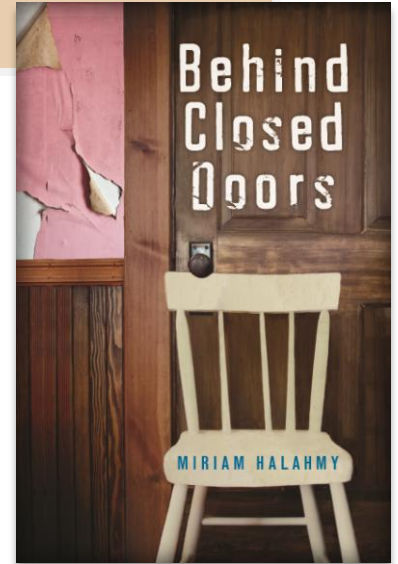


# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

## BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

**Miriam Halahmy**

*Take an emotional journey with Josie and Tasha as they reveal embarrassing and shameful secrets of their lives. This compelling story reveals the underlying feelings of guilt and fear caused by painful family relationships, mental illness, abuse, and homelessness while uncovering the true importance and healing power of love and friendship. You never really know what is going on behind closed doors!*



9780823436415 • Ages 14 up • E-book available

**Guided Reading Level:** Z+

**Grade Level Equivalent HS:** Adult

**Interest Level:** Grades 8 and up

### Instructional Standards

**Reading Literature:** RL.9-12.11,2,3,4,5,6,10

**Writing:** W.9-12.1,2,4,6,7,8,9,10

**Speaking and Listening:** SL.9-12.1,1b,1c,1d,3,4,5,6

**Language:** L.9-12.33,4,5,6

1. Discuss the setting and location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Describe Josie and Tasha: their individual personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.
2. How do the characters behave in the story? Why do Josie, Tasha, both moms, and Chaz act as they do? Are their actions justified?
3. Write about the dynamics between the different characters in the story.
  - Chaz and Tasha
  - Josie and Jordan
  - Josie and Mom
  - Tasha and Mom
  - Josie and Tasha
  - Tasha and Chaz
  - Tasha and Rory
  - Shirl and Josie's mom
4. How has the past shaped their lives?
5. Do you admire or disapprove of them?
6. Do they remind you of people you know?



7. Choose a character from the reading. Who do you most admire for his/her path to success?
8. Discuss the main and secondary characters (Josie, Tasha, Jordan, Dom, Chaz, both moms).
9. Are the main characters dynamic—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works, and their role in it? Write a narrative about one of the characters.
10. Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Why do you think the author included Mel, Ivy, and Len in the plot?
11. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic?
12. Was there redemption in the book for any of the characters? Discuss.
13. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to “get into it”? How did you feel while you were reading it?
14. Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story?
15. What were the central themes of *Behind Closed Doors*? (family, homelessness, mental illness, abuse, friendship, love)
16. Do you think the author effectively developed the themes of family, homelessness, mental illness, abuse, friendship, love? If yes, how? If no, why not? Choose one of the central themes and write about how the author developed it through the actions, thoughts, and feelings of the characters.
17. Discuss stereotypes related to the homeless. How did *Behind Closed Doors* change or confirm your opinion of these stereotypes?
18. What did the story make you think about? How did you feel as you read it? What surprised you about the text?
19. Discuss a part of the book that made you feel sad, nervous, relieved, happy, or frustrated.
20. What does family mean to you? What is a “normal family”? Deliberate about what is considered a “normal family” on a personal and societal level. What obstacles do families encounter? How did these affect the characters in the book?
21. How do ideas from the *Behind Closed Doors* relate to our society? Do you believe homelessness, mental illness, and abuse are problems for society as a whole or only affect individuals? Research and create a PowerPoint presentation.
22. How are the homeless and mentally ill depicted by the media? Based on what you have read, discuss the contradictions. Create a presentation using multiple sources.
23. Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas? What does the clock/time symbolize in the story and for what characters is this relevant?



24. How was the book structured? What structural or narrative devices did the author use?
25. How did multiple voices telling the story affect your understanding and appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
26. Describe the moment when the author intertwined Josie and Tasha's lives.
27. What did you learn about keeping secrets?
28. Discuss the point of views that the story was told from. How do you think it might have been different if another character or characters were telling the story?
29. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Find your favorite passage from the book. Write a brief description about what was happening at the time. Share with the group.
30. Was the language appropriate to the story? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? (The story took place in London. There were many words and phrases that were new to American teenagers.)
31. Create a list of words and phrases from the book that are different from what you would use in the U.S. Write their meanings and share.
32. Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the author's style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
33. How was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters? Was the action believable?
34. What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological?
35. Describe how the author used foreshadowing and suspense in the beginning, middle, and end. Was she effective? How did it affect your understanding and enjoyment of the book?
36. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so, how does this book compare? If not, does this book inspire you to read others by her?
37. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not? How would you change it?
38. Has this novel changed you or broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

Guide written by Marla Conn, reading/literacy specialist and educational consultant

