“Some of the kids at school thought she was weird, but she didn’t care a bit.” (28) This is how David Shannon describes his character Camilla Cream at the end of the book *A Bad Case of Stripes*, but that wasn’t always the case for Camilla Cream. In fact, at the beginning of this book, Camilla fears being different and even denies eating her favorite food, lima beans, in order to fit in. It takes a bad case of stripes, cured only by being true to herself and her love of lima beans, to teach her not to care that others might find her weird. This story of Camilla Cream creatively demonstrates that a person should be who he or she wants to be despite what others might think.

Camilla’s stripes demonstrate this theme by representing her concern for what others think about her. As Camilla tries on outfit after outfit to try to be perfect for the first day of school, the author reveals that Camilla never eats lima beans, even though she loves them, just because she wants to fit in with her friends who hate them. “Camilla was always worried about what people thought about her,” the author explains. (3) The stripes appear exactly as Camilla is worrying about fitting in and what her friends will think. The stripes show on the outside what Camilla is trying to hide on the inside: the fact that she is not the same as everyone else. After Camilla discovers her stripes, the first thing that she does is worry about what other kids will think and how she will dress to match all of her stripes. (4). The stripes take over Camilla’s appearance just as the opinions of others have always taken over her thoughts.

The stripes also show how doing only what others want can take over a person completely. When Camilla returns to school, the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance makes her break out in patriotic stripes and stars. (6) The other students think this is great and start shouting out colors and
patterns, and Camilla turns into everything they say. (7) The changing stripes symbolize how Camilla has always wanted to do what she thinks others want her to do instead of being true to what she wants. Basing everything on the opinions of others, Camilla shows, leads to lots of confusion and frustration! Even the many opinions of the doctors do not help cure Camilla but cover her in more bacteria- and virus-shaped spots and even make her turn into the furniture in her room! (13-15, 19-20) Others telling Camilla what to do has always been the problem because she has always put others’ opinions over her own, and none of the opinions of doctors, specialists, and experts can be the cure.

The cure for Camilla’s stripes reveals the theme of her story. When a kind old lady offers Camilla lima beans as a cure, her first response is to pretend not to like them so that she can be like her friends who hate them, but she finally decides not to worry about anyone laughing at her and admits, “The truth is.... I really love lima beans.” (24) With that, Camilla is cured, and the lady smiles, “I knew the real you was in there somewhere.” (26) Hiding her true self inside and pretending to be someone else to try to fit in has been the problem all along. When Camilla admits her true opinion, her true self emerges, and the stripes disappear. At the story’s end, Camilla will never be the same, no longer caring if people think that she’s weird but doing what she loves and eating all the lima beans she wants. (28)

No matter what anyone thinks, Camilla shows in her story, everyone should be who he or she wants to be. She learns the hard way with a bad case of stripes but finally learns to let go of her worries about what others might think and no longer allows others to control her choices. Being herself makes the stripes go away, leaving her forever changed into a person of self-confidence. The happy Camilla Cream at the end of the story is who everyone should be, a person free to be who he or she wants to be.