

KEEPING IT REAL

BY PAULA CHASE

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Reading level/Interest level: 6th and up

Themes: Social classes, family, friendship and relationships



Background:

Co-founder of the award-winning blog, The Brown Bookshelf, Paula Chase is a longtime Inclusion Jedi and advocate for diversifying the type of fiction featuring Black characters that's highlighted among educators, librarians and parents. She's presented and blogged about the need to expand the focus beyond children's literature that centers the pain of the Black experience. Chase is the author of nine children's books. *So Done* (Greenwillow/HarperCollins), her critically acclaimed middle grade debut, was named a 2018 Kirkus Reviews Best Book. *So Done* and its companions, *Dough Boys* and *Turning Point* are blazing the trail for books that tackle tough and sometimes taboo topics for younger readers.

Synopsis:

Marigold Johnson can't wait to attend a special program at her family's business, Flexx Unlimited, for teens who love fashion. But Mari quickly realizes that she's out of place compared to the three other trainees—and one girl, Kara, seems to hate her on sight. As tension builds and the stakes at the program get higher, Mari uncovers exactly why Kara's been so spiteful. She also discovers some hard truths about herself and her family.

Paula Chase explores complex themes centering on friendships, family, and what it means to conform to fit in. *Keeping It Real* is also a powerful exploration of what happens when parents pick and choose what they shield their children from. Timely and memorable, Paula Chase's character-driven story touches on creativity, art, fashion, and music. A great choice for the upper middle grade audience.

Before reading discussion:

- What does friendship mean to you?
- How do you define loyalty between you and your friends?
- Does having money change a person or make them better than others?
- How important is it to follow your dreams? Would you sacrifice a friendship to achieve your dreams?
- Explain the importance of family.
- Do you keep secrets from people in your family? Explain.
- Is there ever a good reason to keep secrets?

Reading response questions:

- Choose one of the main characters and write about the kind of person they are.
- How did Mari and Justice's friendship change throughout the book. Use evidence from the book to support your idea.
- Compare and contrast Mari and Kara.
- What does Mari desire and motivate her? What are the obstacles that keep Mari from getting what she wants most? Explain using evidence from the text.
- Pretend you are Kara. Write about how she was feeling about going into the Style High internship and having to work with Mari everyday.
- Analyze how chapter 24 fits into the overall structure of the text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting and the plot.
- Agree or Disagree: Justice is loyal to Mari? Explain using evidence from the book.
- Write about the theme of the book. Use evidence from throughout the book to support your theme.
- Write about your thoughts on how the book ended. Did you like or dislike the ending? What would you change or keep?

Before reading activities:

- Define code switching. Explain why people of color feel they need or have to code switch.
- Look at the cover of the book and analyze the cover.
- What do you think the book is about?
- Does the cover give a positive vibe or a negative vibe? Explain.
- Look at the characters on the cover. Why do you think one character is standing in between the other two? What do you think the relationship is between the three of them?
- Read the synopsis of the book. Make a prediction about what will happen by the end of the book.
- Have a discussion about friendships and how friendships can evolve.



Character Analysis:

Growing ideas about characters. As you are reading, write down the ideas you have about the main characters in the book. Write down the page number and the evidence you have to support your ideas. (These ideas can be about their traits, how they act, the reason for actions, things they say)

Character	Idea/detail	Page	Why does this idea/detail matter? (Evidence/prove the idea)
Marigold			
Justice			
Marshall and Manita Johnson (Mari's parents)			
Kara			
Chandra			



Comprehension Questions by Chapter:

Chapter 1:

- How does Justice feel about Mari's family having money?
- Is Justice secretly jealous of Mari and her family?
- Describe Mari and Justice's friendship.

Chapter 2:

- What does it mean to code switch, and why would Mari need to code switch?
- Explain the quote: "That it's mad tiring when you not Black enough for some people and too Black for other people".

Chapter 3:

- What are the two sides of Mari as she refers to Justice see her. (pg. 32)
- Who profied Justice? Why does this make him so upset?
- Explain the commitment pledge situation at Flowered Arms. Do you agree or disagree that students on a scholarship have to sign this pledge?
- How does Justice feel about Flowered Arms Academy?

