

Handout

What Is Normal?

Directions: Read and annotate the following two quotations from Jonathan Mooney's book *Normal Sucks: How to Live, Learn, and Thrive Outside the Lines*. Use the following symbols to annotate:

- ★ **Star** information in the text that **changed** your thinking.
- ! Put an **exclamation point** next to information in the text that **challenged** your thinking.
- ✓ Put a **checkmark** next to information that **confirmed** what you believe or already knew.

About the Author

"Jonathan Mooney is an award-winning writer, entrepreneur, and activist with dyslexia, who did not learn to read until he was twelve years old. He is a graduate of Brown University, with an honors degree in English Literature. Jonathan has spent his professional career as a social entrepreneur developing organizations, programs, and initiatives to improve the lives of marginalized groups."¹

Quotation 1:

"One of the most common things said to children, especially children like me, is the mandate to 'act normal,' which is usually followed by a long list of things to do in order to play the role of a normal person: sit still, talk softer, raise your hand, wear the right clothes, play with the right toys, like the right colors. It's a never-ending set of commands that you can follow into the promised land of normality. I wonder if we recognize the irony of telling people to act normal, because to act is to perform a role that isn't real. And I wonder if we truly understand what it does to a human being to tell them to pretend to be someone, or something, they are not, and how this demand requires people to repress (silence), efface (erase), and cover up who they really are."²

Quotation 2:

"Resisting normal starts with a refusal to hide, to cover, to deny the parts of yourself that don't fit normal's story for you. Humans are made of jagged

¹ "A Video Interview with Jonathan Mooney, Writer and Neurodiversity Advocate," Reading Rockets, accessed September 6, 2022.
² Jonathan Mooney, *Normal Sucks: How to Live, Learn, and Thrive Outside the Lines* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2019), chap. 5.

pieces that don't fit neatly together, and the challenge of anyone's life is to use all these pieces to make the biggest self one can. But there is a relentless (determined) pressure to solve the puzzle quickly, with as few pieces as possible. And so the most jagged, imperfect pieces get shoved under the rug. This hiding, however, doesn't work. Each jagged edge denied, each part taken as the whole, each big self narrowed, each multitude (mass) simplified, each circle squared is a small death and a sacrifice at the altar of normality that works for a while—until it doesn't. Because passing as normal never does."³

3 Mooney, *Normal Sucks*, chap. 5.