

Nicole D. Collier

# JUST RIGHT JILLIAN

"This book  
was a joy from  
beginning to end!"

—**ANIKA NONI ROSE**,  
actress and voice of  
Disney's Princess Tiana







### About the Book

Fifth grader Jillian longs to wear bright colors in a school of neutral tones. To run and flip upside down while everyone else whispers and gossips. But no matter how hard she tries to be herself, shyness keeps her true brilliance hidden away. Even if it means getting the wrong glasses or losing an easy contest, Jillian keeps her mouth shut.

After a bully tells her she can never be a winner, Jillian gets fed up. She is determined to prove, not only that she's smart, but brave, too. But breaking out of her shell is easier said than done. Jillian has less than a month to overcome a lifetime of shyness and summon the courage to fight for herself.

### About the Author

Nicole D. Collier, Ph.D. grew up just south of Atlanta, GA, the only child of an accountant and a public school librarian.

She is a proud graduate of Florida A&M University (FAMU) where she earned a B.S. in Journalism. She also earned an M.S. in Elementary Education from Florida State University (FSU), and a Ph.D. in Learning, Design, and Technology from the University of Georgia (UGA).

Nicole has spent over two decades in education – first as an elementary teacher and now as a partner at Personality Matters, an executive training, coaching, and consulting firm.

She combines her love of story, research, and learning design, as she partners with leaders to develop experiences that challenge old thinking and inspire lasting change.

Nicole's stories often tackle the challenges and lessons that come when learning to be true to yourself. A self-proclaimed ever-victorious woman, she has been known to run, dance, and turn cartwheels on sunny days. *Just Right Jillian* is her debut novel.



## About This Guide





This guide provides a student-centered approach to reading the heartwarming story about Jillian. Student readers can use this guide to personally connect with Jillian and follow her journey toward growth and confidence. Teachers can use this guide as a supplement to standards-based activities, academic discussions, and many other engaging tasks they have planned.

This guide aligns with the [Common Core Standards](#) for 5th grade. Questions and activities can also be applied for grades 4-6. Use [“Before Reading”](#) questions to build background knowledge, spark readers’ thoughts, and engage them with Jillian and her current situation with friends and family. The [“During Reading”](#) has standards-based and relatable questions chunked with an overarching question for major points in Jillian’s journey. These questions can be used for student academic conversations and to deepen readers’ thinking about Jillian’s interaction with family, friends, and people at her school. Questions at the beginning of each section allow students to make various connections to what is happening with Jillian. *Dear Jillian* and *Journal Like Jillian* encourages each reader to maintain a personal connection with Jillian throughout the story.

This guide also includes [“After Reading Activities”](#) that extend students’ learning about topics related to Jillian’s unique journey.

### Before Reading

- Essential Questions:
  -  What unique qualities make people special?
  -  Why is friendship important?
- The main character, Jillian, has to keep a journal for her teacher. Like Jillian, you will journal as you read the story. Begin by looking at the book cover (front and back) and writing down thoughts about it. Respond to the following questions:
  - What do you think?
  - What do you wonder?
  - What do you hope? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7](#))





## During Reading

### Chapters 1-6

The main character, Jillian, is special, but she does not realize it. Throughout the first chapters of the book, you will get to know Jillian. But first, think about yourself. What is something special about you? How does it make you unique from people your age?

1. How are Jillian and Rashida alike? How are they different? Use details from the story to explain your thinking. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#))
2. How does Jillian see herself? How do you think Ms. Warren sees Jillian? Whose point of view is accurate? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6](#))
3. Remember, the story is told from Jillian's point of view. How might Jillian's perspective affect what the reader is told about the game, "Last Man Standing"? What if Rashida told details of the game? How might it be different from Jillian's? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6](#))
4. When Jillian's grandmother pretends not to hear her, how does that give Jillian the opportunity to be more confident? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#))
5. On page 10, Jillian's grandmother says "Being shy is one thing. Hiding is something else." Think about what Jillian has learned when she realizes: "Hiding means you're lying..." ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#))
6. Was Jillian being shy or hiding during "Last Man Standing"? Explain. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#))
7. Describe a situation when you were being "shy." Then describe a situation when you were "hiding." What was the difference?
8. What did Jillian's grandmother mean in Chapter Three when she said Jillian was "just right"? How could Jillian be "just right" while she doubted herself? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#))



9. What does “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” mean? Why was it important for the class not to count the eggs before they hatched into chickens? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)

10. *Dear Jillian*: On pages 22-23 Jillian wondered this about her parents:

“Could they see the inside of me? Maybe if they could see me better, Mama could give me better hints on what to do. How to stop hiding. How to stop worrying about what other people think.”

