



RULE OF THREES

By Marcy Campbell

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 Ages 9-12 • F&P Text Level Gradient: Z
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About the Book: *Rule of Threes*

Part family drama, part contemporary thriller, *Rule of Threes* is a middle grade story about what happens when “perfect” is out of your control.

An interior design enthusiast, twelve-year-old Maggie Owens is accustomed to living her life according to her own precise plans. But when she learns about Tony, a mysterious half-brother her own age who needs a place to stay, any semblance of a plan is shattered. Tony’s mom struggles with an addiction to opioids, and now she’s called upon Maggie’s dad—who is also Tony’s dad—to take him in. On top of everything, Maggie must also come to terms with the Alzheimer’s afflicting her beloved grandmother.

While Maggie can strive for—and even succeed in—a picture-perfect design, when it comes to family, there is no such thing as perfection. To work through the sudden struggles rocking her world, Maggie must learn the importance of having an open heart.

About the Author: Marcy Campbell

Marcy Campbell is an award-winning author of picture books and middle-grade novels, which have earned praise from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *School Library Review*, *The Horn Book*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and many others. Her debut picture book, *Adrian Simcox Does NOT Have a Horse*, was selected for the Junior Library Guild and chosen as a Top 10 Indie Next Pick, translated into eight languages and adapted for stage. Her awards include the Comstock Read Aloud and Crystal Kite Awards. Campbell lives in Ohio with her husband, two children and three furry companions. Visit her at marcycampbell.com.

About this Guide

This guide consists of classroom discussion opportunities that can be used when reading, teaching, or discussing *Rule of Threes*.

Discussion Questions: Before Reading

1. Explore the images printed on the book jacket, the hardcover, and endpapers of *Rule of Threes*. What do you notice? What do you think this book is about? What specific images led you to these conclusions?
2. Think of your closest “friend group.” How long have you been friends? How did it feel when you or your friends began to branch out and expand your friend group?
3. What does your favorite place smell like? What do your favorite people smell like? What emotions are evoked when you remember or smell these aromas?
4. Describe your family or your closest friends. In what ways are they special?
5. Research the significance of the number three (3). Why is the number three (3) so unique in religion, culture, and society?

Discussion Questions: During Reading

1. Reflect on and discuss the following quotes:
 - “No one is saying you need to go out looking for new friends, but if you meet some people you hit it off with, sometimes new friendships just happen naturally, and some old friendships might move a bit more into the background” (p. 6).
 - “You should try and enjoy the good times, whenever they happen. Pretty good rule for life in general, when you think about it” (p. 224).
 - “Just try your best” (p. 264).
 - “A place for everything, and everything in its place” (p. 261).
2. Maggie’s grandmother shows signs of forgetfulness, especially at night. For example, she calls her “Margie” instead of “Maggie” and later forgets her name entirely. Maggie’s mother tells her that her grandmother is in the middle stages of Alzheimer’s disease. How does Maggie react to this news? What do you know about this debilitating, cruel disease?
3. Describe Maggie’s BFFs. What do you know about Rachel/Rakell and Olive? What are their personalities like? How do their personalities fit within the group?
4. Maggie loves interior design. Explain what the “thriller-filler-spiller” grouping is according to Maggie’s interior design practice. How does this grouping relate to her best friend group—the BFFs?
5. The power of smell is prevalent throughout this book. Review each of the following examples and discuss why smell is such a strong connector to people and emotions:
 - Maggie explains, “[All] houses had a smell, and Olive’s usually smelled like some kind of food I didn’t like. Rachel/Rakell smelled like her mom’s flowery perfume. The houses my mom sold had different sorts of smells, musty, or lemony or sometimes cat pee” (p. 24).
 - Maggie describes her closet as smelling like “jasmine hand lotion and like bubblegum wrappers and a little like old dusty things, like the smell from the boxes in the attic where my parents kept stuff from their own childhoods” before declaring that the smell of her closet “usually made me comforted and calm” (p. 36).
 - Tony says that Maggie’s room smells “like a grandma” (p. 80).
 - When Maggie goes to show her grandmother pictures of her newly designed room for the contest, she decides to make the bed and catches “a whiff of something sour” (p. 221).



6. Upon entering middle school, Rachel/Rakell wants to be known as “Ra-kell.” Why does this bother Maggie so much? How does their relationship change throughout the book?
7. When Maggie was younger, her parents experienced “some difficulties” in their marriage (p. 36). During that time, her father had an affair with another woman and she gave birth to his son, Tony, and raised him. When Tony later moves in with his father’s family, how does Maggie react? Describe her initial interaction with Tony.
8. Why is Tony moving in with Maggie’s family? Where is his mother?
9. How does Olive react to learning that Tony is Maggie’s half brother? Why does her reaction surprise Maggie?
10. The shell on Maggie’s desk gets broken. This is the shell that she brought home from the beach and tucked behind the items on her desk. Why is this shell so important? Why is she devastated when it shatters into pieces? Who actually broke the shell?
11. The middle school is having a contest. Teams are decorating areas of the school, and the area with the most votes wins a prize. The BFFs are redecorating the outer lobby area where the secretary sits. Describe their process and the design. Describe the other contestants’ designs.
12. Describe the relationship between Maggie’s father, Robert, and Tony. Why does Tony’s face light up when Maggie says, “You should probably just call him Dad from now on...I mean, Robert sounds weird, and...obviously he is your dad, so...” (p. 147).
13. Maggie’s grandma is coming to stay with the family as she waits for a room at the assisted living facility. She is going to stay in the room where Tony had been sleeping. When Maggie and Tony’s dad calls the bedroom the “spare bedroom,” why do they each become upset?
14. Describe the evolution of Tony’s relationship with Maggie. What are some key moments that stand out to you as especially significant?
15. Which team wins for their room decoration? How does Maggie react to this news? What does she do that is so out of character?
16. What is the relationship between Tony and Rachel/Rakell? Why does he give his mother her phone number?

Discussion Questions: After Reading

1. Visit the Alzheimer’s Association website at www.alz.org to learn more about Alzheimer’s disease and gain insight into “sundowning.” Maggie’s grandmother’s memory seems more sporadic at night. What happens to people with Alzheimer’s later at night?
2. Why do you think the author titled the book *Rule of Threes*? Explain.
3. What is the theme of this story? Expound upon your reason for selecting this theme.
4. Do you think Tony will connect with his mother again? What do you think will happen to her?

About the Guide Creator

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