

TEACHING NOTES

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP*

MARYAM MASTER



LAUGHTER

IS THE

Best

ENDING

Illustrated by ASTRED HICKS



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LAUGHTER IS THE Best ENDING

Blurb

Zee is a loner. She likes to read Oscar Wilde and watch documentaries all day which, according to her parents, is not normal for 13 year olds. So they decide to send her on a five-day holiday camp, hoping she'll make 'at least one friend'.

Now, Zee would rather take a bath in Tabasco sauce than attend a camp called Youth Fusion. But with influencer Tiffanee and super-nerds Jonah and Moses, she soon finds herself in the middle of a hair-raising mystery, hurling her into some fierce detective work and bringing her face to face with the notorious Old Bat Viv.

'Laugh out loud material, whip smart writing, and meaningful.
I had a little cry at the end.'

Karen Foxlee, author of *Lenny's Book of Everything*

'I found it so energising! Zee plays with words like a gymnast. We click with her from the very start – she's funny, frank, fair and feisty!
This story will be a hit with young readers.'

Anna Fienberg, author of the *Tashi* series

About Maryam Master





Maryam Master is a screenwriter, playwright and author who loves creating stories for young people. She has adapted four of David Walliams' books for the stage – *Mr Stink*, *Billionaire Boy*, *The Midnight Gang* and *Ratburger* – as well as Oliver Jeffers' *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*, all of which premiered at the Sydney Opera House and toured across Australia.




Maryam began her career in TV, writing for shows like *Home and Away*, *Blinky Bill* and the Jim Henson Company's *Bambaloo*. She was selected by Sesame Workshop as the writer for Elmo's tour of Australia.

Maryam's first novel, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers and the ABIA Book of the Year for Younger Children 2022. Her second novel, *No Words*, was winner of the Children's Peace Literature Award and the Readings Children's Prize 2023, and was a CBCA Notable Book for Younger Readers. *Laughter is the Best Ending* is her third novel.

Questions

1. Discuss the title of the book, **LAUGHTER IS THE BEST ENDING**, and its play on Oscar Wilde's quote: 'Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one.' How does this tie in with the story of Zee and Dame Viv, and the themes of the book?
2. Zee is obsessed with the language of Oscar Wilde. On page 14, she says: 'I just like the way old words sound. The way they roll around in your mouth and make you feel like you're a character in a Jane Austen novel.' What kind of language appeals to you? (It doesn't have to be old-sounding words.) Go into LIST MODE, and list:
 - a. Some satisfying words to say out loud.
 - b. Your favourite words, and why.
3. Zee likes to use the quotes of famous writers to help her create meaning, and understand what's going on in her life.
 - a. Why do you think the works of Oscar Wilde or Shakespeare in particular appeal to Zee?
 - b. Find an Oscar Wilde or Shakespeare quote that appeals to you and write about why it suits your life.
4. How would you define 'mystery' and 'adventure'? What themes, elements and conventions should mysteries and adventures have? Which of these can be found in the book?
5. How does the book use setting – through both words and illustrations – to create atmosphere and tension? Consider the Youth Fusion Camp and its surrounds, and Dame Viv's House on the Hill. For example, how did the setting make you feel when the protagonists are entering the House on the Hill (page 102)?
6. **LAUGHTER IS THE BEST ENDING** uses playscripts as a device for storytelling.
 - a. Compare this to regular storytelling of prose and dialogue. How do these scenes affect the way you read the book? How does it create more action and immediacy? Does it make it more compelling?
 - b. Pick your favourite scene from Maryam Master's **NO WORDS** or **EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP** and then turn the dialogue into a play. Does this change the way you read the scene?
7. Illustrations can evoke feelings, reactions and thoughts, and can work together with the text to enhance the narrative.
 - a. Discuss the style of drawings in the book. How does this style enhance the text?
 - b. What is your favourite illustration in **LAUGHTER IS THE BEST ENDING**? Describe what you like about it and what it makes you feel. For example, if there are characters in the illustration, describe what you liked about the emotions on their faces.
 - c. How does the book also use text design – different fonts and sizes, lists, etc. – to create interest and intrigue?

