

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?

by
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Book Information

Avi, Who Was That Masked Man, Anyway?

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Book Level: 2.7

Interest Level: MG

In the mid-1940s, when nearly everyone else is thinking about World War II, sixth-grader Frankie Wattleson gets in trouble at home and at school because of his preoccupation with his favorite radio programs.

Topics: Countries/Regions, United States; Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, See All Sides; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - Grades 4-6 (Theme: Friends and Family); Wars, World War II

Main Characters

Franklin Delano Wattleson (Frankie) a young boy who is obsessed with heroes and the radio

Mario Calvino Frankie's playmate, who worries about breaking the rules

Miss Esmeralda Gomez Frankie's pretty teacher, who has difficulty coping with Frankie's imagination

Mr. Albert Wattleson Frankie's hard-working father, who attempts to restrict Frankie's radio listening

Mr. Swerdlow the renter who lives in the Wattleson household; he is often annoyed by Frankie's activities

Mrs. Mary Wattleson (Ma) Frankie's overwrought mother, who struggles to control his behavior

Thomas Peter Wattleson (Tom) Frankie's older brother; he is traumatized by his experiences in the war

Uncle Charley Frankie's long-lost uncle, who has spent time in prison

Vocabulary

brilliant extremely intelligent

crucial very important; necessary

improve to become better; to increase in quality

spy one sent into enemy territory to secretly collect and send information; a secret watcher

telegram a message sent by telegraph; a wired message

wounded hurt; injured

Synopsis

Frankie is a sixth-grade boy living at the time of World War II. His life is consumed by his attempts to emulate the heroes he hears about in adventure stories on the radio. Unfortunately, this means spying on Mr. Swerdlow, the renter living in his home, and neglecting to do his homework. Frankie's parents threaten to take the radio away from him if he continues to misbehave, and his teacher, Miss Gomez, threatens to flunk Frankie if his behavior in school does not improve.

Frankie's life changes for the worse when his brother Tom arrives home. His parents send him to live in the basement so that Tom can have a room to himself. Tom is given the radio, so Frankie cannot even listen to his shows any longer. Frankie tries to solve the problem by enlisting his friend Mario's help to fix the "radio" Frankie finds in the basement. However, the system is actually a primitive telegraph machine, so the boys' attempt to use it to drive Mr. Swerdlow out of the house so that Frankie can have his room back. The plan works, but Frankie's parents are enraged that Frankie has caused them to lose income.

Frankie's plotting continues as he attempts to bring Tom and Miss Gomez together. Frankie believes that if Tom marries Miss Gomez, Miss Gomez will not make him repeat the sixth grade. The night that Frankie has arranged for the two to meet almost ends in disaster when Tom tells Frankie the horrible

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truth about war, and Miss Gomez explodes in rage when Frankie informs her that no one is at home for her meeting with his parents. She demands to speak to Tom, the only adult in the house, and Tom falls out the window trying to avoid her. The humor of the situation breaks the tension, and Tom laughs for the first time in months. The story flashes forward to show the wedding night of Miss Gomez and Tom.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What does Frankie do when Uncle Charley comes to the house?

Frankie lies to Uncle Charley about his name, but then he answers Uncle Charley's inquiries regarding the family. Some of the information about the family that Frankie gives to Uncle Charley is false. He also gives Uncle Charley a box of cereal and asks questions about Uncle Charley's past.

Literary Analysis

Why is doing homework so important to Mario?

Mario is terrified of disappointing his mother. She expects him to do his homework, and Mario diligently meets this expectation. Mario also does not like being the center of negative attention in school.

Inferential Comprehension

How do the commercials on the radio affect Frankie's life?

Frankie is greatly influenced by the commercials he hears on the radio. The radio commercials persuade him to send away for toys, such as the cardboard walkie-talkies, which he incorporates into his daily life. They also cause him to insist on eating certain cereals and other foods.

Constructing Meaning

Miss Gomez tells Frankie that he has potential. How is this shown in the book?

Frankie is very imaginative. He constantly creates stories and remembers details from all his radio shows. Also, he is able to answer questions about Australia when he thinks that it will cheer up Miss Gomez. When it is his turn to read, he reads smoothly until he decides to add his own details to the story. This shows it is Frankie's emotional immaturity that keeps him from succeeding in school.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft The author has Frankie invent his own versions of the stories that he hears on the radio. Have the students combine into groups of three or four to write their own radio scripts, similar to the adventures Frankie listens to. Then have them perform their scripts for the class.

Recognizing Feelings Frankie is often insensitive to the feelings of others. Have groups of students act out an event where Frankie ignores the reactions of the person with whom he is speaking. Have the students explain how Frankie's actions are making the other person feel.

Responding to Literature After Tom speaks to Frankie about his war experiences, Frankie is frightened. But from the information that he has received from the radio, Frankie has been led to believe that the war is exciting. Have the students write about a time when they realized that something they imagined as being fun or exciting turned out differently. Have the students include the reason they thought their experience would be more rewarding than it really was.

Describing Actions or Events This story is written completely in dialogue. Have pairs of students choose one event in this story and read the dialogue aloud. Then have them describe the characters' behavior based on clues given by the dialogue in the book.