

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Twinkie Squad by Gordon Korman

Book Information

Gordon Korman, The Twinkie Squad
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Thrown out of a series of schools, Douglas lands at a public school where he transforms a bunch of misfits into a clique.

Award: ALA Best Book for Young Adults; ALA Notable/Best Books; Manitoba Young Readers Choice Award/Nominee; Silver Birch Award/Nominee; State Award

Topics: Canadian Content, Canadian Content (All); Community Life, Cliques/Clubs; Community Life, School; Humor/Funny, Funny; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, Canadian Children's Book Centre's Our Choice

Main Characters

Armando "Commando" Rivera a sixth-grader and a member of the basketball team sent to the Special Discussion Group (Twinkie Squad) because he is accused of hitting Douglas

Beverly Busby the most popular girl in school, a snob who doesn't hesitate to pick on the "Twinkies"

Douglas Fairchild a sixth-grader who has been kicked out of four private school in two years

Gerald, Dave, Anita, Yolanda and Ric members of the Special Discussion Group, called the Twinkie Squad by the other students

Julia and Martin Richardson the school guidance counselors who run the Special Discussion Group

Mr. and Mrs. Fairchild Douglas's father (a U. S. ambassador) and mother

Mr. Silverman the principal of Thaddeus G. Little Middle School

aggressive prone to hostile behavior

irrefutable that which cannot be proven wrong

limousine a large, luxurious automobile driven by a chauffeur

mollified made less angry or agitated, soothed

Synopsis

Douglas Fairchild is a sixth-grader who is starting at Thaddeus G. Little Middle School after being "kicked out" of four private schools in the past two years. He is the son of a famous ambassador and has two successful adult siblings. Rather than try to compete with his successful family, Douglas chooses to be different. He explains his behavior by pointing out that he is actually a citizen of Pefkokia.

Mr. Silverman, the principal, assigns Douglas to the school's Special Discussion Group (the Twinkie Squad), run by the school guidance counselors, Mr. and Mrs. Richardson. All the students in the group, Gerald, Dave, Anita, Yolanda and Ric, are "different" in some way; each has some problem or behavior that makes it difficult for them to succeed in school. Armando "Commando" Rivera is assigned to the group because Mr. Silverman believes he hit Douglas. He is very upset about being taken off the basketball team and forced to spend time with a bunch of "losers." After Commando tells the group why he is so angry about being there, Douglas decides to turn the Twinkies into a social organization. He renames the group "The Grand Knights of the Exalted Karpoozi."

One morning, Douglas attempts to make breakfast at school for the other Grand Knights. Interrupted by the beginning bell, he hides garlic squid with mango and banana in a hole in the ceiling. By the time he returns to retrieve the food, the school custodians have repaired the hole and permanently sealed the food inside. In a series of humorous escapes, Douglas, Commando, and eventually the whole Twinkie Squad attempt to quell the stench caused by the rotting food. Each attempt causes another problem, and the student body eventually comes to believe the Grand Knights of the Exalted Karpoozi is an exclusive club devoted to playing

Vocabulary

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practical jokes in school. The members of the Special Discussion Group become unified in friendship as they work together.

Beverly Busby, the most popular girl in school, signs up to join the club, but is rejected. Although none of the other students know who the members of the Grand Knights are, Beverly's rejection makes the club seem even more elite.

Douglas forges a letter to Mr. Silverman from the Surgeon General of the United States with the intention of clearing Commando so he can return to the basketball team without having to explain the situation to his father.

After the Grand Knights club is opened to everyone, the entire student body flocks to a membership meeting, and the students are shocked and embarrassed when they learn the Grand Knights of the Exalted Karpoozi are actually the Twinkies.

After resigning from the Grand Knights, the group rides off in Douglas's limousine.

Mr. Silverman meets with Mr. Fairchild and Mr. Rivera, and he learns Commando did not hit Douglas. When Mr. Fairchild learns about the forged letter and all the problems Douglas has caused, he makes arrangements to send Douglas to another school. Gerald, Dave, Anita, Yolanda and Ric go to Mr. Fairchild's office to tell Mr. Fairchild why they need Douglas at their school. Mr. Fairchild changes his mind, and Douglas promises his father he will "do better."

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Mr. Silverman said Commando had always been aggressive. Why had Commando been in fights in school?

Commando did not like bullies. When he saw older students bullying younger ones, he would fight to defend the younger students.

Literary Analysis

This was a fictional story about middle school. In what ways were the characters in the book like real middle school students?

Answers may include a discussion of middle school students' struggles with friendships, their need to feel they belong, and/or conflicts between "popular" and "unpopular" students.

Inferential Comprehension

Mr. Fairchild and Mr. Rivera were very different fathers. How were they different, and what might Mr. Fairchild be able to learn about fathering from Mr. Rivera?

Mr. Fairchild was not very close to Douglas, but Mr. Rivera and Commando had a lot of fun together and talked a lot. If Mr. Fairchild could learn to do some of those things with Douglas, they would probably have a better relationship, and Douglas might have fewer problems.

Inferential Comprehension

Compare Douglas's experiences at Thaddeus G. Little Middle School to the experiences he might have had at his other schools. How were they similar? How were they different?

Douglas was asked to leave his other schools, and we know he caused problems both there and at Thaddeus G. Little Middle School. He probably didn't make many friends at those schools, however, or he wouldn't have continued to behave as he did. At Little Middle School he became friends with the Twinkies and it led to a change in his behavior.

Teachable Skills

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Recognizing Plot One of the main conflicts in *The Twinkie Squad* is between the Twinkies and the rest of the student body, particularly the "popular crowd." Have students discuss this conflict--how it might have developed, how students were identified with one group or the other, how it could be resolved. Do students believe this type of conflict is inevitable at a middle school? Do the students who read the book believe the conflict between the Twinkies and the rest of the school was actually resolved? Did their experiences really change the students at Thaddeus G. Little Middle School?

Understanding Characterization Mr. Silverman, the principal of Thaddeus G. Little Middle School, sets the events of the story in motion when he assigns Douglas and then Commando to the Special Discussion Group. Commando was assigned to the group because Mr. Silverman mistakenly believed he had hit Douglas. He wasn't prepared to believe Commando was innocent, yet apologized for his mistake in the end. Have students discuss the character of Mr. Silverman. What kind of a person was he? How did he come to the decisions he made? Students should use examples from the story to support their opinion of the character.

Making Predictions Beverly Busby considered herself the most popular girl in the school. Of all the students, she may have been most surprised by the events that unfolded at the Grand Knights meeting in the gym. After Douglas and his friends left in the limousine, Beverly suggested everyone else go back inside and continue the meeting. When the other students started for home, Beverly asked, "What's going on here?" Her friend, Carol, responded, "I'll explain it to you on the bus." Beverly was well-characterized, and students can predict how Carol's explanation unfolded and how Beverly might respond. Have students write the dialogue in play form and dramatize their scenes for the class.

Responding to Literature The experiences of the Twinkie Squad at Thaddeus G. Little Middle School were exaggerated, but many real students have the experience of being labeled or

ostracized by other students. Have students write about a time they felt as if they couldn't fit in at school, perhaps participated in making other students feel left out, or witnessed other students behaving this way. Writings may be shared, perhaps anonymously. Have students brainstorm ways to help students at their school treat each other with more care and respect.