. This is an example of Mia's changes as she becomes literally addicted to having new experiences with colors rather than focusing on the things that are important in her life.

The glow around Faith is ten times as vibrant as it was the first time, and the last vestige of guilt caused by lying to my parents leaves me. I'm sure they wouldn't deny me this experience if they knew about it.”

-- Mia (chapter 12 paragraph 1)

Importance: Mia has just undergone her second acupuncture session. She's lying to her parents about where she is because she's so intent on getting the next color experience that she's lost sight of what's important.

The only thing there is, is a Mango-shaped space.”

-- Mia (chapter 13 paragraph 63)

Importance: Mia has been to the acupuncturist for the second time by this point. She's been seeing auras around everyone but at this point, only Mango's aura remains visible to her. Mia wakes up to a thunderstorm and knows that Mango will be afraid, but she discovers that he's missing.

So now I'm no longer the girl who sees colors, and I'm no longer the girl whose grandfather's soul is in her cat. All I am is the girl who is no longer special in any way.



-- Mia (chapter 14 paragraph 50)

Importance: Mia has lost her colors after Mango's death and she's feeling completely lost. Part of it is that the colors are gone but a larger part is that she has never really grieved for her grandfather because she always felt she had a part of him with her in the form of Mango.

My sister doesn't have a disease. She has a gift.”

-- Zack (chapter 15 paragraph 106)

Importance: This is the first time Zack has stood up for Mia in Mia's presence. It shows that Zack accepts Mia for who she is and this is an important piece of information for Mia.