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8. Zee's mum is 'a firm believer that no one should EVER comment on another person's appearance. Good or bad. Or merely observational.' (page 15) Why do you think Zee's mum thinks this way? Is it right to comment on people's appearance? Why or why not? Think about how it makes you feel when someone says something negative/positive about your appearance.
 9. Most of the characters in **LAUGHTER IS THE BEST ENDING** are not as they first appear or seem, especially Old Bat Viv, and even Madam Augustus in the end. Why is it important not to take things on face value alone or judge a book by its cover?
 10. Ziba's name means 'beautiful' in Persian. Discover the etymology of your own name. What does it mean? Does the meaning suit your personality? Why or why not?
 11. On page 194, Dame Viv quotes Kahlil Gibran: 'Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart.' In the end, both Ziba and Tiffanee re-evaluate their definitions of beauty. In what ways does **LAUGHTER IS THE BEST ENDING** reinvent the traditional definition of beauty, as defined by the beauty industry?
 12. Social media has both good and bad qualities.
 - a. As a class, discuss the pros and cons of social media.
 - b. Do the pros outweigh the cons? Why or why not?
 - c. Discuss Tiffanee's social media withdrawals on pages 73–84. What is her physical reaction meant to represent?
 - d. Tiffanee says social media is the 'real world' (page 74). Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
 13. What does the book (and each character) teach us about the importance of friendship and connection, and the potency of loneliness? Discuss, for example, why Zee's mum sends her to Youth Fusion to find friends, how Dame Viv is lonely in her House on the Hill, and even how Tiffanee is trying to find connection through social media.
 14. 'Rumours start small, with a little spark of truth, but quickly get out of control and spread like wildfire.' (page 209) As a class, play the game Telephone. Afterwards, discuss how words and phrases morphed as they were passed along the rumour mill.
 15. On pages 116 and 118, Dame Viv passes on this wisdom to Zee and Tiffanee: 'All the money in the world will never fill your cup . . . I used to think that having "things" would make me happy . . . but less is more in this life.' What does Dame Viv mean by this? Discuss how this book explores the perils of materialism, especially through a younger Dame Viv and influencer Tiffanee.
 16. Go into LIST MODE, and list the similarities and differences of the four protagonists in this novel – Zee, Tiffanee, Jonah and Moses. Who is your favourite character (it doesn't have to be one of these four!)? Do you relate to any of the characters more than others? While each character could be an archetype, in what ways do these characters also subvert their archetypes?
 17. 'Old folk have so much on us. Not only have they managed to not die for aeons, but they've collected a stockpile of experiences, stories and wisdom.' (page 7) At the heart of this novel is an intergenerational friendship. Why should people be friends with people of all ages? Why do old people carry so much wisdom?
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18. There is a comic strip on pages 172–173 that illustrates the scene of Moses falling out of the tree. Ask the students to choose another scene in the book and turn it into a comic strip sequence, using comic book conventions (panels, speech/thought bubbles, captions, sound effects and illustrations) in their preferred comic book art style. Show the class different examples of comic book art styles, if this is helpful.
19. On page 156, Madam Augustus says: ‘Kids are too pampered these days. Over-indulged. Wrapped up in cotton wool. This game is teaching them resilience. Survival. Problem solving. Yes, it’s also scaring them out of their wits, but that’s a price I’m willing to pay.’ Discuss what you think of Madam Augustus’s Murder in the Dark game, and the aim of it. Do you think kids are too pampered? Do they need to be more resilient and learn survival skills? If so, why do you think Madam Augustus’s approach was right or wrong? Go into LIST MODE, and list some better ways to teach children these skills.
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