Write a note to Jillian explaining what she could do to stop worrying about what others think of her so she no longer has to hide. Who does she feel she can freely be herself with? What does she do around them? How can she do some of those same things around her peers at school? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)

11. Think about the creative names Marquez gave the eggs on page 27. Which one was the best? Why? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)

12. *Journal Like Jillian*: Now that you have read the first six chapters of the story, think about Jillian.:

- What do you think about her?
- What do you wonder about her?
- What do you hope for her?

## **Chapters 7-12**

In the next few chapters of the story, Jillian struggles to find her voice and speak up. Despite advice from her relatives and friends, she lacks confidence. Who is a confident person you know or have seen? This can be a real or fictional individual. What is one thing the person does to show confidence? What do you think helps that person to be confident?

1. Why do you think Jillian wants to stand out at school? What is one good way she stands out at home? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3)

2. What does it mean to “master” something? Think about Chapters 1-12. Which person in the story is mastering something? How? Who is not mastering something? Why not? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)
3. Summarize Chapter 9. Which events in the chapter encourage Jillian to “master her mind.” Explain.
4. *Dear Jillian:* Write a note to Jillian explaining how she can “master her mind.” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)
5. Jillian did not want the brown glasses because they “blended in.” Instead, she wanted the red ones so she could stand out. She names colors she thinks are confident, cheerful, and bright. What is a color she does not name that could be described as confident? Why is it a confident color? Think of two other adjectives (besides cheerful and bright) to describe that color. (Ex. Brown – dull, boring, common, ordinary). (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)
6. Jillian’s mother picks out the brown glasses even though Jillian wanted the red ones. Do you think it was reasonable for her mother to believe Jillian would prefer the brown glasses? Why or why not? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3)
7. In Chapter Nine, Jillian’s dad tells her “study long, study wrong” (pg. 64). What does he mean by this? Do you agree or disagree with her dad? How might this advice help Jillian become more confident? Explain. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)
8. *Dear Jillian:* Think about what motivates Jillian to compete in Mind Bender? Does she make the right decision? Write a note to Jillian letting her know how you feel about her decision to join the competition. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3)
9. *Dear Jillian:* Reread pg. 80 and jot down key words or phrases Marquez uses to describe “the heart of a champion.” Do you think Jillian has any of those characteristics? If so, how? If not, what would she need to do to develop the “heart of a champion”? What would she need to change? Write a note to Jillian explaining whether you think she has the “heart of a champion.” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4)



10. Marquez mentions JTRA. What does Jillian need “just the right amount” of to become the person her grandmother knows she can be? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#))
11. *Journal Like Jillian*: Think about how is Jillian different in this part of the story from the beginning? How is she changing? What happens in Chapters 10, 11, and 12 to show this?
- What do you think about the changes Jillian shows in Chapters 10, 11, and 12?
  - What do you wonder?
  - What do you hope? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))

### Chapters 13-20

As Jillian finds confidence, she discovers the encouragement and support of friends. Think about your best friend. What makes that person a friend to you? What is one thing your friend has done to help you? How does having this person as a friend make you feel?

1. How does Jillian’s viewpoint affect how she describes others in the story? How does her viewpoint about herself differ from her grandmother and parents? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6](#))
2. *Dear Jillian*: Marquez uses “JTRA” to give Jillian confidence during the “redo” final round for Mind Bender. Think about why that acronym gives Jillian confidence. Create a different acronym and write to Jillian explaining what it means and how it can encourage her whenever she needs to speak up about anything. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#))
3. How is Rashida different from what Jillian thought of her in the beginning of the book? How does Jillian’s point of view change about Rashida? What happens to cause this? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#))
4. Jillian thinks about whether Rashida is a “friend” or “foe” in Chapter 15. What is the definition of friend? What is the definition of foe? Write those definitions in your own words. Would you use “friend,” “foe,” or another word to describe Rashida? Use

evidence from the story to explain your thinking. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#))

5. Summarize the events in Chapter 15. How do events in the chapter connect with the title? Why is the chapter called “Fly Away”? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
6. Choose the best idiom Jillian’s friends use to encourage her to “Speak Up” in Chapter 27. Explain what it means. Why is it better encouragement than one of the other sayings? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#))
7. *Journal Like Jillian*: Jillian shows courage that other people notice.
  - What do you think about Jillian’s courageous actions in this part of the story? Be sure to cite which chapter and explain how she shows courage.
  - What do you wonder about her new courageous behavior?
  - What do you hope? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))

## Chapters 21-27

Jillian begins to take on the heart and mind of a champion – even though she faces an obstacle out of her control. Who is someone (real or fictional) you consider a champion? Explain what makes this person a champion.

1. Read Marquez and Jillian’s conversation about champions on pgs. 135-136. Do you think Marquez or Jillian is right about what makes a champion? Explain your thinking. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#))
2. *Dear Jillian*: Think about what Jillian’s thoughts on pg. 148:

“Everyone wants to be like Rashida, but it sounds like Rashida just wants to be . . . free.”