Chapter 7:

- Describe Kara.
- Describe Mari and Kara's interaction when they talked about where they were all from. (pg. 90-91)
- How is Mari feeling at the end of chapter 7?
- Make a prediction about how you think the other interns will treat Mari?

Chapter 8:

- After reading chapter 8, is Kara jealous of Mari? Explain.

Chapter 9:

- Is Justice ignoring Mari's text on purpose or is he just focusing on working and doing his best at Style High?
- How does Mari feel about wanting to be accepted by the other interns and her parents owning the Flexx.

Chapter 10:

- How has Kara shown she doesn't like Mari through this chapter?
- Do you think Mari is going to stick to Style High or quit after the way Kara treated her?

Chapter 11:

- How has Justice shown he doesn't want to work or be partnered with Mair?
- Who thinks Kara is more Justice's type? Why would they say this?
- Does the Style High internship mean more to Justice, Kara, and Chandra than it does to Mari? Why?
- Does Mari want to be more than friends with Justice?
- How is Mari and Justice's friendship changing?

Comprehension Questions by Chapter:

Chapter 12:

- How does Kara twist things Mari says into something negative?
- What do Chandra and Mari have in common?

Chapter 13:

- How might the Style High internship be different if Mari tells her parents what's going on between her and Kara?

Chapter 14:

- What moment of kindness did Mari and Kara show in this chapter? (pg. 176)
- Is Justice liking Kara real or is it all made up by Mari?
- After their moment of kindness, how did Kara show that she still didn't like Kara?

Chapter 15:

- Why doesn't Justice want people to believe him and Mari are a couple? (pg. 192-193)

Chapter 16:

- Was it a good idea to let Sammie go after Justice? Explain.
- How is Mari and Justice's friendship getting worse in this chapter?

Chapter 17:

- Why is Mari mad at the way Justice is acting about their friendship when she talks to Chandra?
- Who does Mari have to work with the style Magiq for the VGAs? How does she feel about this?

Chapter 18:

- How focused is Justice on the Style High internship?

Chapter 19:

- Who was the topic of Mari and Ms. Sadie's conversations?
- What does Ms. Sadie tell Mari about her situation with Kara?

Chapter 20:

- How is Mari treated by the white students at school and by friends that are Black outside of school?
- How does Mari feel having to prove her Blackness to others?
- Does Mari think she is better than everyone else?

Chapter 21:

- What does Mari's dad say about her and Justice's friendship and how Justice approaches the Style High program?

Comprehension Questions by Chapter:

Chapter 23:

- Whose outfits were chosen to be worn to the VGAs? How do the other interns feel about it?
- What happens when Mari tries to be nice to Kara?

Chapter 24:

- What caused the blow up between Mari and Kara?
- What bomb did Kara drop on Mari? Why do you think she chose this moment to tell Mari the truth her parents have been hiding?
- What was Kara's perception of Mari when she met her? Does this explain why she has been treating Mari the way she has?
- How does Mari feel about the information she learned about Kara?
- Make a prediction about what you think Mari parents will say about the situation.

Chapter 25:

- Were Mari's parents surprised that Mari knows the truth about Kara?
- What "deal" did Mari's parents make with Kara's mother?
- Mari realizes why Kara has been treating her the way she has. How does she say Kara has been treating her? Why? (pg. 311)
- How does Mari describe Kara?

Chapter 26:

- Describe the broken structure of Mari's family now that the truth has been told about Kara.
- How does Justice compare the judgment he feels at Flowered Arms to the judgment Mari casted on Kara?
- Why does Mari want Kara's address at the end of chapter 26?

Chapter 27:

- What wisdom does Ms. Sadie give to the Johnson family and why?

Chapter 28:

- What realization does Kara come to when she apologizes to Mari?
- What does Mari realize at the end of the book? What has she learned from talking to Kara?

English Language Art Activities (Writing)

- As you are reading, identify figurative language being used in the book and the meaning of the figurative language. This can be similes, metaphors, personification, and hyperbole. Keep a list on your teacher-provided graphic organizer.
- Choose a character from the book. Write about how that character changed throughout the book. Use evidence from the book to support your thinking.
- Write a new ending to the book. How do you think the story should continue after Mari goes to talk to Kara?

