



The Big Apple Effect

Christy Goerzen

Reading level: 3.2

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Book Summary

After a lifetime of New Age “adventures” with her weirdo hippie mom, fifteen-year-old Maddie is realizing a lifelong dream and visiting New York City. Armed with her 134-item to-do list, Maddie hits the streets of New York with her friend Anna and Anna’s brother, Thomas. Maddie drags her friends around on an epic quest for the ultimate art-show outfit, oblivious to the fact that they don’t share her passion for vintage clothing. Three days into the trip, a most unwelcome surprise—the arrival of Maddie’s mother—threatens to derail the entire adventure. As her mother’s obsession with dietary trends and fortune-tellers takes center stage, and everyone’s tempers get thin, Maddie has to face some ugly facts about how she’s been treating her friends.

Author Biography

Christy Goerzen has been writing since the age of two, when she forced her parents to be the scribes for her long, convoluted stories about sheep and faeries. Passionate about everything to do with reading and writing, Christy holds a Master of Arts in Children’s Literature from the University of British Columbia. She has worked as a book reviewer, copywriter, marketing consultant, television writer, bookseller, university instructor and writing mentor. She loves daydreaming, dancing in the kitchen, wearing costumes, and goofing off with family and friends. Born and raised on the West Coast of British Columbia, Christy lives in Vancouver, with her family and two funny cats.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Novel Study

To engage students with the characters and themes in *The Big Apple Effect*, use the following as group discussion topics, individual study or paragraph-writing exercises.

1. At the end of chapter 5, Maddie is shocked to see her mother has come to New York as a birthday surprise. Maddie says, "I couldn't believe it. My mother had swooped in to ruin the week that I'd saved for, for an entire year."
 - ♦ Do you think Maddie has the right to be angry? How would you feel in her situation?
 - ♦ Why do you think Lynn, Maddie's mother, really went to New York? Was it to surprise Maddie for her birthday, or should she have known Maddie wouldn't like that? Did she truly want to "ruin" Maddie's trip?
2. Read aloud or project these quotes for students to see. Ask them to reflect on what Maddie is saying. In each quote, Maddie is talking about her mom. But could she also be describing herself? What does she learn about herself at the end of the novel?

Prompt: Maddie doesn't see that she is treating Anna poorly on their trip.

 - ♦ *Even though she went on and on about having great awareness, she sure was out of it sometimes.* (ch. 6)
 - ♦ *It was always the same. On every summer adventure...my mom had always...left me in the dust.* (ch. 10)
 - ♦ *My first time getting to do what I want to do. And you still managed to make it all about you.* (ch. 12)
3. A prominent theme in the novel is the relationship between Maddie and her mother. Students who connect with this theme will enjoy these titles from the Currents series.
 - ♦ In *Farmed Out*, the prequel to *The Big Apple Effect*, Maddie wants to find an inspiring subject for a portrait to enter in an art contest. The first prize is an all-expenses-paid trip to New York City. Maddie's mother interferes in Maddie's plans by taking them on one of their summer "adventures," this time to an organic farm, where Maddie must find inspiration amid goat poop, chickens, and her Mom's knack for embarrassing her!
 - ♦ In *Flower Power* by **Ann Walsh**, Callie's mother has chained herself to the neighbor's tree and is living inside the treehouse. Between the neighbor who wants to cut the tree down, the local TV crew who want the story, and her friends coming to see what the excitement is all about, Callie has a lot to cope with. She needs to figure out how to get her mother to come down from the tree so that her life can return to normal.

Building Vocabulary

The following words were used in *The Big Apple Effect* in the context of art, feelings and Maddie's mother. Ask students to write an imaginary diary or journal entry in which Maddie describes one of her experiences in New York, incorporating four or more words.

art show	museum	betrayal	bracelets	incense
exhibit	painting	bitter	candles	tarot
gallery	portrait	conscience	crystals	tie-dyed
inspiration	surreal	forgiving	enlightened	quartz
intricate	visual	fury	fortune	velvet

Art, Language Arts

Maddie, like many fifteen-year-olds, has a lot to deal with. Ask students to discuss this, considering themes from the novel. For example,

- She doesn't get along with her mother, who she thinks is an embarrassing weirdo hippie who's out to ruin her life.
- She has a crush on her best friend's older brother, and she can't seem to help herself from feeling this way.
- She enjoys artwork and was really excited to win an art contest, but her high hopes are grounded when an art expert doesn't like her portrait.
- As an only child, she wishes she had a brother or sister to hang out and talk with.

