

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for My Teacher Is an Alien by Bruce Coville

Book Information

Bruce Coville, My Teacher Is an Alien
Quiz Number: 5433
Pocket Books, Inc, 1989
ISBN 0-671-73729-5; LCCN
123 Pages
Book Level: 5.3
Interest Level: MG

Susan Simmons must prevent her alien teacher from taking selected classmates to another planet.

Award: State Award

Topics: Community Life, School; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Science Fiction, Aliens; Series, My Teacher Is an Alien

Main Characters

Dr. Horace Bleekman the principal of Kennituck Falls Elementary, who has a very rigid idea of how a classroom should be run

Duncan Dougal Susan's classmate, who is known as a bully

Mike Foran an average student in Broxholm's class who never misbehaves

Mr. Edward Simmons Susan's father, who listens attentively to her problems

Mr. John Smith/Broxholm an alien, posing as a teacher, who is determined to kidnap five students

Mr. Milton Bamwick a music teacher who dreams of having his students play "The Stars and Stripes Forever"

Mrs. Glacka the school nurse, whose main remedy is having students lie down

Mrs. Margaret Simmons Susan's mother, who tends to baby her

Ms. Marie Schwartz Susan's innovative teacher, who is concerned for her students even while she is being held captive

Peter Thompson an introverted boy who loves reading science fiction

Stacy Benoit a well-behaved and average student in Broxholm's class

Susan Simmons an intelligent and popular girl who is protective of others

Vocabulary

awe a combined feeling of fear and respect
column a tall, thin shape
convince to cause to believe something
invasion forced entry into an area to take control of it
pathetic stirring up a feeling of pity; feeble; absurd

Synopsis

When Ms. Schwartz, Susan's favorite teacher, suddenly resigns six weeks before the end of school, Susan's class is taken over by a strict teacher named Mr. John Smith. Although Susan is a good student, she is frustrated by the change in class rules and curriculum. She writes a cranky note about Mr. Smith in class in order to pass it to her friend Stacy. In her note, Susan complains that Mr. Smith hates her piccolo and all kinds of music. Unfortunately, Mr. Smith accidentally picks up the note with Susan's class assignment. Susan is desperate to get it back, so after school she follows Mr. Smith home. She is about to covertly retrieve the note from Mr. Smith's briefcase when she hears a terrible screeching sound from upstairs. Susan sneaks up the stairs and sees Mr. Smith sitting in front of a mirror. To her horror, he is removing his human face to reveal that of an alien. The mirror turns out to be a communicator to an alien spaceship, and Susan learns that Mr. Smith, whose alien name is Broxholm, is on a mission to kidnap students.

After escaping Broxholm's house, Susan tries to think of someone who will believe her story. She finally settles on her classmate Peter, an introverted intellectual who loves to read science fiction. The next day she approaches him on the playground, but when she tells him Mr. Smith is an alien, Peter almost starts to cry because he thinks Susan is teasing him. She finally gets him to help her by pretending that she is playing a game. Peter suggests they break into Broxholm's house for evidence. Susan's willingness to do so convinces Peter that she is not just playing a game.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

My Teacher Is an Alien

by
Bruce Coville

That evening, Susan and Peter use Broxholm's absence from home as an opportunity to investigate Broxholm's house. When they reach the attic, they discover Ms. Schwartz trapped in a force field. She tells them telepathically that Broxholm intends to abduct five students from Susan's class: the best, the worst, and three average kids. Ms. Schwartz advises Susan and Peter to unmask Broxholm. The conversation is cut short when Broxholm arrives home and Susan and Peter must sneak out of the house.

On Friday Susan notes again that Broxholm reacts adversely when she picks up her piccolo to go to music practice. She has to admit to Mr. Bamwick, the music teacher, that she was not able to practice. When she returns to the classroom, she makes a desperate attempt to unmask Broxholm by pretending to faint and grabbing his ear as she falls. Unfortunately, her plan fails and she is sent home sick. That evening she wants to tell her father about Broxholm, but she decides not to because she doubts he will believe her.

When Susan returns to school on Monday, her classmates are acting strange. Duncan, the class bully, brings the teacher an apple. Stacy and Mike, two of the best-behaved students, suddenly start fighting one another in the classroom. On the playground, Peter informs Susan that he told Stacy about Broxholm's plan and that she spread the story throughout the class. Also, Peter warns Susan that she is a candidate for best student since her social skills are so much more developed than Peter's. The next day Susan and Peter skip class to go to Broxholm's house and photograph Ms. Schwartz in the force field. Duncan joins them with a promise to act as their lookout, but instead he sneaks into the house after them and turns on the communicator while Peter is taking pictures. Susan and Peter hear him screaming and find him sitting in front of the activated communicator looking at an alien. For safety reasons, Peter takes Duncan to his house to hide.

