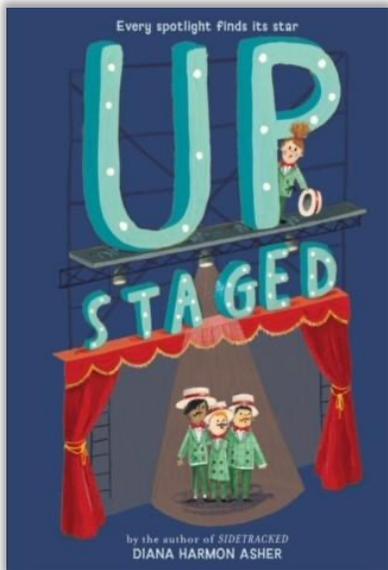


# UPSTAGED READING GUIDE



Shira Gordon is painfully shy. She rarely speaks and blushes at everything. And yet, when she's alone in her room, she'll sing and dance, dreaming she were different. So when her best friend forces her to audition for their school's production of **The Music Man**, she's mostly hoping the play will get canceled . . . but a tiny part of her hopes she'll get in.

And she does. As a member of the barbershop quartet. Playing a dude with a mustache is not exactly her dream role, but Shira is surprised by how much she loves rehearsing with her quirky new friends. When her teacher asks her to understudy the lead role, Marian the Librarian, she reluctantly accepts.

It's not easy to understudy Monica Manley, an eighth-grade diva who will not be upstaged. And things get even more complicated when a mysterious prankster starts playing tricks on Monica and

Shira's crush joins the cast. But something keeps Shira going, and it might just be Marian herself. Sure, Marian is a leading lady, but she's also misunderstood, lonely . . . and shy. And if a star can be shy, then maybe, just maybe, a shy person can be a star.

***“A sincerely moving story with a whole lotta heart.”***

**—Kirkus**

***“Readers who participate in chorus or theater will appreciate the articulate portrayal of the work, the tension, the camaraderie, and the occasional magic of those experiences.”***

**—Booklist**

***“As Upstaged shows so brilliantly, even the blaring of seventy-six trombones is not as glorious as the unfolding of a soul out into the world.”***

**—Gary Schmidt, Printz Honor and two-time Newbery Honor winner**

***“Warm, funny, and heartfelt, Upstaged will resonate with every young person who ever doubted their own abilities, sang in a school musical, or stood up for a friend.”***

**—Barbara Carroll Roberts, author of Nicki on the Line**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



### Chapter 1: Pilgrim Feet

We learn from Cassie that Shira is in the chorus, and she has a good voice. So, why doesn't Shira want to audition for the musical?

Cassie asks, "What happened to this being the year you were going to stop being Shy Shira?" Have you ever made a goal to change a quality or characteristic about yourself?

### Chapter 2: A Hat and a Mustache

On page 9, Shira says she hopes to see a sign saying,

PLAY CANCELED  
NO ONE HAS TO GET UP THERE ON  
STAGE AFTER ALL.

Is that what she really wants? What do you think she's really hoping for? What does Shira mean that seventh grade is "when people notice you. For all the wrong things?" Has there ever been a time you felt noticed for something you didn't want?

### Chapter 3: Radar

On page 18, Shira mentions codes. Are there literally "codes" in school? What are the "codes" that Shira is talking about? Are there any "codes" that you think exist at your school?

In Chapter 3, we meet Paul. What are your first impressions of Paul? What sets him apart from other characters we've met so far?

### Chapter 4: A Grubby Old Ball

Based on what Shira overhears, what is the disagreement between Mr. Hoover and Mrs. Manley? Who would you side with in this disagreement?

### Chapter 5: Cooties

In Chapter 5, we meet Shira's sister, Sophie. What is your first impression of Sophie? How are she and Shira similar, and how are they different?

### Chapter 6: Cartoon Chicken

On page 33, Shira shares a memory about specks of dust and shafts of light. What do you think the dust and the light represent? What does this memory tell us about Cassie?

Do you agree or disagree with Shira that, "Sometimes it comes in handy to have reasonably uptight parents?"

### **Chapter 7: Telling Fortunes**

On page 43, Shira responds to Paul's invitation dance like this: "No, thank you. I don't really dance," I say, which is partly true, but not nearly the truth." Can you explain what she means?

### **Chapter 8: Ta-Da!**

On page 52 when Shira thinks maybe she's not going to play Jacey Squires, she feels "a jolt of worry." What's changed for her?

In this chapter, we learn a little bit about the plot and setting of *The Music Man*. What similarities can you think of between *The Music Man* and the way Shira describes middle school?

### **Chapter 9: Starfish**

Do you think there's such thing as a "motherish" thing to say? Can you give some examples?

What does Sophie's "creatures in the wild" comment really mean?

### **Chapter 10: Sincere**

What does Vijay mean by "wordplay?"

### **Chapter 11: Skin Deep**

How do Monica and Shira disagree about the character of Marian? Why do you think the two of them feel differently about the character?

### **Chapter 12: Goal**

What do you think is keeping Shira from quitting? Is it only that she wants to "get to know Marian better" or are there other reasons?

### **Chapter 13: Dum Da Da-Da-Da**

Monica leaves her score behind a lot. Do you think there's significance to things you leave behind?

