



BOOK CLUB & CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE

Earthlog,

My Not So Normal Sixth Grade Year

A discussion guide for identity, belonging, and finding your place in the universe.

COMPLETE GUIDE

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SECTION 1

Welcome & How to Use This Guide

About the Book

Earthlog, My Not So Normal Sixth Grade Year follows Jayden, a sixth grader who returns from summer break feeling awkward and out of place: his old friends have moved on, and he's not sure where he belongs anymore. When news breaks that aliens are integrating into human schools, everything changes, especially when one of them enrolls at Jayden's. Blending humor, heart, and a touch of science fiction, the story explores identity, belonging, and the courage to connect with someone different.

Why It Resonates with Middle Grade Readers

This book tackles common middle school experiences (friendship shifts, physical changes, social anxiety) through a story that's relatable, funny, and thoughtful. With an imaginative twist, it invites readers to consider empathy, curiosity, and what it really means to belong.

Using This Guide

This guide is designed for book clubs in a variety of settings: public libraries, classrooms, afterschool programs, or family reading groups. It offers flexible formats (one-, two-, and four-meeting options), general discussion questions, and a detailed chapter-by-chapter section. Activities such as Earthlog Journals or creative extensions can help deepen engagement and provide space for self-expression.

Facilitator Tips

- Create a welcoming space where every participant feels safe to share.
- Encourage connections between the book and students' own lives.
- Embrace moments of laughter and quiet reflection; this book allows for both.
- Adapt pacing and discussion depth to fit your group's needs.
- Consider rotating discussion leaders or using small group breakouts.

SECTION 2

Book Club Formats

Choose a structure based on your setting, time frame, and group readiness. Each format is built around meaningful discussion and flexible pacing.

Option A: One-Meeting Book Club (60–75 minutes)

- Participants read the full book ahead of time.
- Focus on major themes: identity, inclusion, friendship, and change.
- Use the core discussion questions, or select favorite chapters for deeper discussion.
- Optional: close with a creative writing prompt, “Write your own Earthlog.”

Option B: Two-Meeting Book Club (2 sessions, 45–60 minutes each)

- Meeting 1: Chapters 1–8
- Meeting 2: Chapters 9–17
- Optional: use Earthlog Journals between sessions for personal reflections.

Option C: Four-Meeting Book Club (4 sessions, 30–45 minutes each)

- Week 1: Chapters 1–4
- Week 2: Chapters 5–8
- Week 3: Chapters 9–13
- Week 4: Chapters 14–17
- Include discussion and creative activities as desired.

Earthlog Journals (Optional Activity)

Encourage participants to write short journal entries after each session, either from Jayden's perspective, Zin's, or their own. This builds empathy, reflection, and writing skills.

SECTION 3

Core Discussion Questions

These thirteen questions are the heart of the guide. They were originally developed for and featured through the Colorado State Library's Book Club Resource (see the appendix for details), and work well as a single wrap-up discussion or spread across sessions. Each includes a follow-up prompt or sentence starter to help a facilitator go deeper.

1. Jayden feels awkward and out of place when school starts. How do the changes he went through over the summer affect his friendships?
↳ *What's one time you felt unsure about how you looked or changed? How did others respond?*
2. Everyone at school is talking about the aliens. How do people react when something big or different happens? Why do you think that is?
↳ *When something new or different happens at my school, people usually...*
3. Jayden and Zin are both new in different ways. What do they learn from each other? How does their friendship change throughout the story?
↳ *What's something you've learned from a friend who was different from you?*
4. What does it mean to "fit in"? Which characters are trying to find where they belong? Did any part of that feel familiar to you?
↳ *I feel like I belong when...*
5. Have you ever felt like you were on the outside of a group? What helped you feel included, or what do you wish someone had done?
↳ *What could someone do today to help another kid feel welcome?*
6. Zin's way of talking and learning is different from Jayden's. What was most interesting or surprising about Zin's culture?
↳ *What's one thing you'd like to ask Zin about their home planet?*
7. Jayden doesn't always know how to speak up for others. What makes it hard to stand up for someone, and why can that be hard?
↳ *I feel brave when...*
8. The characters keep journals to help make sense of their feelings. If you wrote an "earthlog," what might you say in yours?
↳ *Try writing one paragraph as if you were Jayden or Zin.*
9. Why do you think the school dance and game night are important in the story? What do they teach about having fun and being part of a group?
↳ *My favorite way to connect with others is...*



10. How does Jayden change by the end of the book? What does “growing up” look like in this story?

↳ *What's something you've gotten better at since the beginning of this school year?*

11. Which part of the book made you laugh, feel something strong, or stay in your head afterward? Why do you think it stuck with you?

