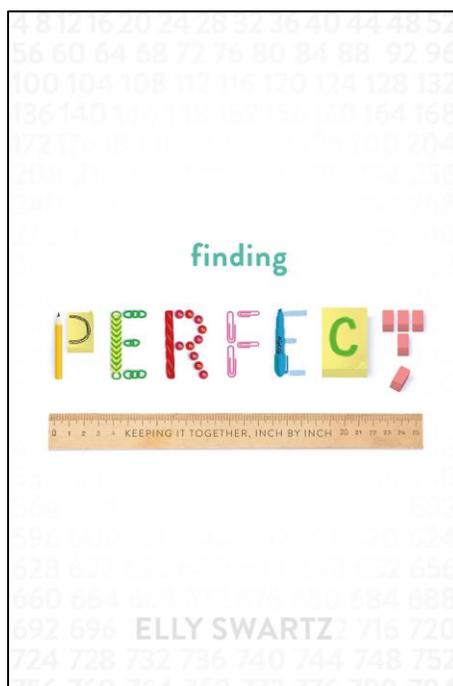


# A Teacher's Guide For FINDING PERFECT

*For use with Common Core Standards*

## About the Book



To twelve-year-old Molly Nathans, perfect is:

- The number four
- The tip of a newly sharpened No. 2 pencil
- A crisp white pad of paper
- Her neatly aligned glass animal figurines

What's *not* perfect is Molly's mother leaving the family to take a faraway job with the promise to return in one year. What if one year turns into two years turns into forever? So Molly hatches a plan to bring her mother home: win the Lakeville Middle School Poetry Slam. The winner is honored at a fancy banquet. If Molly wins, her mother will have to come home for the celebration. Right?

But as time passes, writing and reciting slam poetry become harder. Actually, everything becomes harder as new habits appear, and counting, cleaning, and organizing are not enough to keep Molly's world from spinning out of control.

In this fresh-voiced debut novel, one girl learns there is no such thing as perfect.

## About the Author



Elly Swartz is a middle-grade author and *FINDING PERFECT* is her debut novel. Swartz loves writing for children, but did not take a direct path to that career. Through the years, she's been a Sesame Place ride operator, lawyer, legal author, and college essay adviser. She lives in Brookline, Massachusetts with her husband, two sons and beagle named Lucy. If you want to connect with Elly or learn more about what she's working on, you can find her at [www.ellyswartz.com](http://www.ellyswartz.com), on Twitter @ellyswartz or [Facebook](#).

*To attain specific Common Core grade-level standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!*

## **General Discussion Questions**

### **Pre-reading Questions and Activities**

1. Define, draw, explain, or write a poem representing your idea of perfect. Compare and contrast your idea of perfect with those of your classmates.
2. Look at the cover/spine, and explain what you anticipate *Finding Perfect* to be about?
3. Explain what connotation the word 'perfect' has in the world?
4. Describe in detail a time when you felt like things felt perfect in your life. Where were you? What were you doing? How did it feel? Who else was there? What made it perfect?
5. How do you think someone would go about "finding" perfect?

CCSS ELA - Language L6.1, L6.2, L6.3, L6.5  
CCSS ELA - Reading: Literature RL6.2, RL6.4  
CCSS ELA - Speaking and Listening SL 6.1, SL 6.2, SL 6.4, SL 6.5  
CCSS ELA - Writing W6.2, W6.3

### **Post-reading Discussion Questions**

1. Hannah says, "Didn't you ever do something wrong so you could do something right?" Locate examples from the book when characters do something wrong so they can ultimately do something right? Explain why you think their behaviors are justified or not.
2. What do you think would and would not have been different for Molly if her mother had not taken the job in Toronto? Explain your thoughts.
3. How do the various characters in the book cope with challenges? In what ways do Molly, Ian, Kate, Hannah, and Mom cope with the various challenges that present themselves? Do you think those coping mechanisms are effective and/or positive over time? Use the chart below to record your thoughts.

Character	Challenge(s)	Coping Mechanism(s)	Effective/Positive

4. What prevents various characters in the book from saying what they want to say? Consider: fear of the truth, fear of being stigmatized, fear of disappointing others, fear of discomfort, fear of conflict.

