"A compelling novel of friendship, responsibility, and standing up for what's right." —ERIN ENTRADA KELLY, Newbery Medal-winning author of Hello, Universe
A PERFECT MISTAKE
MELANIE CONKLIN

A Standards-Aligned Educator Guide for Grades 3 - 7

A PERFECT MISTAKE

About the book:

Max wishes he could go back in time to before he was diagnosed with ADHD, before he grew to be the tallest kid in his class, and before he and his best friends went into the woods in the middle of the night. Max doesn't remember what happened after he left his friends. Knowing isn't going to make Joey talk to him again, or bring Will out of his coma. When the local authorities run out of leads, Max realizes that without his help, they may never know what really happened to Will. Max pairs up with a classmate to investigate what really happened that night. But not everyone in the community wants that night to be remembered.

Age Range: 8 - 12 years
Grade Level: Grades 3 - 7
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About the author–Melanie Conklin:

Melanie Conklin grew up in North Carolina and worked as a product designer before she began her writing career. Her debut middle grade novel, *Counting Thyme*, is a Bank Street Best Children's Book, winner of the International Literacy Association Teacher's Choice Award, and nominated to four state reading lists. She is also the author of *Every Missing Piece* (2020), *A Perfect Mistake* (2022), and her picture book debut, *When You Have to Wait* (2023). When she's not writing, Melanie spends her time doodling and dreaming up new ways to be creative. She lives in New Jersey with her family.

Pre-Reading Discussion:

- A mistake is defined as a miscalculation, a misunderstanding, or an oversight. Mistakes are typically considered to be unfortunate events founded on errors in judgment. Determine how a mistake might be perceived as being perfect.
- Illustrations tell stories with pictures. Observe the illustration featured on the book cover. Identify the images included in the graphic. Note the silhouette at the center of the page. Predict how the silhouette connects details in the illustration.
- Predict what this story is going to be about.

Post-Reading Discussion:

Today is different. (27)

- Max fled the roundhouse the night of Joey's birthday, after which a mysterious accident occurred leaving Will in coma. Was it a mistake for Max to leave Will behind? How so?
- Max and his family spent the summer diligently focused on ADHD management skill strategies. He visited Dr. Williamson's office on a regular basis working on consistent goals together. Why did Max state that this therapy session would be "different"? Explain your answer.
- Time blindness, a symptom of ADHD, is the unintentional disregard of the passing of time. Predict how experiencing time blindness impacts Max's abilities to interpret the events that took place the night that Will became injured.

"If everyone likes you, you're doing life wrong," Cal says. "There are always going to be people who don't like you. Forget those people. You don't need them." (112)

- In this scene, Max's uncle Cal states that some people are not "friend material". Do you agree with this assessment? How so?
- Cal advises Max to avoid physical confrontations with peers. He tells Max, "It's not worth it. Trust me." Is Cal speaking from the voice of experience? Cite examples from the text to support your point of view.
- Compare and contrast Cal and Max's characters. Describe their similarities. Tell how they differ.

"You have to stop," Joey says. A tear slides down his cheek.
"Stop what?" (157)

- Examine the detail of the tear gliding down Joey's cheek as he physically confronted Max by his locker. Explain why Joey felt the urge to cry while attacking Max with his backpack.
- The word *desperation* means anguish, torment, and hopelessness. Which of these three synonyms do you feel best describe Joey's emotional state in this scene? Determine the reasons for Joey's feelings of desperation.
- And, yet Max resists fighting back. What does his reaction to Joey's outburst reveal about Max's character?

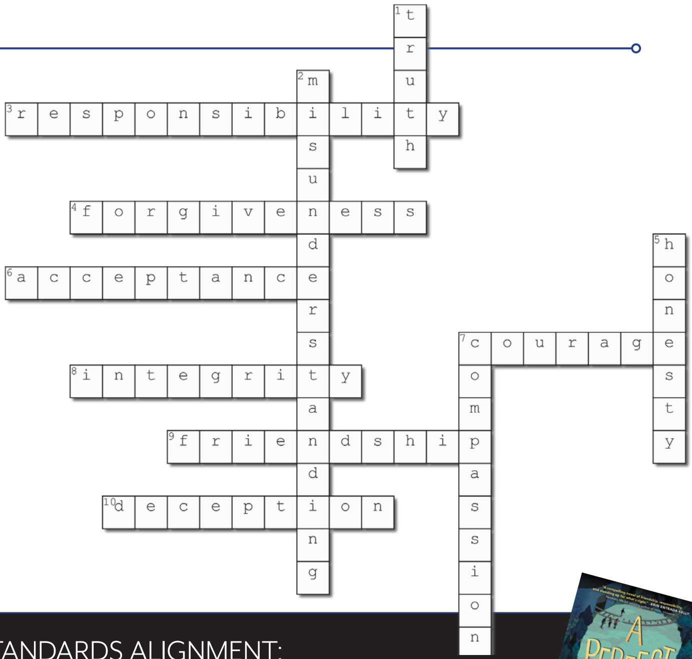
"You can fake a lot of things, but you can't fake history," he said. (258)

- The word *history* is defined as being a story, a narrative, or a chronicle of events that occurred in the past. Is it possible to falsify things that happened in the past? If so, would the consequences of the event change?
- Identify the Dog Lady's, Joey's, and Luca's motivation to falsify the chronicle of events that occurred the night Will was injured. Describe the consequences of their efforts to do so.
- Make a connection between the book's title and the themes explored in the story. Identify which mistake that was made in the story was the most perfect. Cite examples from the text to support your answer.