↳ *A part of the book I'll remember is... because...*

12. If you could add a new scene to the story, what would you include? What would happen?

↳ *Describe what Jayden and Zin might do in your new scene.*

13. What is the big message or feeling the book left you with? Did it make you think differently about being yourself or making friends?

↳ *This book made me think about... Bonus: what does this story teach us about curiosity and kindness?*



Sci-Fi, Humor, and Imagination

- If you were in the Welcome Club, what's one question you'd ask an alien exchange student?
- What's the first food you would introduce to an alien visitor? Why?
- Would you rather have lunch with Zin or play your favorite video game with them? Why?
- If you designed a human-alien game night, what game would you include?
- What's one Earth custom you think aliens would find confusing? What about one alien custom you'd want to try?
- If aliens visited your school tomorrow, what do you think would happen in the first 10 minutes?
- What part of the alien storyline felt the most real, or the most hilarious?

Creative Connection

- Write your own “Earthlog” entry from Jayden's or Zin's perspective. What's happening that day?
- Draw a map of your school, or an alien school. What's different? What's the same?
- Imagine Zin gave a speech at the next school assembly. What would they say about Earth?

APPENDIX

Original Colorado State Library Discussion Questions

This discussion guide is part of a physical book club set distributed through the Colorado State Library's Book Club Resource program. Colorado residents can request the set, which includes multiple copies of the book, through their local library.

Book Club Resource program: coloradovirtuallibrary.org/resource-sharing/co-book-clubs

Catalog record: csl.catalog.aspenca.info

The questions below are reproduced as originally submitted to the program, restyled here to match this guide's design. They are the same thirteen questions presented in Section 3, shown here for reference and citation.

Reader Questions (as submitted)

1. Jayden feels awkward and out of place when school starts. How do the changes he went through over the summer affect his friendships?
2. Everyone at school is talking about the aliens. How do people react when something big or different happens? Why do you think that is?
3. Jayden and Zin are both new in different ways. What do they learn from each other? How does their friendship change throughout the story?
4. What does it mean to “fit in”? Which characters are trying to find where they belong? Did any part of that feel familiar to you?
5. Have you ever felt like you were on the outside of a group? What helped you feel included, or what do you wish someone had done?
6. Zin's way of talking and learning is different from Jayden's. What was most interesting or surprising about Zin's culture?
7. Jayden doesn't always know how to speak up for others. What makes it hard to stand up for someone, and why can that be hard?
8. The characters keep journals to help make sense of their feelings. If you wrote an “earthlog,” what might you say in yours?
9. Why do you think the school dance and game night are important in the story? What do they teach about having fun and being part of a group?
10. How does Jayden change by the end of the book? What does “growing up” look like in this story?
11. Which part of the book made you laugh, feel something strong, or stay in your head afterward? Why do you think it stuck with you?
12. If you could add a new scene to the story, what would you include? What would happen?



13. What is the big message or feeling the book left you with? Did it make you think differently about being yourself or making friends?

SECTION 4

Chapter-by-Chapter Guide

This section includes a brief summary, key themes, and discussion questions for each of the 17 chapters. Use it to guide deep discussion or tailor your pacing across sessions.

Chapter 1: Crash-Landing at Frontier

Brief Summary

Jayden returns to school after summer break feeling awkward about his appearance. He's shocked when his old friends ignore him, making his first day feel like a crash-landing.

Key Themes: *Identity, Physical Change, Fear of Rejection*

Discussion Questions

- How does Jayden feel about the changes in his appearance over the summer?
↳ *What kinds of changes feel the most uncomfortable for people your age?*
- Why do you think Jayden's old friends reacted the way they did?
↳ *Have you ever seen someone be left out for a reason that seemed unfair?*
- Have you ever felt left out because of a change, physical or emotional? How did you handle it?
↳ *What advice would you give someone going through that now?*
- What would you have said or done if you were in Jayden's place?
↳ *Would it be easy or hard to speak up in that situation? Why?*
- Why do first impressions sometimes make or break friendships?
↳ *Can first impressions be changed over time? How?*

Chapter 2: The Big Five and Being Invisible

Brief Summary

Jayden observes the social structure of middle school and feels like an outsider. Between gym and lunch, he realizes how hard it is to find his place.