5. Why do you think Molly was not able share her secret with anyone but was able to participate and perform openly in the poetry slam contest? Why do you think she was ultimately able to reveal her secret to Ian?

6a. Review the narrative technique used by the author on pages 73, 122, 127, 170, 194. What does the use of that technique reveal about Molly's changing character?

6b. Between page 132 and 219, how does Molly's counting affect you as a reader and what does it reveal about Molly's changing character?

7. Compare the poems in Chapter 29 and Chapter 51. What do you notice about these two poems? Why do you think the author chose to do this?

8. What is empathy and what role does it play in the story? In what way or ways do the following characters display this emotion in the story? Find textual evidence to support your findings. Use the chart below to record your thoughts.

Characters	Page Number	Display of Empathy
Molly		
Bridget		
Ian		
Kate		
Hannah		

9. Explain why the casual use of a phrase like, “I am so OCD,” is both incorrect and insensitive. By the end of the story, how do you think Molly would react to the uninformed use of this phrase?

10. Go back into the book and find at least three moments that take place in Mom’s closet. Identify what characters were present, explain the reason they were in the closet, and discuss the significance of the moment. What do those moments have in common?

Page number	Characters	Reason	Significance

CCSS ELA - Language L6.1, L6.2, L6.3, L6.4, L6.5  
CCSS ELA - Reading: Literature RL6.1, RL6.2, RL6.3, RL6.4, RL6.5, RL6.6, RL6.10  
CCSS ELA - Speaking and Listening SL6.1, SL6.2, SL6.3, SL6.4, SL6.6  
CCSS ELA - Writing W6.2, W6.2, W6.3, W6.4

### Enrichment Activities

1. Go back to your original depiction of “perfect,” and define, draw, explain or write a poem representing your new understanding of perfect. Have students share their pre and post depictions of perfect with the class.
2. Pick one of the following symbols from the story and write an extended metaphor or slam poem from Molly’s point of view.
  - Glass Figurines
  - Numbers
  - Sea glass
  - Sheets
  - Toothpaste
  - Pencil box
3. Pick two characters who have a shared experience and write an original poem for two voices using the chart below as a guide. For example: Molly and Ian’s poem on Mom’s absence or Molly and Hannah’s walk to school or Kate and Molly’s views on the beaded necklaces or Perfect Molly and Other Molly’s perspectives on the math test.

Spoken Alone by Character 1	Spoken Together	Spoken Alone by Character 2

4. Molly's view of herself differs greatly from how others perceive her. Although Molly's situation is unique, we are all a little like Molly—who we present to the world is not always in perfect alignment with who we are inside. Create an Identity Bag. The contents *inside* of your bag should represent how you view yourself—who you are as a person, what you believe, your strengths/weaknesses, fears, dreams, interests, viewpoints, etc. The outside of your bag should represent how you feel others perceive you—who you are as a person, what you believe, your strengths/weaknesses, fears, dreams, interests, viewpoints, etc. Clearly, there will be some overlap between the inside and outside of your bag, but think about the things that will differ. Feel free to be as creative as you need to be.

5. Grow a culture of empathy in your school. After coming up with a working definition of empathy, tell your students that they will become the ambassadors of empathy in their school. Find an opportunity for them to share their definition of empathy with younger students and challenge them to notice acts of empathy in their own community. Create an empathy board where the whole school can recognize and be recognized for both small and big acts of kindness. Watch how empathy is contagious.

CCSS ELA - Language L6.1, L6.3, L6.4, L6.5  
CCSS ELA - Reading: Literature RL6.2, RL6.4, RL6.5, RL6.9  
CCSS ELA - Speaking and Listening SL6.1, SL6.5  
CCSS ELA - Writing W6.4, W6.5

This guide was written by author Elly Swartz and educator Anna Kontos. As an educator for twenty years, Anna has served in both public and independent schools as a classroom teacher, literacy coach, English department head, and learning specialist. Anna holds a Masters in Education in language and literacy from Harvard.