Theme Analysis Crossword Puzzle:

Follow the steps listed below to examine the themes explored in A PERFECT MISTAKE.

- Consider the citations featured in the Across and Down sections of the puzzle found on the following page.
- Search for each citation in the text.
- Use context clues to analyze the themes of each cited phrase.
- Record your answers in the spaces provided on the crossword puzzle.



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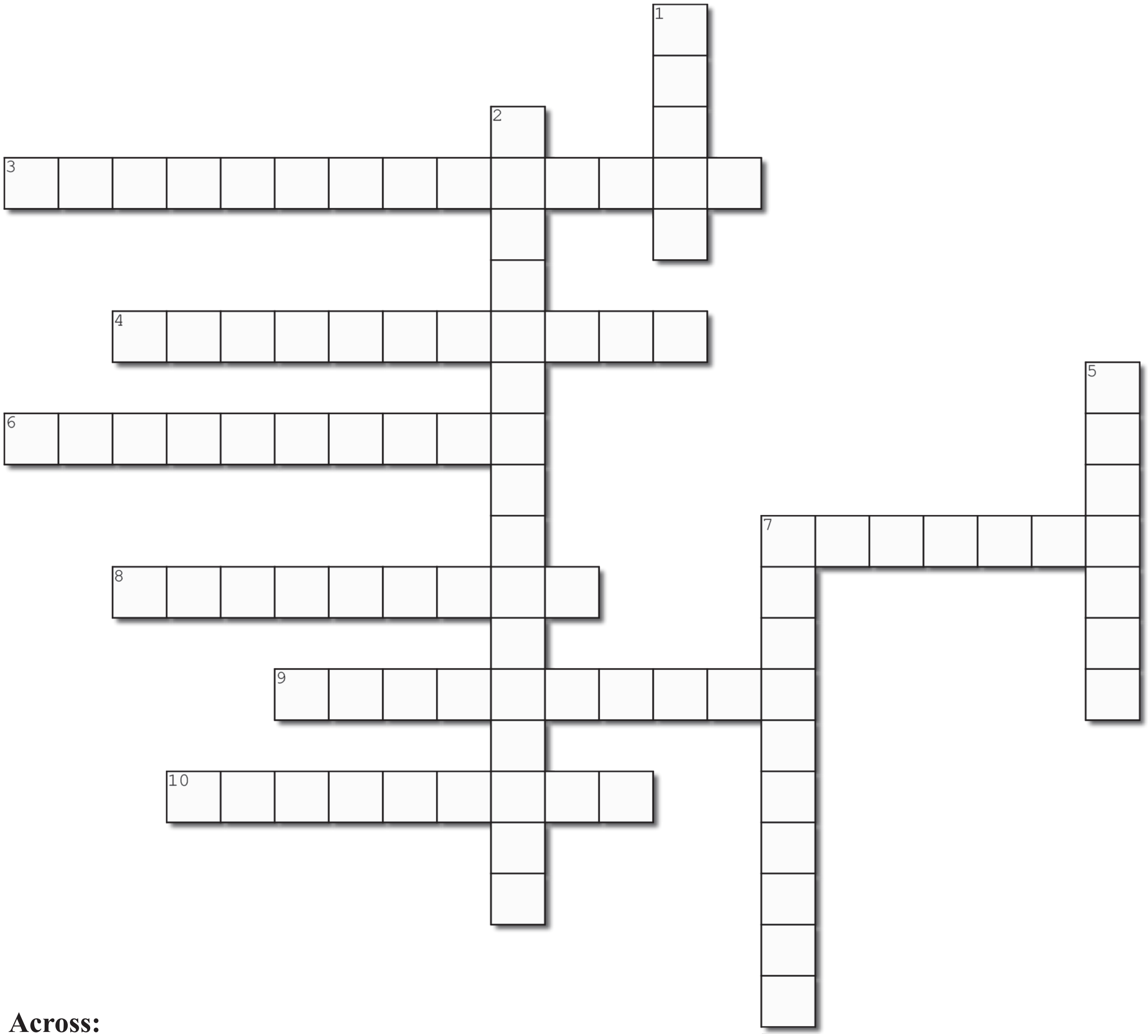
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:

Reading Literature: RL.1, RL.2, RL.3, RL.4, RL.7, RL.10

Speaking & Listening: SL.1, SL.2, SL.4, SL.6

Guide created by Debbie Gonzales, MFA

Theme Analysis Crossword Puzzle



Across:

3. Which just leaves me. I’m *It.* (66)
4. “It’s much harder to forgive yourself, but we’re going to work on that, okay?” (30)
6. “...either be the guy everyone wants you to be or you can be yourself.” (55)
7. *Just do the thing.* (68)
8. “You get to define yourself.” (165)
9. “...the idea of Joey’s parents splitting up was so big and scary, it took all three of us to hold it.” (22)
10. “What’s done is done. Let’s move on.” (250)

Down:

1. “The police needed to know about the bottle. It’s an important piece of evidence.” (116)
2. … I’m never going to be a straight-A student like Shelley. (24)
5. “She’s lying about being home, but I don’t know why.” (150)
7. “Pain breeds pain. Hurt causes hurt.” (120)