

SAVE ME A SEAT

Teacher / Facilitator Guide

CENTRAL IDEA

What does it take to actually make room for someone — and what assumptions do we have to let go of first?

Resource Information

Novel: Save Me a Seat by Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan

Setting: Albert Einstein Elementary School, Hamilton, New Jersey — Mrs. Beam's fifth-grade class

Designed for: Advanced readers in grades 4–6, with adaptable supports

TEXT USE

Use a teacher-approved copy of the complete novel. This resource supplies original prompts and no reproduced passages.

Resource Overview & Intended Use

A five-mission whole-novel inquiry for advanced readers, designed for seminar, compacted ELA, enrichment, or a mixed-readiness classroom. It emphasizes perspective-taking across two alternating first-person narrators, the difference between assumption and evidence, and the real costs of bullying and isolation.

Nonnegotiable alignment

The novel is organized by the five days of Ravi and Joe's first week of fifth grade, each paired with its cafeteria food. Missions 1–5 follow Monday through Friday in order. The culminating mission requires the complete novel.

Text & Edition Information

- Novel: *Save Me a Seat* by Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan; published 2016 by Scholastic Press.
- Told in short, alternating first-person chapters narrated by Ravi and Joe; the first and last chapters are both narrated by Ravi.
- Organized across five school days: Monday (Chicken Fingers), Tuesday (Hamburgers), Wednesday (Chili), Thursday (Macaroni and Cheese), Friday (Pizza).
- The book includes two glossaries (Ravi's and Joe's) and two family recipes; use these as supplementary, not required, reading.
- This guide reproduces no novel quotations. Verify any teacher-added quotation against the exact classroom edition.

Content Care

Preview social bullying (exclusion, theft, engineered public embarrassment), a scene in which Ravi is tricked into eating food that violates his family's religious dietary practice, and classroom depictions of Auditory Processing Disorder. Discuss analytically; do not reenact bullying or mocking of accents; offer alternate response modes for any student who needs them.

Learning Objectives & Conceptual Questions

- Track a developing claim across a complete novel and revise it as both narrators add evidence.
- Practice perspective-taking across two limited first-person narrators who each know less than the reader does.
- Distinguish assumption from evidence, especially assumptions based on a single shared trait (like heritage).
- Analyze bullying as a system of power and popularity, not just individual meanness.
- Recognize a disability (Auditory Processing Disorder) and a religious dietary practice accurately, without armchair diagnosis or stereotype.
- Design an honest, evidence-based reflection on identity and belonging.

Conceptual spine

What does it take to actually make room for someone — and what assumptions do we have to let go of first?

Implementation Map

Phase	Reading	Core Work	Checkpoint
Launch	Before Ch. 1	Pre-assessment; norms; edition check	Initial profile
Mission 1	Monday	Chicken Fingers	What does Ravi assume about Dillon, and what does Joe already know — and why can the same person look so different to each of them?
Mission 2	Tuesday	Hamburgers	What does it cost Joe to stay quiet about what he needs, and what does it cost Ravi to assume his old strengths will simply carry over?
Mission 3	Wednesday	Chili	What changes for Ravi the moment he realizes what Dillon actually did — and why does that moment matter more than the embarrassment itself?
Mission 4	Thursday	Macaroni and Cheese	Both boys spend most of this week alone — what does isolation protect them from, and what does it cost them?
Mission 5	Friday	Pizza	What has to happen before Ravi and Joe can actually see each other, instead of just occupying the same classroom?
Synthesis	Complete novel	The Whole Truth Assignment	Product + reflection

Suggested Timing

6–9 sessions: one launch, five mission seminars (one per day of the novel), one context lab, and one exhibition/reflection. Compact routine skill practice when pre-assessment evidence shows mastery.

Pre-Assessment Interpretation

- Score dimensions separately; do not total them into a fixed ability label.
- Advance quickly when a student already explains why two honest accounts of the same event can differ.
- Teach evidence-location and claim-reasoning links explicitly when needed.
- Offer oral, visual, or speech-to-text response modes without reducing conceptual demand.
- Reassess after Mission 3; profiles should change. Full dimensions and levels are in the companion Pre-Assessment & Interpretation Guide.

