## Synchro Boy – Shannon McFerran

## Chapter Discussion Questions

**Chapter One**

What is Bart’s view of himself as his stands on the bulkhead at the opening of the novel? How does his self-regard present a conflict to be explored in the story?

How is the setting introduced in the novel? How does it provide a stage for the story conflict?

Do you think Bart’s suspension is justified? Why or why not? If you think it wasn’t, how do you think his coach should have handled the conflict?

Geoff calls synchro swimming “water ballet.” Why?

**Chapter Two**

Have you had an experience of trying an activity that takes you back to a younger time, like Bart did while he swam under water? If so, how did you react? How did it make you feel? If not, what do you think would give you the experience of feeling like you did when you were little? Do you think that would affect how creative you feel now?

Where do you still see sports designated as being specific to one gender? What do you think is happening to competitive sports as more gender diverse athletes join?

**Chapter Three**

What can you tell about Bart’s experience of high school?

How does Bart react to Riley’s attempt to stand up for him while Bart was trying synchro? Do you think Bart is fair in his response?

**Chapter Four**

How is Bart’s middle school experience similar or different from your own?

What problems did joining swimming solve for Bart at the time? Is it still working? Why or why not?

Bart recalls a transition point in his past that pushed him to give up something he loved so that he could move on. Do you think you would have made a similar choice? What do you think the decision cost Bart socially/emotionally, and developmentally?

What sort of character was Bart as an eleven year old? What sort of character is he now in the novel? Point to specific examples to support your view.

**Chapter Five**

What is Bart’s relationship with his best friend like? Cite specific evidence from the text so far to support your description.

Why do you think Bart likens Erika’s swimming to an ice dancer? What do you think might be significant about that comparison from Bart’s point of view as a boy?

What conflicts are established in the novel’s present time so far? Think about internal and external conflicts.

**Chapter Six**

What does Erika feel certain of when she comes over to talk to Bart?

Knowing what you know about Bart so far, is Erika right about him lying to her about why he was a dancer? What makes you think so?

**Chapter Seven**

What similarities can you draw between Bart’s treatment by his coach and his treatment by his teammates? What does this say about the culture of his club?

Why do you think Bart rejects Dive Boy’s calling him a “synchro boy?” What is the significance of the name “Synchro Boy” over the course of the story?

Describe Bart’s internal thoughts and feelings when he finds himself wanting to check out the guy from the diving team in the hot tub. What is at the heart of his discontent in this scene? How does Bart feel then when Dive Boy witnesses the harassment in the showers?

Bart remarks that it’s “like middle school again” with Riley. What do you think is leading to this change in the dynamic with Bart, Riley, and the other Rosa Waves members? How does it seem to be affecting Bart and Riley’s friendship?

**Chapter Eight**

Do you think Bart is okay with the answer he gives Sunny when she asks him to compete? Why? What are all of the opposing forces at this point in his decision?

**Chapter Nine**

What is Riley picking up on at the beginning of this chapter? How does that relate to what Bart feels when he finds out Riley hasn’t told him about asking Casey out?

What do you think of Bart’s reasons for why he can’t swim synchro with Erika? Do they make sense given the pressures he feels he’s under? Or do they speak to unfounded fears, as Erika might suggest when she texts Bart, ‘Don’t be scared?’

What revelation does Bart have about himself when he’s watching Bill May swim?

**Chapter Ten**

How does Bart’s mom’s note influence his behaviour in this chapter? How do you think it influences him through the rest of the story? Do you think a parent’s support has this kind of power in real life?

After Bart tells Coach Cragg he’s leaving, he listens to one voice telling him he’s going to be okay, and one that tells him he’s not. Do these voices articulate the same tension he’s been feeling all along, or are they saying something different now in the moment when he’s made the break? How do you think they will help or hinder Bart now?

**Chapter Eleven**

Bart thinks of a future when he’s holding a “medal and a girlfriend.” What do you think this image comes from? On what levels is it motivating Bart? How will it challenge him?

How do you think Bart’s choice is going to throw off “the stupid gender police?” Who are the gender police in his world?

**Chapter Twelve**

How would you describe the relationships among the girls on the synchro team? How does Chelsea feel about Bart? Why might she feel this way?

Why do you think Riley is upset as he is about Bart leaving racing?

**Chapter Thirteen**

Describe Bart’s relationship with his Dad. What does Bart want from him? Does he get what he wants at the end of this chapter? Explain.

**Chapter Fourteen**

What does Chelsea try to impress on Bart? Do you think the others aren’t being realistic about his chances in competition? Why or why not?

What does Chelsea mean when she says, “You’re such a racer, Bart?” What do you think it says about his personality?

**Chapter Fifteen**

Why do you think Erika says Amanda Gates would be relieved to find out that Bart is gay?

The girls examine recordings of Mixed Duet swims to see if the guys wear makeup. Discuss the significance of makeup and gender expression to the sport and the inclusion of men in competition.

