In Ecstasy

Grade 10 students Sophie and Mia have been best friends since kindergarten. Mia admires how the beautiful and popular Sophie seems at ease in any situation. When Sophie gets Mia to try ecstasy at a party, Mia is delighted to find that all her insecurities disappear. Soon she is going out with Lewis, one of the most popular boys in school, and is the envy of all the girls. As her relationship with Lewis draws her deeper into the world of drugs, her friendship with Sophie suffers. Soon Mia is spinning out of control and Sophie struggles with her own sense of guilt and what she can do to help save her friend.

Activity Ideas

The following activity ideas are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

Comprehension activities:

• help readers to extend their general knowledge from prior experience
• develop reading strategies for comprehension
• bring relevance to the act of reading
• foster discussion and reflection through response to the text

Before Starting the Book

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest and develop predictions of what the text will be about.
1. Initiate with students a discussion of the roles that self-esteem and peer pressure play in teen society. Why do many teens crave acceptance from their peers? What might be some of the dangers of being influenced by peer pressure? Can peer pressure sometimes be a positive influence?

2. Ask students to reflect on a time when they did something that harmed or destroyed a friendship. How did they feel? What did they do to try to repair the friendship? What did they learn about friendship—and themselves—from the experience?

WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers’ reactions.

SECTION 1 (PAGES 1–82)

1. Invite students to make a list of the three adjectives they think best describe Sophie’s character. Have them write beside each adjective one or two pieces of evidence from the novel to support their choice. Then ask students to repeat the process for Mia. Students could then share their work with a partner and discuss any differences of opinion.

2. Ask students to revisit the first paragraph on page 17. Then ask them to suggest reasons why the author would have Sophie reveal so early in the novel that things are going to “unravel” and become “awful.” Does this ruin the suspense of wondering how things will turn out? Why or why not?

3. Have students write a journal entry about which of the two narrators they would rather have as a friend and why. Encourage students to consider both positive and negative characteristics of each narrator.

SECTION 2 (PAGES 83–177)

4. Recall with students that both of the narrators have gone through a transformation experience: Sophie became confident and popular with boys after the incident with Thomas Westcroft; Mia changed after she started going out with Lewis. Invite students to compare and contrast these two transformations and consider the pros and cons of each.

5. Have students work with one or two classmates to identify the key events that lead to the breakdown of Sophie and Mia’s friendship. Encourage them to consider the role that honesty (or lack of honesty) plays in this breakdown. As a follow-up, invite students to debate whether complete honesty between friends is always the best policy.
6. Invite students to make predictions about what will happen in the remainder of the novel. For example:
   - Will Sophie and Mia repair their friendship?
   - Will Lewis and Mia get back together?
   - Will Mia stop using drugs?
   - Will Glenn play a role? If so, what might that be?
Encourage students to share the reasons behind their predictions.

SECTION 3 (PAGES 178–254)

7. Draw students’ attention to the dilemma that Sophie faces—she wants to help Mia, but she doesn’t want to get mixed up in Mia’s world of drugs or get her in trouble with her parents or the police. Encourage students to share their feelings about the choices Sophie makes with regard to Mia, and anything they would have done differently if they were in Sophie’s situation.

8. Discuss with students how Mia changes before she is rescued by her mom. In a short oral or written report, have students respond to the following question:
   - Did the author make the changes in Mia’s personality and behavior believable? If yes, describe how the author accomplished this. If no, suggest ways in which the author could have made these changes more believable.

9. Explain to students that going to rehab is not a magical cure for addiction, and that people with addictions often continue to struggle after treatment. Then have students choose one of the following activities:
   - Work with a partner to role-play a conversation between Mia’s parents about how they can best support Mia after her treatment at rehab.
   - Write a journal entry as Mia, reflecting on what she can do to have a different kind of life after treatment.

AFTER READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

1. Elicit from students that one of the author’s purposes in writing the novel is to warn teenagers about the danger of drugs. In an informal essay, have students discuss whether they think this novel achieves that purpose more effectively than an information pamphlet about drug use, and explain the reasons that support their opinion.

2. Students could collaborate with one or two classmates to develop a teen friendship handbook, providing helpful advice on choosing friends and maintaining friendships.
3. Invite students to write a review of the novel, explaining their opinions on the realism of the plot, the author’s development of characters, the use of two narrators, and any other aspects of the novel they wish to comment on.

4. Write on the board the saying, “Things are not always as they appear to be.” Have students work in small groups to identify three or four examples of how this saying applies to the novel. Then combine the groups to share their thoughts.