Key Themes: *Social Belonging, Cliques, Feeling Lost in the Crowd*

Discussion Questions

- Why does Jayden feel like he doesn't belong to any group?
↳ *What kinds of things help someone feel like they belong?*
- How does he react to being excluded or ignored in gym and at lunch?
↳ *What do his actions tell us about his confidence or mindset?*



- What does Jayden's description of each group tell us about middle school social dynamics?
↳ *How do labels or cliques shape school experiences?*
- What might help someone find belonging in a new place or situation?
↳ *Can you think of a time when someone helped you feel included?*
- Why is being 'different' sometimes treated like a bad thing in school?
↳ *How can we help shift that mindset in real life?*

Chapter 3: Aliens Among Us

Brief Summary

The school buzzes with rumors that aliens have arrived. Jayden finds himself caught between skepticism and wonder, and starts to hope for something different.

Key Themes: *Distraction, Imagination, Human Connection*

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think everyone got so excited about the alien rumors?
↳ *What kinds of rumors spread fastest at school, and why?*
- How does the alien news change the social atmosphere at school?
↳ *How do shared stories bring people together?*
- In what ways does this event make Jayden feel more connected, or still left out?
↳ *Does he feel part of the group or still on the outside looking in?*
- Why do big stories like aliens or celebrity gossip become so contagious?
↳ *What does this say about how we seek connection?*
- Do you think Jayden uses imagination to escape, or to connect?
↳ *What role can imagination play in helping us feel seen?*

Chapter 4: We're Not Alone

Brief Summary

It's official: aliens are real, and they're coming to school. The social order begins to shift, and for once, Jayden feels less alone in the chaos.

Key Themes: *Wonder, Unity, Shift in Perspective*

Discussion Questions

- How do the different school cliques react to the news of the aliens?
↳ *What surprises you about their reactions?*
- Why does Jayden feel less worried about fitting in during this chapter?
↳ *What changes for him emotionally?*



- What does Jayden mean when he says everyone was too focused on aliens to notice the usual middle school drama?
↳ Have you ever seen something big distract everyone from daily problems?
- What would you want to ask or share with the aliens if they visited your school?
↳ Would your questions be personal, funny, or serious?

Chapter 5: Integration Plans

Brief Summary

The government announces plans to integrate aliens into schools. Jayden reflects on what it means to be new and the role empathy can play.

Key Themes: *Fear of the Unknown, Power of Empathy*

Discussion Questions

- Why are some people nervous about aliens living on Earth?
↳ How do people usually react to big changes or unknowns?
- How is helping aliens adjust like welcoming a new student?
↳ What kinds of support do new kids need most?
- What does Jayden mean by “we’re all just trying to find a place where we fit in”?
↳ Can you relate to that feeling?
- What can we do to make others feel accepted in new situations?
↳ What’s something small that could make a big difference?

Chapter 6: Flying Solo

Brief Summary

Jayden considers joining the Interstellar Welcome Club but feels uncertain about putting himself out there. His decision marks a turning point in his self-confidence.

Key Themes: *Courage, Curiosity, Identity*

Discussion Questions

- Why does Jayden hesitate to join the Interstellar Welcome Club?
↳ What fears or doubts might be holding him back?
- What does he realize about himself by the end of the chapter?
↳ How does this moment show growth?
- How does the idea of being 'different, not wrong' help Jayden feel more confident?
↳ Have you ever had a moment where being different felt empowering?
- What can we learn from Jayden's decision to sign the club sheet?
↳ What would you have done in his place?

Chapter 7: The Welcome Club

Brief Summary

Jayden attends his first Welcome Club meeting, where he learns about alien etiquette and customs. For the first time in a while, he feels like he might be part of something.

