

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

My Name Is Brain Brian

by

Jeanne Betancourt

Book Information

Jeanne Betancourt, My Name Is Brain Brian

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Book Level: 4.3

Interest Level: MG

Brian is discovered to be dyslexic, and his teacher teams him up with the smartest student in the sixth grade in this realistic look at learning disabilities.

Topics: Character Traits, Self Improvement; Community Life, School; Disabilities, Learning; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8

Main Characters

Brian the principal character in the story; a sixth-grade boy who is encouraged by his teacher to conquer his dyslexia

Dad Brian's father, who works a lot and has little sympathy or patience for Brian's learning difference; likely also dyslexic

Dan one of Brian's classmates who shares his changing attitude toward school and the Jokers Club

Grandfather Al Brian's father's dad; a widower visiting Florida

Hilary Brian's older sister; a high school student

Isabel the "brain" of Brian's class, who is teamed up with him for a special project

John and Richie two more of Brian's classmates, also members of the Jokers Club, who prefer to do poorly in school and hang out with older boys

Mother Brian's mother

Mr. Bigham the new sixth-grade teacher, who takes a special interest in Brian

Mrs. Samuels a retired teacher and Brian's tutor, who taught Brian's dad in second grade

Tyson Brian's two-year-old brother who is often in his care

Vocabulary

dyslexia impairment of the ability to read

hibernate to pass the winter sleeping

marshy a swampy piece of land

sentinel a guard or sentry

Synopsis

Brian is a poor student with three friends who also don't care much about school. John, Dan, Brian, and Richie form the Jokers Club, and they meet in a hideout near an abandoned mansion.

When school is about to start, the Jokers Club decides to play a game called Operation J.D.B.R. This game awards points to members who play jokes on classmates. Brian often scores points by doing things he doesn't mean to do.

As the school year progresses, Brian is diagnosed with dyslexia. Because of this learning difference, his sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Bigham, takes Brian under his wing. With his teacher's help, Brian begins to enjoy school and make progress. He even makes friends with Isabel, the "brain" of the class.

Brian and his friend Dan realize they have grown apart from John and Richie and want to dissolve the Jokers Club. In the end, Brian has changed the way he feels about his friends, his family, and himself.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Do you think a club like the J.D.B.R. is a good way to have fun?

Answers will vary.

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Literary Analysis

Why is Brian's father so angry about, and impatient with, Brian's problems at school?

Brian's father probably has dyslexia, and he may be venting the frustration he has felt with himself all these years.

Inferential Comprehension

There was only \$23 in the Operation J.D.B.R. pot when there should have been \$40. What do you think happened to the money?

John and/or Richie probably "borrowed" it to buy something they/he wanted.

Constructing Meaning

Which family members do you think Brian will be close to in the future? Why?

Grandpa Al and Tyson because they don't resent Brian's dyslexia.

paragraph and exchange it with another student who has done the same with a book he or she has read. Each of them should try to complete the paragraphs based on the first half that has been written.

Understanding Sequence Have the students reread the epilogue of the book, then imagine they are writing a sequel. They should create a one-page plot outline, making certain the beginning of their book blends into the epilogue. Will they delete and/or add characters in their sequel? Will they focus on Brian's dyslexia or his little brother's problems? Will Brian continue to be friends with Dan? How will his relationship develop with his father?

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot Brian isn't very close to his dad, perhaps because his dad also has dyslexia and is frustrated with the situation. Have the students "erase" the conflict between Brian and his father and discuss how this changes various parts of the story. Would Brian have had as many problems with his schoolwork? Would Brian have been a member of the Jokers Club?

Understanding Characterization Brian is faced with the challenge of dyslexia. Have the students put themselves in Brian's shoes and discuss how they would handle the situation. Would they wait to let someone else help them, or would they seek help for themselves? Would they be frustrated or embarrassed by the situation? Perhaps they have a challenge of their own they could share with the group.

Making Predictions The students should choose three paragraphs from *My Name is Brain Brian*, that are representative of some of the main ideas of the story. Have them write the first half of each