Facilitation Principles

- Ask “What makes you say that?” then “What does this character not know yet that the reader does?”
- Keep both narrators' needs visible — this is never only Ravi's story or only Joe's.
- Separate explaining Dillon's behavior from excusing it.
- Avoid treating any one culture, disability, or family as representative of a whole group.
- Use wait time, written entry points, and structured turn-taking.

High-Level Presses

- What does this character assume, and what evidence is that assumption actually based on?
- Who has the power to make this classroom different, and what would it cost them?
- What would count as evidence that two people actually understand each other, not just tolerate each other?
- What can this story illuminate about real bullying or real disability — and what needs outside checking?

Mission 1 Facilitation: Monday — Chicken Fingers

Essential question

What does Ravi assume about Dillon, and what does Joe already know — and why can the same person look so different to each of them?

Look-Fors

- Ravi's confidence and his assumption that shared heritage means instant friendship
- Joe's dread, built from years of prior experience with Dillon
- the teacher mispronouncing Ravi's name and the class misjudging his accent

Seminar Sequence: Silent Noticing + Turn-and-Talk

- Silent noticing (2–3 minutes): jot one thing Ravi's opening chapter assumes, and one thing Joe's opening chapter already knows.
- Turn-and-talk: compare notices before any whole-group claims.
- Whole-group seminar with the Assumptions Ledger visible.
- Exit line: “I used to think ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “Ravi is silly for assuming Dillon will be his friend.” Press students to explain why the assumption is reasonable given what Ravi doesn't know yet — and why sharing one thing in common (heritage) doesn't guarantee sharing everything.

Craft Focus: Two Openings, Two Assumptions

Compare Ravi's and Joe's opening chapters side by side. What does each narrator expect before any real evidence arrives, and how does the book let you see both expectations at once?

Mission 2 Facilitation: Tuesday — Hamburgers

Essential question

What does it cost Joe to stay quiet about what he needs, and what does it cost Ravi to assume his old strengths will simply carry over?

Look-Fors

- Joe's Auditory Processing Disorder and the classroom noise that overwhelms him
- Ravi's confusion when skills that worked in Bangalore don't translate directly
- small moments where each boy could ask for help, and doesn't

Seminar Sequence: Fishbowl

- Silent evidence sort (2–3 minutes).
- Fishbowl: an inner circle discusses what's stopping Joe from speaking up; an outer circle tracks the reasoning moves used.
- Outer circle reports patterns before the whole group responds.
- Exit line: “I used to think ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “Joe should just tell someone” as a simple fix. Press students to name the specific things making it harder — noise, embarrassment, fear of not being believed — rather than treating silence as a simple choice.

Craft Focus: Dramatic Irony Between Narrators

Find one moment where you, holding both Joe's and Ravi's chapters, know something that neither boy knows yet on his own. How does alternating narration let the reader hold more truth than either character?

Mission 3 Facilitation: Wednesday — Chili

Essential question

What changes for Ravi the moment he realizes what Dillon actually did — and why does that moment matter more than the embarrassment itself?

Look-Fors

- Dillon tricking Ravi into eating food that breaks his family's practice
- Ravi's reaction moving from confusion to understanding
- the gap between how the class sees the moment and what it actually cost Ravi

Seminar Sequence: Structured Academic Controversy

- Paired controversy: one partner argues this was “just a joke,” one argues it was real harm, using only textual evidence.
- Partners must produce one joint, qualified position before the whole-group seminar.
- Whole-group seminar with the Assumptions Ledger visible.
- Exit line: “I used to think ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “Dillon is just evil” as a full explanation. Press students to consider what need, fear, or pressure might sit underneath his cruelty — without ever excusing the harm it causes.

Craft Focus: A Turning Point Built on Consequence

Notice how this scene is written for emotional weight rather than shock. Where does the text slow down to let the consequence land, instead of rushing past it?

Mission 4 Facilitation: Thursday — Macaroni and Cheese

Essential question

Both boys spend most of this week alone — what does isolation protect them from, and what does it cost them?

