



# A-OKAY

by Jarad Greene



Eighth grade was supposed to be the best year yet for Jay! Now, things refuse to go as planned. The acne that he hoped would disappear over the summer is not only still there on the first day of school, but has gotten worse. When he finally negotiates his way into art class, his new schedule is the complete opposite of his friends. On top of everything else, when he does manage to make some new friends, they both develop feelings for Jay. Only... he doesn't share the same feelings for either of them. When he finally gets on some medication to help with his acne, he is hopeful that everything is going to end up being a-okay. But will that hope be enough?

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**SELF-IMAGE:** Jay has poor self-image at the beginning of the book. When he looks at his reflection in the mirror, Greene's illustrations magnify Jay's pimples, so they look bigger than they really are (p. 2). The same thing happens when he looks at himself in the car window (p. 7). How is self-image addressed at other points throughout Jay's story? Consider how you see yourself versus how others see you. Why do you think there are differences between your self-image and the perceptions of others? What do you think of Jay's reaction to his reflection at the end of the book (p. 230)?

**BULLYING:** Ever since Jay was little, he was teased by his school bully, Aaron. It started when Aaron found out that the acne cream Jay was using had makeup in it (p. 28), and it continued from there. When Jay decides to buy new clothes and style his hair to distract from his acne, Aaron continues to bully him (p. 82). Why do you think Aaron is targeting Jay? Discuss how bullying has affected you. If you were able to have an impact on Jay's experiences, how would you address or confront the bullying he receives? How might you confront or address bullying in your own school?

**IDENTITY:** Aside from his struggles with acne, Jay begins to feel self-doubt and discomfort when he realizes that both Amy and Mark like him as more than friends, especially because he doesn't feel the same way in return (p. 158). Why do you think this is such a concern for him? Why do you think he is so comforted by the fact that the label "asexual" exists? Discuss why this particular identity might be difficult to embrace, considering how people talk about romance and couples in life, TV and movies, and in books?

**FRIENDSHIP:** Throughout the book, Jay struggles to maintain his friendship with Brace, especially after their argument (p. 154). Jay also struggles to understand his friendships with Mark and Amy, which are complicated when they both start having deeper feelings for him. Friendships are important, but they can also be difficult. Why are each of his friendships important to Jay throughout his struggles with self-image and self-discovery? Have you ever grown apart from a friend? How have you worked through other kinds of challenges with friends? Why do you think friendships are so crucial people of all ages?

**THE ROLE OF ART:** Art class—and art in general—is very important in Jay's story. Art is what brings him closer to Amy and Mark, for instance. Art helps Jay and Brace reconcile their friendship after things fall apart earlier in the book. In what other ways does art bring people together throughout the book? How do art and illustration help Jay to cope with difficulties? Think about what art means to you, whether painting, drawing, music, writing, or another type of media. How does it impact you and others in your life?