What do you think of Frankie's comment on page 80: "Isn't that stalking...It sounds like stalking"?

What does Shira mean when she says "I'm not really me, but I'm not pretending, either. It's some free space in between." Have you ever done something that made you feel that way, too?

### **Chapter 14: Ding Dong Ding**

What does Felix mean by "hypothetical?" Do you agree with Vijay that by using hypotheticals, "You get to see how people's minds work"?

### **Chapter 15: Perfect**

In this chapter, Shira finds out she has a special talent she didn't realize she had. Have you ever discovered a secret talent you didn't know you had?

Perfect pitch is a good thing, right? So, why is Shira self-conscious about it? Can you be as self-conscious about a good characteristic as you can about a bad one?

### **Chapter 16: A Toilet Flushes on F-Sharp**

Why is Cassie frustrated with Shira? Who do you sympathize with in this scene: Cassie or Shira?

### **Chapter 17: Spam**

What do you think of Ms. Channing? Can you make a prediction about her role in the story?

What did Monica reveal at the end of the chapter? What do you think her motivation was?

### **Chapter 18: Call the Banana Patrol**

How has your perception of Ms. Channing changed? How do you explain how she reacted at the end of the chapter?

### **Chapter 19: A Double Boiler**

A malapropism is when you get a phrase wrong. Why does Shira react to Monica's malapropisms with such frustration?

Why does Monica's comment to Cassie upset her so much?

### **Chapter 20: Glacial Erratic**

Based on how Shira describes Paul, what sets him apart from other kids at Hedgebrook? Have your perceptions of Paul changed at all since we first met him?

Paul says, "But it's different on stage...it's better. I'm better." Is there a place where you feel that way?



**\*\*\*INTERMISSION\*\*\***



Have you heard any songs from THE MUSIC MAN?  
Listen and see what you think!  
What are your favorites?

### **Chapter 21: Turtle Brave**

In this chapter, we learn about the special meaning the rock has for Shira, and for Paul. Is there a place or spot that has a special meaning for you? What is it, and why?

Do you think Paul is right? Could Monica be jealous of Shira?

### **Chapter 22: Jade Marimba Teal**

What's the importance of the costumes and what problems do they bring up?

### **Chapter 23: Crashing Cymbals**

Have you ever been swept up in a song, or heard a piece of music that transports you?

What does Shira mean by, "I've been looking right through Paul all this time. I haven't seen him at all."?

### **Chapter 24: A Thousand Kisses Shy**

So...would it (the kiss) count?

### **Chapter 25: Spotlight**

How does Mr. Hoover pick up on Shira's feelings? How does he compare to Dr. Leeds in that way?

What do you notice about Monica in this chapter? Do you have any new perceptions about Monica?

### **Chapter 26: One Door Closes**

How have Shira's feelings about playing Jacey Squires changed and why?

### **Chapter 27: Whomp, Whomp**

Do you have any ideas about who shredded Monica's script? Do you feel sorry for Monica?

### **Chapter 28: Benched**

Do you believe Melinda? What's changed in the barbershop quartet by the end of this chapter, and why?

### **Chapter 29: The Blue Marauder**

Do you think the Blue Marauder really is one of them?



### **Chapter 30: The Jaws of a Crocodile**

On page 197, Shira says, “Walking through the halls with a teacher is a special feeling...like we’re suddenly promoted to being trusted. I wonder if that’s what it’s like to grow up.” What does she mean, and have you ever felt that way?

### **Chapter 31: Mistaken**

Why do you think Felix and Vijay don’t want to go see Mr. Donnelly?

How would you describe Mr. Donnelly based on what we’ve seen?

### **Chapter 32: The Most Unassuming People**

When Vijay says, “You’re like the last person I’d suspect,” Felix looks “relieved, but a little disappointed, too.” Why would Felix feel that way?

### **Chapter 33: Purple Garlic**

How do you feel about the Blue Marauder at this point in the story?

### **Chapter 34: Murray**

What do you think about the saying, “When one door closes, another one opens”?

### **Chapter 35: Showtime**

Has there ever been a time you felt nerves similar to what Shira and the others are feeling in this chapter?

### **Chapter 36: Sincere**

Would you be satisfied if the story ended here? Why or why not?

### **Chapter 37: Break a Leg**

On page 252 Cassie tells Shira, “You can be shy and still be a star.” Do you think that’s true?

### **Chapter 38: Bells on the Hill**

What is the significance of the “trick” that *Seventy-Six Trombones* and *Goodnight My Someone* are composed of the same notes?

### **Chapter 39: Crush**

Do you agree with Shira’s decision? Should she have gone with Drew to Melinda’s?

### **Chapter 40: AKA Marian**

Has Monica changed over the course of the story, or is she still the same old Monica? What about Shira?

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Create a playlist of songs or pieces of music with special meaning to you.
- Choose a character and write a post-show diary entry from that character's point of view.
- Create a timeline of key moments from the story, showing how and when Shira has changed.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Diana Harmon Asher is the author of *Sidetracked*, which was an ABA Indies Introduce book and an ALA Notable Book. She is the mother of three sons and the daughter of two gifted singers. Her own first singing role was in a summer school production of *The Music Man*, where she played Mr. Jacey Squires.

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