To connect with the character of Maddie, ask students to complete one of the following.

- Imagine you are the brother or sister Maddie wants or a close friend. Offer to help.
 - ♦ Write a script of a conversation between the two of you and then record it. What do you think Maddie's voice and tone would be like?
 - ♦ Write a letter or a blog for Maddie. Incorporate images of artwork or New York to make your writing come alive.
 - ♦ Use images of vintage handbags, suitcases and outfits to illustrate a poster that helps Maddie de-stress.

The Writer's Craft

1. The introduction to a character can give readers a strong first impression of the new character through the narrator's eyes. Ask students to find the initial descriptions of Maddie's mother (ch. 1), Anna (ch. 2), Thomas (ch. 3) and River Moonlove (ch. 11).
 - ♦ What impression do the initial descriptions give you? Can you tell how Maddie feels about each character by how they're described?

- ◆ Write a description of someone famous without including the person's name. Use powerful, illustrative words that describe the person physically, their surroundings, or just the impression you have of them. Exchange with another student and take turns guessing who's being described.
- ◆ Pose alternate descriptions of one of the characters—a description that is opposite or very different—how does our sense of the character change?
- ◆ How does the way we choose to present ourselves (our hair style, the way we dress, our body language, facial expressions, etc.) send a message to others about what we're like? What are other people's first impressions of us?

Option: You may wish to use this as an opportunity to discuss point of view or first person narrative style.

2. Writers use similes to create images for readers by comparing one thing to another, often by using the word "like" or "as." Some examples from the novel are below.

ch. 2 *I'm like a little kid excited about Disneyland.*

ch. 4 *The city lights in the window shimmered like candles on a birthday cake.*

ch. 6 *My guts churned like I'd eaten a jar of hot banana peppers.*

ch. 6 *I coughed, and it was like an invitation for the tears to flow.*

Ask students to complete these sentences below or encourage them to create sentences of their own, using characters and situations from the novel.

- ◆ Looking down from the airplane and seeing New York City below was fun. The Statue of Liberty looked like _____
- ◆ I know having a crush on my best friend's brother isn't a great idea but I just can't help myself. My heart is like _____
- ◆ When my ridiculous mother embarrassed me at the gallery, my stomach rolled over and over like _____
- ◆ When those people called my artwork uninspired, my mouth became as dry as _____ and I felt like _____

Connecting to the Curriculum

History, Geography

1. Maddie refers to New York City as The Big Apple. The term actually comes from horse racing and was first used as a nickname for New York City in the 1920s. Ask students to find another city that has a nickname, and explain its history. Does where you live have a nickname?

Prompts: City of Lakes, City of Palaces, Gateway to the South, Windy City.

2. As they read the novel, ask students to identify famous neighborhoods, stores, museums and sites. Post a map of New York City and have students use pins or markers to indicate sites. Start with the first thing Maddie sees, the Statue of Liberty (ch. 2). Once finished, ask students to choose a site, research it further, and share their learnings with the large group. Questions to explore could be:

- ◆ How did this site get its name?
- ◆ When did it open?
- ◆ How many people visit it each year?
- ◆ What makes it special or important?
- ◆ Would you want to visit this site?

Personal Planning, Leadership

1. The night of the *Face of Youth Art Contest Winners* exhibit at the Bolt Gallery was meant to be one of the most special nights of Maddie's life. She was excited to see her portrait of Anna's cow, Frida Cowlo, among the other winning portraits. Her pride and excitement crashed when she overheard people call her artwork naïve, uninspired and derivative.

Ask students to discuss skills Maddie could develop to make facing criticism or judgment easier—and even useful. Connect these skills to other areas of students' lives, such as schoolwork, hobbies, drama class, jobs, team projects and sports. Some ideas to explore include: courage, personal resilience, openness to feedback, a learning mindset, partnering with peers, or working with a mentor or tutor.

2. Maddie and her mother don't seem to see eye to eye. Maddie thinks her mother is unaware of how Maddie feels and uses guilt to manipulate others. Maddie's mom thinks Maddie misunderstands her intentions and just has "issues to work through" (ch. 7).

In chapter 6, when Maddie's mother arrives at Thomas' apartment, Maddie is convinced her life has been ruined. Anna tells Maddie she has three choices: Tell her mother to get lost, ignore her, or secretly sabotage her. Ask students, would any of these choices work? What would be the likely outcome for each? What would really help Maddie improve her relationship with her mother?