Key Themes: *Belonging, Anticipation, Cross-Cultural Curiosity*

Discussion Questions

- What does Jayden learn about alien etiquette and customs?
 - ↳ *How do these differences challenge or interest him?*
- Why does Jayden feel hopeful about meeting someone new?
 - ↳ *What has changed in his attitude since the first chapter?*
- How does the club help Jayden feel more connected at school?
 - ↳ *Have you ever been part of a group that made you feel more included?*
- What do you think Ms. Holloway meant when she said the alien might be more like Jayden than he realizes?
 - ↳ *What do you think they might have in common?*

Chapter 8: First Contact

Brief Summary

Jayden meets Zin for the first time during an all-school assembly. Through a mix of awkwardness and curiosity, their first lunch together lays the groundwork for a new friendship.

Key Themes: *First Contact, Building Understanding*

Discussion Questions

- How does Zin feel during the assembly and lunch?
 - ↳ *What clues tell us how they're feeling?*
- Why does Jayden feel like he can relate to Zin?
 - ↳ *What experiences do they share despite being from different worlds?*
- What do we learn about Zin's home world and communication style?
 - ↳ *How does this compare to how humans communicate?*
- How does Zin use empathy to understand others?
 - ↳ *How might empathy work differently, or the same, across species?*

Chapter 9: Standing Up

Brief Summary

Jayden witnesses Zin being teased and feels unsure about whether to intervene. By the end, he finds the courage to stand up and take a risk for his new friend.

Key Themes: *Courage, Inclusion, Standing Up for Others*

Discussion Questions

- Why is Jayden hesitant at first when Zin is teased?
↳ *What do you think he's afraid of?*
- What changes when Jayden speaks up during gym class?
↳ *How does that moment shift his role at school?*
- What do Zin and Jayden teach each other about being different?
↳ *What does this say about how friendships can grow?*
- Why does standing up for others matter, even when it's scary?
↳ *Can small actions make a big impact?*

Chapter 10: Glow Stick

Brief Summary

Jayden freezes the first time Zin is teased, but later redeems himself. He reflects on what it means to be a true friend, and how speaking up can make a difference.

Key Themes: *Courage, Allyship, Power of Speaking Up*

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Jayden froze the first time Ryan teased Zin in the cafeteria?
↳ *Have you ever felt frozen in a tough situation?*
- How does Jayden feel after standing up for Zin during gym class? Why does that moment matter?
↳ *How can courage feel different before and after an event?*
- What does Zin mean when they say, 'Individuality strengthens our society'?
↳ *What are some ways you've seen that idea in your own life?*
- Why do some people react negatively to others who are different?
↳ *How can we change that in our communities?*
- What does this chapter teach us about what it means to be a true friend?
↳ *Can friendships grow stronger after tough moments?*

Chapter 11: Dodgeball Diplomacy

Brief Summary

During a tense dodgeball game, Jayden steps in to help Zin. Their teamwork begins to shift how other students see them, showing the power of small acts of allyship.

Key Themes: *Empathy, Courage, Power of Allyship*

Discussion Questions

- Why did Jayden decide to help Zin during dodgeball?



↳ *What made him act differently this time?*

- How do Zin's reactions during the game show they're learning to adapt?

↳ *What does this say about growth in unfamiliar situations?*

- What does it mean to be an ally to someone who feels different or excluded?

↳ *What are some everyday ways you can be an ally?*

- How did the other students' attitudes toward Zin change during the game?

↳ *Why do you think their opinions started to shift?*

- How do small acts of support create larger changes in group dynamics?

↳ *Have you ever seen one action make a big difference?*

Chapter 12: The Library of Light and Balance

Brief Summary

Jayden and Zin connect over their love of learning. Inside the library, Zin opens up about their home planet, and the two discover deeper common ground.

Key Themes: *Belonging, Identity, Connection Through Stories*

Discussion Questions

- How does Zin describe learning on their home planet?

↳ *What feels familiar or unfamiliar about their learning style?*

- What do Zin and Jayden have in common, even though they come from different worlds?

↳ *How do shared interests help form connections?*

- Why is it important to have someone who 'gets' you?

↳ *How does that change how you feel at school or home?*

- How do Zin's feelings about home and school show the importance of belonging?

↳ *Where do you feel the strongest sense of belonging?*

- What's the value of asking questions and being curious about others?

↳ *Can curiosity help build stronger relationships?*

Chapter 13: Learning to Dance Together

Brief Summary

Jayden helps Zin prepare for the school dance. As they practice together, both learn to step out of their comfort zones and express themselves in new ways.

