



Lights, Camera, Disaster

By Erin Dionne

Junior Tome It List Discussion Guide



Pre-reading questions:

1. This book's main character is Hester Greene (Hess, for short), an eighth grade student who struggles with "Executive Function Disorder" (EFD). Before you begin reading, do a little online research (using reliable sources) to find out what this condition is, and how it might complicate the school, home, and social life of a typical teenager.
2. The author wrote this novel in the "First-Person-Narrative" from Hester's point-of-view, so we can really see what it's like to *be* her. Because Hess loves filmmaking, the book includes sections that are written in the form of a movie script, with STOP/PAUSE/PLAY/REWIND moments and headings or abbreviations that give the director and actors extra information about how to shoot or perform each scene. Flip through the book, and find examples of this...then, discuss how these sections are different and what they add to your understanding of Hester's world.
3. As you read "Lights, Camera, Disaster," pay attention to all the times author Erin Dionne has Hester say, "If this were a movie..." then, "that's not how this goes..." Think and talk about some of the movies or TV shows you've seen recently that feature actors, who are supposed to be "teenagers," navigating through schoolwork, teacher troubles, home-life, friendship, and emotional problems. How are the conflicts of these fictional "**teenage**" actors usually solved? Since Hester is a fictional *book* character, do you predict that most of her problems will have positive or negative resolutions? Is it realistic for us to expect that difficulties in our *own* lives will work out like they do in movie scripts?

Post-reading questions:

1. Look back to pgs. 21-23 to recall how Hess reacts when her father slips down their front steps and injures himself badly. Why do you think she behaved the way she did? How do you think you would act and feel in a similar situation?
2. What type of book was Hess reading when she said, "No book has ever carried me anywhere, before now!" (p.69)? Then, what other kind of book did Zada introduce her to that Hess discovers she also enjoyed reading (p.131)? Why do you think these different types of books, were easier for Hess to stay focused on and enjoy, than other books she had tried but failed to finish in the past?
3. On "Family Night Fun" (FNF) at the Greene home, what did Hester's mom mean when she said Jack was upstairs, "teenagering" (pgs. 52-58)? How did each of Jack's family members feel about him not joining them to play games? Have you ever acted like Jack with your family, in order to let them know how you feel, or because you didn't get your way?
4. Why does Hester's best friend Nev lug her duffel bag full of clothes to school when she swaps back and forth between her mom's and dad's houses (p.72)? Do you think it will bring about the result that she probably hopes for?
5. Which one of Hester's classmates called her a "Disaster" several times (p.90 & p.158)? What did Hess finally do in retaliation? Did her angry act make the student start treating Hester better, or cause the student to be less popular at school?
6. Who did Miss Vogel want Hess to meet and listen to at the first afterschool practice for, "The Hoot" (p.167)? How did this person finally make Hess feel valued, and what important filmmaking advice did he give her (pgs. 170-171)?
7. [SPOILER ALERT] For most of the book Ms. Walker the Language Arts teacher, does not seem to be very supportive or understanding towards Hester's learning and organizational issues. On p. 26, Hess tells us that her other teachers allow her to do extra-credit videography projects when her grades slip, but that Ms. Walker does not allow any assignment accommodations. However, after Ms. Walker watches Hester's final documentary-style video titled, "This is Who We Are," Ms. Walker turns to Hester and says, "Point taken" (p.244). What did she mean by that? Why do you think Hester's film seemed to make a powerful emotional impact on both the students, and the teachers who viewed it?

8. Imagine that you have a best friend that experiences lots of the same problems that Hess struggles with on a daily basis, like...keeping their locker/school binders organized, getting assignments completed on time, studying for tests enough in advance, remembering to bring important things like a charged phone, remembering to attend scheduled events, or taking on too many tasks at once and not being able to follow through. What are some strategies that you think you could suggest, and then help your friend learn to use, that might help them with some of these issues?
9. [SPOILER] Even though not all of her problems get resolved happily at the end of this book (*like they do in most TV shows and movies about teenagers*), there are 2 very-moving final scenes where Hester is given good, realistic advice by intelligent, caring adults. Reread p. 175 and p. 201 to recall who these people were, and what they told Hester. Then, discuss how both the fictional book character Hester, and real teens like you, can use their guiding statements in the future!

Post-reading Activities

1. To understand a little of what life is like for teens like Hester Greene, who have Executive Function Disorder (EFD), go to this website; <https://www.understood.org/en/through-your-childs-eyes>, scroll down to the “Simulations” section, then click on each of these SHORT game-like-experiences; Attention, Organization, Reading, Writing, and Math. (These could be played independently or whole-group on a large projection screen.) How would you feel if you experienced issues like these, every single day - no matter how hard you tried?
2. Like the main character Hester Greene in the book, “Lights, Camera, Disaster,” many tweens and teens who have EFD are often overlooked or mis-labeled as just lazy, messy, or unmotivated “disasters,” when in fact they have real neurological issues that can be better managed with understanding, support, and specifically-taught strategies. Work together in a group of up to 4 Tome members, to research this current health issue, and create a “Current Issues Essay & Portfolio” about “EFD in Teens” to enter into this spring’s Tome competition! Carefully read the instructions and rubric for the “Current Issues Essay & Portfolio” on this page <http://www.tomesociety.org/competitions.html>, before you begin.
3. [SPOILER ALERT] Since Hess could not get academically eligible in time to compete in her middle school’s talent show (“The Hoot”), Nev, Max, and Hess did not ever get to film their short movie titled, “The Spy who Bugged Me.” However, the author included the final shooting script for it at the end of the book on pgs. 245 - 260. With 2 or 3 of your friends, read, practice, perform, and video-record your own performance of her film! Post it to your YouTube or social media account, and tag #TomeSociety to show it off! Or, you could film one of Hester’s shorter shooting scripts; “Max’s New Lunch” pgs. 44 - 46, “Where is the Horse?” pgs. 60-62, or write, practice, perform, & video an original shooting script all your own using Hester’s examples as your guide.
4. Hester’s best friend Max was convinced he would be able to make millions of dollars someday by creating famous food commercial songs. Throughout the book, Max sings several of his original commercial advertising “jingles” to Hess and Nev (ex. “Ole Salsa” p.16). On p. 102, he tells Nev and Hess he’s also trying to think of a jingle for “Happy Sprouts Frozen Vegetables” so he can enter to win \$1000! Think of some food commercial jingles that are easy to remember and get stuck in your head after you hear them, then try to make up one to suggest to Max that will advertise the “Happy Sprouts Frozen Vegetables.” Then, create a jingle or rhyming song to advertise this book or Tome Society. Practice it, video-record it, then post it to YouTube or social media with #TomeSociety so other members can enjoy it!

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