Write a note to Jillian letting her know that it is okay to appreciate Rashida as a friend, but it is more important that she continues freely being who Jillian truly is. Describe how



it would look for Jillian to be free at this point the story. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#))

3. How does Jillian “have the power” in Chapter 22? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
4. What is the correct spelling (the one found in a dictionary) for the title of Chapter 26? What does the word mean? Write a summary for Chapter 26. How are the major events in the chapter connected to the title? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
5. How is Jillian similar to the chick embryo? What are things around Jillian that she needs to suck up before she can reach her goal? Use details from the story to explain your thinking. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#))
6. What does it mean when a baby chick pips, zips, and escapes? Jillian thinks she has “pipped.” Do you agree? Why or why not? Create a drawing to show how Jillian has done this. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
7. *Journal Like Jillian*: Jillian could not help missing the final round to qualify for Mind Bender, so now she has to really prove that she wants to compete by speaking up.
  - What do you think Jillian will do in the next part of the story?
  - What do you wonder?
  - What do you hope? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#))

## **Chapters 28-34**

At the end of the story, Jillian’s teacher helps her understand that one of the biggest things she had to overcome was the battle within. Write about a time you or someone you know had a tough inside battle. Describe the challenge or battle. How did the person overcome it?

1. Evaluate the four steps of the plan on pg. 182. What is one smart thing the team decided to do? Why? What is one thing they didn’t think of that would better convince the teachers and Kyle to support a redo round? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#))

2. Describe Jillian and her friends' presentation to gain teachers' support for a redo round. What is something you think Jillian learned about teamwork? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#))
3. How would you describe William's behavior in Chapters 30 and 31. Why do you think he behaves that way? How does he provide encouragement to Jillian? What do you think about Jillian's response to William? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
4. Why do you think Ms. W. was successful at hatching chickens? What did she do during the story that made a difference? What does that show about her as a teacher? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#))
5. How does remembering the stages of chick development help Jillian during the final round of Mind Bender? ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#))
6. *Dear Jillian:* Now that Jillian is a champion, write a note congratulating her. What two things or events in the story you think helped her become the champion? Be sure to cite chapters or page numbers in your explanation. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
7. How does being a champion change the way Jillian tells the story? Explain one difference you notice between Chapter 34 and Chapter 1 of the story. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6](#))
8. Ms. W tells Jillian, "The toughest battle, the most important one, is always the one inside." What does that mean? How does this relate to Jillian at the beginning of the story? How does it relate to her at the end? Use specific events or chapters in the story to explain your thinking. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
9. *Journal Like Jillian:* Reflect on Jillian's journey with her friends.
  - What do you think?
  - What do you wonder?



- What do you hope?



### After Reading


1. Theme: Jillian has learned several lessons. Choose one of the topics below you think Jillian has learned throughout her journey. Write a thematic statement that shows what she learned about the topic. Explain how she overcame one major obstacle to learn this important lesson. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#))

 Friendship


 Confidence


 Gratitude


 Family


 Being Yourself

2. Characterization: Research the stages of a chick embryo development. Draw a chart that shows each stage. Trace Jillian's journey from shyness to self-confidence to that of the embryo. Reference specific chapters and pages in the book. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#), [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#))
3. Research: "The Heart of a Champion." Marquez called Ida B. Wells and John Lewis champions. He also mentioned Colin Kaepernick as someone noteworthy as well. Choose one of them to research. Answer these questions as you find information:

 What are important details about his or her childhood?

 What did he or she spend a lot of time doing? Why?

 What makes this person a champion?


 How are you or someone you know similar to this champion?


Create a blogpost, podcast, or PowerPoint using the information you found. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.7](#))

4. Jillian's Friends Get Social: Jillian realizes the importance of supportive friends. Choose Rashida, Marquez, Shelby, or William. Pretend they are setting up one social media account to get social. How would their imaginary TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, or any other account look? Create the following:

 Profile picture

 Creative social media name


 Tagline (three or four words that describe the character)

 What makes him or her a good friend to Jillian

5. JTRA: Throughout the story, Jillian was reminded that she had “just the right amount” of what she needed to be more confident. Which of your friends or loved ones has JTRA but doesn't know it? Consider these questions:

 What is their goal or something they are working toward getting better at?

 What do they have “just the right amount” of that will help them?

 How can they use what they have to help them achieve their goal?

Create a greeting card or poem encouraging them about their JTRA and how they can use it.

6. “I Am Just Right!” Throughout the story, Jillian learns that it is totally acceptable to stand out as herself. She is just right. Think about what makes you *you*. Write a paragraph that explains what is “just right” about you. Create a collage that visually represents your paragraph.