Key Themes: *Cultural Exchange, Expression, Overcoming Social Anxiety*

Discussion Questions

- How does Zin's experience of dance differ from Jayden's?

- ↳ *What makes each of their approaches unique?*
- Why do you think Zin wanted to learn how to dance?
 - ↳ *What does this say about their character?*
- What do Jayden and Zin learn from each other by blending their dancing styles?
 - ↳ *How can sharing experiences lead to growth?*
- How can creative expression, like music and dance, bring people together?
 - ↳ *What forms of expression help you feel understood?*
- How did their hallway dance practice affect other students?
 - ↳ *Why might this moment be important for the school community?*

Chapter 14: Game Night Harmony

Brief Summary

Jayden hosts a game night where students, including Zin, connect through laughter and teamwork. A cooperative alien game shifts everyone's idea of what it means to win.

Key Themes: *Inclusion, Community-Building, Cooperative Problem-Solving*

Discussion Questions

- Why did Jayden plan the game night, and how did it help the group connect?
 - ↳ *What was his goal, and did he achieve it?*
- How did Zin's cultural game teach the group a new way of thinking about winning?
 - ↳ *What's the difference between competition and collaboration?*
- What are the differences between competitive and cooperative games?
 - ↳ *Which do you prefer, and why?*
- How can sharing cultural traditions (like Zin's game) bring people closer?
 - ↳ *Have you ever learned something new from a friend's culture?*
- What does it mean to create balance in a group, and why is that important?
 - ↳ *What happens when one voice dominates a group?*

Chapter 15: Signals and Shifts

Brief Summary

Jayden notices small signs that his old friends may be coming around. His friendship with Zin deepens, and he begins to accept that relationships can evolve.

Key Themes: *Rebuilding Friendships, Identity Growth, Belonging*

Discussion Questions

- What small signs showed Jayden that his old friends were starting to reconnect?



↳ *What do these moments reveal about friendship?*

- How does Zin help Jayden feel a deeper sense of belonging?

↳ *Why does that matter so much at this point in the story?*

- Why do you think Sam is still unsure about Jayden and Zin's friendship?

↳ *What might help him understand them better?*

- What does Jayden realize about change and friendship by the end of the chapter?

↳ *Can friendships survive change?*

- How do you know when a friendship is worth rebuilding?

↳ *What are some signs it's worth the effort?*

Chapter 16: Field Day and Finding Balance

Brief Summary

Jayden and Zin participate in Field Day events, learning to work as a team. Through wins and failures, they build trust and resilience.

Key Themes: *Teamwork, Resilience, Confidence Through Shared Experiences*

Discussion Questions

- How did Field Day help Jayden reconnect with his body and confidence?

↳ *What changed for him during the events?*

- Why was Zin's reaction to the events important?

↳ *What did it show about their growth and mindset?*

- What did Jayden learn about winning versus participating?

↳ *Is winning always the goal?*

- How did Jayden and Zin handle failure during the three-legged race?

↳ *What does that say about their friendship?*

- What does this chapter teach about supporting one another in challenges?

↳ *Who helps you stay strong when things are tough?*

Chapter 17: Orbiting Forward

Brief Summary

As the year wraps up, Jayden reflects on all he's learned about friendship, identity, and growth. He realizes that change doesn't have to be scary, and that real connection can happen in unexpected places.

Key Themes: *Closure, Self-Acceptance, Looking Toward the Future*

Discussion Questions

- What does Jayden realize about the meaning of friendship?



↳ *How has his understanding changed since Chapter 1?*

- How has Jayden changed since the start of the school year?

↳ *What caused these changes?*

- Why does Jayden compare friendships to planets in a galaxy?

↳ *What does that metaphor mean to you?*

- What does Jayden mean when he says change isn't something to be scared of?

↳ *Do you agree? Why or why not?*

- How does this chapter show that you can belong to more than one group?

↳ *Can belonging look different in different places?*

THANK YOU

Thank You

Thank you for using this guide with your book club, classroom, or reading group. If it sparked good conversation, I'd love to hear about it.

**Dan H. Lawrence**

Dr. Dan H. Lawrence is a storyteller, librarian, and educator with nearly 30 years of experience across libraries, nonprofits, and higher education. He writes to inspire reflection, courage, and hope. Earthlog is the first book in a middle-grade science fiction series about identity, resilience, and connection.

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