

# MARY MARGARET, CENTER STAGE

by Christine Kole MacLean

Mary Margaret likes to do things her way. And she loves it when her teacher, Mr. Mooney, rains down his “good job” smile on her. The problem is, Mary Margaret’s way isn’t always perfect, but Ellie’s is, and Ellie is the one who gets the biggest smiles from Mr. Mooney.

When Mr. Mooney announces that he will direct a community play of Cinderella, Mary Margaret comes up with the best idea for raising the money they need. She even manages to convince some VIPs to help out. So she figures she’s a shoo-in for the part of Cinderella. Guess who gets it instead?

Read this hilarious book to see how Mary Margaret gets her moment in the spotlight and learns that it is sometimes better *not* to be perfect.

Here’s what reviewers have said about MARY MARGARET AND THE PERFECT PET PLAN:

*“MacLean’s heroine is lively, spirited, and full of energy. All of the characters are well drawn and the narrative sparkles with humor. Children ready to move on to a more challenging read after Beverly Cleary’s Ramona books will enjoy Mary Margaret’s predicaments.”*

— School Library Journal



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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Characters

Mary Margaret thinks Ellie is perfect. Do you think she is? Why or why not?

How are Mary Margaret and Ellie similar? How are they different?

How are Mary Margaret’s and Ellie’s moms different? How are they the same?

Who are you more similar to, Mary Margaret or Ellie? Give some examples.

### Plot

What are some of the things that Mary Margaret does to ensure she will get a starring role in the play?

What things does Mary Margaret do to annoy JT? Does she do them on purpose?

Which role does Ellie audition for? Why is she disappointed with the role she gets?

Why doesn’t Mr. Mooney choose Mary Margaret to play Cinderella? Do you think he made a good decision?

Why does Mary Margaret decide to help Ellie when she has stage fright?

### Synthesis

What was Mary Margaret’s consequence for calling JT a bad name? Do you think this was fair? Explain your answer.

Why do you think Ellie’s mom wants her to be perfect? How does Ellie feel about it? Give some examples.

When Mary Margaret accidentally reveals that she read JT’s note, her mom says, “I expect more from you.” Was it fair for JT to expect Mary Margaret not to read the note? What about her parents?

After Mary Margaret and Ellie fight about the code, Mary Margaret apologizes. Does she mean it? Why or why not?

What does it mean to **really** be sorry? Give some examples of times in this book when Mary Margaret was truly sorry.

If Mary Margaret really were a fairy godmother, what wishes do you think she would grant for these people in her life:

- Ellie
- Her mom
- JT
- Liza
- Stevie Butts
- Mr. Mooney
- Andy



# ACTIVITY IDEAS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

## Language Arts

### Poetry

Mary Margaret writes several haiku during the course of the book. Write 3-4 of your own haiku about the same central theme. Although writing haiku is a complex art, try the most basic versions: three lines with a 5-7-5 beat pattern, including an element from nature.

### Literature Study

Mary Margaret has some suggestions to rewrite Cinderella with a more modern, assertive heroine. Find other Cinderella retellings at home or the library. Compare and contrast the elements the stories share and those that make each one unique. Consider: setting, characters, plot, and moral, if any.

### Word Study

This book includes unusual words such as: *brouhaha*, *technicality*, *celebrity*, *thespian*, and *audition*.

Spend some time with these words. How do you pronounce them? What do they mean? How many syllables does each word have? Can you think of *synonyms*, other words that mean the same thing? Are there words with similar spelling patterns that you already know which can help you remember how to spell these new words correctly?

### Composition

Write your own retelling of Cinderella or another favorite fairy tale.

Imagine you are making a celebrity calendar like Mary Margaret and her friends. Write a letter to a celebrity whose picture you would like to include. Try to be as convincing as Mary Margaret was in her letters. Remember to use proper letter format, correct spelling and punctuation.

## Dramatic Play

Play a game called "Who am I?" Act like you are a character from the book. Have an audience guess which person you're playing.

Put on your own play! Choose a play, make a budget, pick a director, cast roles, and invite an audience.

Pretend you're a director. Cast a different fairy tale play (for example, Rumpelstiltskin, The Three Little Bears, or Rapunzel) using the characters from this book. You can include grown-ups. Discuss your casting choices with other "directors."



## Mathematics

The kids decide to sell calendars to raise money for the play. Here are the costs to produce the calendars:

Paper: \$20 for 120 sheets  
Binding: .20 cents per calendar

Ink: \$26 for 120 sheets  
Cover: .20 cents per sheet

If each calendar has 12 sheets of paper plus a cover and a binder, what is the total cost to produce 10 calendars? How much does it cost to produce one calendar? Show your work.

**Math Challenge:** Say the kids print 100 calendars and sell them for \$10 each. How much money will they raise? (Don't forget to deduct the cost of supplies!)

## Problem Solving

### Code Kids

Mary Margaret and Ellie work together to figure out JT's secret code. Make your own simple code. For example:

#### Shift 5:

A=E B=F C=G, etc.

#### Substitute numbers for letters:

A=1 B=2 C=3, etc.

#### Make it trickier by going backwards:

With letters: A=Z B=Y C=X

With numbers: A=26 B=25 C=24

See if friends or your parents can figure out your code!

### Following Directions

Practice giving clear directions. Blindfold a friend, and help him or her walk safely around the classroom, without holding his or her hand. (First you should make sure there's a clear path to walk and nothing dangerous to bump into!)

Write directions to tell someone how to find your house. Check them as you ride in the car. Did you forget anything?

