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Family Reading Guide for "Bye Forever, I Guess"

Conversation starters for parents and children

Getting Started

What This Book Is About

"Bye Forever, I Guess" follows Ingrid, a middle schooler living a double life: at school she's her popular friend Rachel's charity case, while online she's a confident gamer and social media personality. When she finally stands up to Rachel, her school world collapses—until a wrong-number text from a mystery boy sparks a connection that feels more real than anything she's experienced IRL. As she begins to suspect the mystery boy is a popular classmate, Ingrid must decide whether she's brave enough to let herself be truly seen.

Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Online vs. offline identity:** Ingrid is a different, more authentic version of herself online—a gap many teens navigate daily
- **Social hierarchies and belonging:** The "cool-kid food chain" shapes Ingrid's choices in ways that are limiting but deeply familiar to middle schoolers
- **Authenticity and courage:** The central question is whether Ingrid is ready to stop performing and let someone see who she actually is
- **Friendship and trust:** Both the friendship with Rachel and the new connection with the mystery boy ask hard questions about what real friendship requires
- **Standing up for yourself:** Ingrid's decision to confront Rachel is the inciting act of the whole story—small courage with large consequences

Tip for Parents: This book opens rich conversations about how teens manage different versions of themselves in different contexts—and whether the "online self" is less authentic than the "school self." Approach these conversations with curiosity rather than judgment; many teens feel more like themselves online than they do in their physical school environment.

Discussion Questions

About Ingrid and Her World

- Why do you think Ingrid feels more like herself online than at school?
- What does Ingrid get out of her friendship with Rachel, even though Rachel treats her poorly?
- What gives Ingrid the courage to finally stand up to Rachel—and what does she risk by doing it?
- How does the wrong-number text change Ingrid's sense of what's possible for her?

About Identity and Connection

- Do you think the online version of Ingrid is more "real" than the school version? Why or why not?
- What makes the mystery boy connection feel different from Ingrid's other relationships?
- Why is it scary to let someone from your "real life" see the version of you that exists online?
- What do you think true friendship requires that Ingrid's friendship with Rachel is missing?

Fun Conversation Starters

- If you had an anonymous online identity, what would you be doing or saying that you don't do IRL?
- Has a wrong number or accidental message ever led to something unexpectedly good?
- What's one thing you wish people at school knew about you that they probably don't?



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- What game, hobby, or interest are you best at that the people around you might not know about?
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Discussion Activities

Exploring Online and Offline Identity

- Discuss: "Are you the same person online as you are at school? In what ways are you different?"
- Share a time when you felt more comfortable being yourself in one context than another
- Talk about what makes it easier to be authentic in some settings versus others
- Explore together: What does it mean for an online friendship to become "real"?

Reflecting on Social Dynamics

- Discuss what a "charity case" friendship looks like—and why someone might stay in one
 - Talk about the social cost of standing up to a popular friend
 - Ask: "What would it take for Ingrid's school self and online self to become the same person?"
 - Share a time you saw someone find their confidence after breaking free from a limiting dynamic
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Conversation Tips for Parents

Supporting Authentic Expression

- Ask about your teen's online life with genuine curiosity, not surveillance—"What do you love about it?" before "Who are you talking to?"
- Validate that different contexts call for different presentations of self—this is normal, not deceptive
- Celebrate the version of your child that exists in their passions—gaming, content creation, whatever it is
- Discuss the difference between performing a false self (exhausting) and code-switching appropriately (normal)

Navigating Social Hierarchies

- Share a story from your own adolescence about a friendship that was more performance than connection
 - Discuss: "What do you need from a friendship? What are you willing to give?"
 - Talk about how social hierarchies in school rarely predict anything about adult life
 - Ask: "Is there a version of yourself you're hiding at school? What would it take to let it out?"
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Questions by Age Group

For Younger Readers (Ages 11–13)

- Why does Ingrid feel more comfortable online than at school?
- What happens when Ingrid finally stands up to Rachel?
- Who sends Ingrid the wrong-number text—and why is that complicated?
- What does Ingrid have to decide by the end of the story?

For Older Readers (Ages 13–15)

- What does the book suggest about which version of Ingrid is her "real" self?
- How does the story explore the risks and rewards of being seen by someone new?



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- What does "being friends IRL" mean in this story—and why is it a harder question than it sounds?
 - How does Ingrid's relationship with Rachel shape the way she sees herself—and how does that change?
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Activity Ideas

Creative and Reflective Projects

- Write two character bios for yourself: one as the world sees you, one as you see yourself
- Create a "social media profile" for Ingrid that shows her authentic online identity
- Write the scene from the mystery boy's perspective—what is he thinking during their conversations?
- Draft the text exchange that starts everything: what do they actually say?

Discussion and Research

- Research how teens manage identity across different social platforms and in person
 - Explore the psychology of "authentic self"—when do we feel most like ourselves?
 - Discuss: What are the real risks of letting someone from "real life" into your online world?
 - Read about the social dynamics of middle school friend groups and how they shift
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"Bye Forever, I Guess" speaks directly to the exhaustion of performing a self you don't recognize—and the hope that somewhere, there's a connection real enough to meet you where you actually are. Ingrid's journey from survival mode to something like genuine belonging is one many young readers will see themselves in clearly. Let this book open a conversation about which version of your teen feels most like home—and what it would take to bring that person into the light.