When Susan returns to school, Mr. Bamwick scolds

her for missing her practice session with him. At the end of the school day, Broxholm detains Susan and informs her he is aware she has been in his house. He warns her not to interfere with his plans. The next day Susan suspects that Peter wants Broxholm to kidnap him. In class, he begins answering all Broxholm's questions instead of ignoring the lesson, as he usually does. However, he is as disappointed as Susan is when he learns that the pictures he took of Ms. Schwartz do not come out properly.

By Thursday, the students are all too nervous to function in the classroom, and Mr. Bamwick cancels the special piece in the school concert. When the spring concert begins, Broxholm leads the band members down the hall. Susan is suddenly reminded of Broxholm's aversion to music. She takes out her piccolo and starts playing her solo from the piece that the band was to have played that evening. Broxholm begs her to stop, but the rest of the band joins her. Mr. Bamwick is so excited to hear them correctly playing the special number that he insists the students keep playing. Mike informs Broxholm that they will not stop until he unmasks himself. He complies and his identity is revealed, but just as Susan thinks Broxholm is cornered, Peter opens a door, sets him free, and flees with him. Within minutes, Peter and Broxholm depart in Broxholm's spaceship.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Susan feel about Ms. Schwartz as a teacher?

Susan greatly admires Ms. Schwartz. She feels that her teaching methods are interesting and educational. She feels that Ms. Schwartz is unjustly criticized by Dr. Bleekman, and she likes that Ms. Schwartz stands up to Dr. Bleekman and refuses to compromise her teaching philosophy.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for My Teacher Is an Alien by Bruce Coville

Literary Analysis

What mood or feeling does the author create when Susan and her class play "The Stars and Stripes Forever" at the end of the story?

First, there is a feeling of confusion as the students are described moving through the hallways in a chaotic manner. Tension also exists because the students are afraid of Broxholm and the reader does not know the extent of Broxholm's powers. As Susan's plan begins to succeed, it inspires the participation of the other students. This leaves the reader with a feeling of triumph and relief as Broxholm is vanquished.

Inferential Comprehension

How do the actions and attitudes of the adults in this story make it harder for Susan to deal with Broxholm?

Susan is certain that the adults will not believe her if she tells them that Broxholm is an alien. Before Susan even knows about Broxholm's alien identity, Dr. Bleekman makes it clear that he does not feel it is appropriate for Susan to be concerned about the personal lives of her teachers. When Susan tries to confide in her father, he placates her by saying that she can put up with her unusual teacher until the end of school. Mr. Bamwick is so focused on his desire to have his students play "The Stars and Stripes Forever" that he does not question why his students are so frazzled. Finally, when rumors about the alien invasion do come to the attention of the adults, Susan's mother states that if Susan did believe in the aliens, then she would have to have counseling. It is clear to Susan that she cannot expect help from the adults, and that she might even be punished if she seeks their help.

Constructing Meaning

What does Peter say to try to convince Susan that Broxholm may not be evil?

He says that Broxholm's people may be so superior to the human race that they see humans the way humans see ants. He states that Broxholm's people may be peaceful and have concerns about how much humans fight. He argues that they may believe that if humans are allowed to progress too far into space they may cause a war.

Teachable Skills

Making Predictions Peter is optimistic about Broxholm's plans for the human race. Have the students write a story about what happens to Peter after he joins Broxholm on his spaceship. Have them show whether or not Peter's hopes about the aliens are fulfilled or destroyed.

Understanding Characterization Broxholm's job is to evaluate which students are best suited to his project. Ask students to consider the descriptions Susan gives of several of the students. Have the students write a school record that shows what their strengths and weaknesses as students are.

Identifying Persuasive Language Susan does not think anyone but Peter will believe her that Broxholm is an alien. Have the students choose one of the other characters in this book. Ask students to write a persuasive argument that they feel Susan could use successfully to convince that character that Broxholm is a threat to his students.

Identifying Reasons Peter has difficulty trusting others. Ask the students to create a list of reasons for Peter's lack of trust. Have students use events in the book and statements that Peter makes about others in their list.