**Chapter Sixteen**

Why do you think Chelsea is disappointed to see Bart in makeup, with hair gelled?

What do you think Bart’s mom is afraid of? What do her comments at the end of the chapter suggest?

**Chapter Seventeen**

How is Bart taking control of his situation after regionals? Explain the factors you think are leading to his determination, rather than driving him away.

**Chapter Eighteen**

Bart comments that the world isn’t ready for a male-male synchro duet, yet. Do you think he’s right? Discuss the significance of the sole event for men in synchro being a mixed male-female duet, especially in light of the entire range of gender identity.

**Chapter Nineteen**

What does Bart’s pushing his hypoxic training in this chapter say about him? How does this explain some of his choices that he’s made in the story so far?

**Chapter Twenty**

What does Bart mean when he says “apparently we can both talk around this,” when Erika suggests Kim is “into him?”

**Chapter Twenty-one**

Discuss the different reactions the three have to shaving their heads. What does it say about each character?

**Chapter Twenty-two**

What does Bart’s mom taking him makeup shopping say about her, and her relationship to her son? Can you think of a time when a parent or guardian did something for you that they might not have before?

What’s the significance of Erika lifting Bart in the routine?

Why does Bart feel that it’s important the Mixed Duet event gets included in the Olympic Games?

**Chapter Twenty-four**

The Rosa Waves members don’t seem to have changed in their treatment of Bart. Why do you think that is? What would have to change for things to go differently?

Why do Bart and Erika say Chelsea makes it too easy to hate her? Do you think you’d hate Chelsea? Why or why not?

What little things make Bart and Erika more connected in the park scene? Discuss specific moments or exchanges.

**Chapter Twenty-five**

Why do you think Bart pretends he doesn’t see Erika at the GSA meeting? Discuss specific events or thoughts prior to this that you think may have influenced his decision.

**Chapter Twenty-seven**

Bart hears someone call him a “fag” in the hallway. Terms like fag, dike, and queer have been reclaimed by LGBTQ2S people, but we sometimes still hear them used as derogatory terms today. Do you still hear them used that way in your school or community? Discuss what would need to happen in Bart’s school for that to change.

What do you think leads Bart to being so irritable when he’s talking to Julia after walking out of the meeting? Cite specific examples.

What do you think of Julia’s intervening with Bart, Dave and Erika? Do you think you’d go about it the same way, if you were in the same situation? Why or why not?

Do you think that Bart is right when he says that synchro is viewed by others as “a sport for girls or gays or boys who want to be girls?”

**Chapter Twenty-eight**

Bart says “synchro’s hard enough. I don’t need the rest of my life to be hard, too.” What does he mean by this?

How has Bart been changing Chelsea over the course of the story? Discuss specific examples.

**Chapter Thirty-one**

How would you describe Bart and Erika’s relationship? Would you want to be in a relationship like theirs? Why or why not?

At this point in the story, you’re starting to see a new picture of Chelsea. Do you think she truly cares about Bart? Why or why not?

**Chapter Thirty-two**

Why do you think Erika decides to follow Bart out on his walk? What makes her talk to him? What is her take on why he’s mad?

**Chapter Thirty-four**

Why is Bart losing faith in the possibility for him in this sport at this point in the story? What was he hoping for that seems impossible now, and what events have pushed his dream further away?

**Chapter Thirty-five**

What’s the “twelve year old cliff” that Bart mentions? Were you committed to an activity you gave up around that age? Or did you stick with something you started when you were younger? What were the factors that led to your decision?

**Chapter Thirty-six**

When Bart remarks that Erika’s feminine movements look right on him, and that no one’s ever going to give him a 6-point-anything on how Boy he is, what is Bart feeling ready to let go of? How do you think this letting go leads him to get together with Dave? How do you see this spilling over into the rest of his life—to his relationship with Erika, Riley, his swimming, and his relationship to his former teammates?

**Chapter Thirty-seven**

What do you think Bart is grieving at the end of the chapter when he breaks down while he’s stretching in front of the mirror?

**Chapter Thirty-eight**

Erika talks about everything that they give up to commit to a sport like they have at their age. What do you think they get in return? Does the trade off seem worth it to you?

**Chapter Thirty-nine**

Describe the significance of Bart’s going to the top of the dive tower now. How is this showing Erika and himself what he’s ready for?

**Chapter Forty**

Bart says, “It’s time the pool and the wider world admitted that there are many ways to be a boy.” The world may be getting it, but some spaces are slower to understand or evolve. Where do you see this tension?

When synchronized swimming or artistic swimming first debuted, men and women swam and competed in the sport, but then clubs stopped including male swimmers. Why do you think men aren’t included now at the highest level of competition? What do you think it would take to change this?

**Chapter Forty-one**

Sunny tells Bart that the little guys are there in the club because he is. How important do you think teens are as role models for younger kids? How much influence do you feel you have? Did you look up to people your age when you were younger? How could this be important for creating change in a whole sport?