Look-Fors

- Ravi and Joe each retreating further into themselves after Wednesday
- moments of near-connection between the two boys that don't quite land
- adults who notice something is wrong, and adults who don't

Seminar Sequence: Two-Column Chart + Synthesis

- In pairs, build a chart: “What Ravi doesn't know about Joe” and “What Joe doesn't know about Ravi.”
- Compare charts across pairs before the whole-group seminar.
- Whole-group seminar tests whether isolation is a choice, a habit, or something forced on each boy.
- Exit line: “I used to think ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept “the boys are just too different to connect.” Press students to name specific, concrete things Ravi and Joe already have in common that neither of them has noticed yet.

Craft Focus: Structure as Isolation

The boys are physically apart for nearly the whole book, and the chapters alternate without them meeting. How does that structural separation itself perform their loneliness on the page?

Mission 5 Facilitation: Friday — Pizza

Essential question

What has to happen before Ravi and Joe can actually see each other, instead of just occupying the same classroom?

Look-Fors

- the identity-object assignment as a forced moment of honesty
- the first real, direct interaction between Ravi and Joe
- what does and doesn't get resolved by the end of the week

Seminar Sequence: Socratic Seminar

- Each student submits one genuine question about the ending.
- The group selects and pursues the most generative question together.
- Facilitator presses for textual evidence, not guesses — direct rehearsal for the culminating mission.
- Exit line: “I used to think ... now I think ... because ...”

Misconception to Press

Do not accept that the ending “solves” bullying. Press students to separate what's actually true by Friday (a first real connection between two boys) from what's still unresolved (Dillon's behavior, the wider class dynamic).

Craft Focus: Convergence and Pacing

Compare the pacing of these final chapters to the earlier ones. How does the alternating structure change — faster cuts, closer proximity — as the two threads finally meet?

Context Packet Integration

After Mission	Context File	Purpose
1	Auditory Processing Disorder: What It Actually Is	Ground Joe's experience in real, documented facts before judging his behavior.
2	Classroom Supports That Help	Connect the story to practical, real accommodations.
3	India Is Not One Thing	Complicate the assumption that Ravi and Dillon should understand each other automatically.
4	Food, Faith, and Identity	Deepen the stakes of the Wednesday chili scene respectfully.
5	What Moving Countries Is Really Like for Kids	Ground Ravi's adjustment in real newcomer-student research.
6	Bullying, Power, and Popularity	Name the system around Dillon's behavior, not just his character.
7	Reading Two Truths at Once	Connect the dual-narrator structure to real differences in eyewitness accounts.

Culminating Mission Facilitation

Complete novel

Require evidence from both narrators across the full week. A partial reading does not meet the task.

Students complete The Whole Truth Assignment: choose an object that reflects who they are, write a short unsigned reflection (mirroring Mrs. Beam's assignment), and pair it with a written analysis using evidence from both Ravi's and Joe's chapters about what it actually takes to make room for someone.

- Approve proposals only after checking novel evidence from both narrators and at least one context source.
- Require students to name one assumption they had to let go of, using evidence from the text.
- Allow varied products but hold one rubric.
- Assess the reasoning, not agreement with the facilitator.

Conference Questions

- What does your strongest piece of evidence establish — and not establish?
- Which character in the book most complicates a simple rule like “just be kind”?
- Where does your reflection risk treating one group (a culture, a disability) as if everyone in it is the same?

Assessment & Differentiation

Need	Access Without Lowering Rigor	Extension
Decoding / fluency	Audio paired with text; one day per session	Compare how each day's chapters open
Writing production	Oral rehearsal; speech-to-text; modular paragraphs	Persuasive closing paragraph
Executive function	Milestones; evidence cards; visible checklist	Student-managed reading calendar
Discussion entry	Questions in advance; written first turn	Seminar co-facilitation
Mastery shown	Compact repeated organizers	Independent source critique
Emotional access	Preview; pause; choice of response mode	Compare to another bullying/newcomer story

Implementation Checklist

- ☐ Confirm the edition and record bibliographic data.
- ☐ Read the complete novel before facilitating.
- ☐ Remove or verify every locally added quotation.
- ☐ Send content preview and establish no-mocking, no-reenactment norms.
- ☐ Administer and interpret the pre-assessment dimensionally.
- ☐ Use aligned mission ranges (one school day per mission) in every handout.
- ☐ Verify APD and religious-practice facts against the context packet's sources.
- ☐ Require both narrators' evidence for culmination.
- ☐ Collect student access feedback and revise.

Facilitator Reflection
