

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Aliens Ate My Homework

by
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Book Information

Bruce Coville, Aliens Ate My Homework
Quiz Number: 5339
Pocket Books, Inc, 1993
ISBN 0-671-72712-5; LCCN
179 Pages
Book Level: 4.8
Interest Level: MG

Rod has enough troubles, but a tiny spaceship adds more problems to his life.

Award: State Award

Topics: Community Life, School; Humor/Funny, Funny; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Do the Right Thing: Integrity; Science Fiction, Aliens; Series, Rod Albright and the Galactic Patrol

Main Characters

Arnie Markle a bully at Rod's school who teams up with Billy to torment Rod; Arnie's father threatens to sue Rod's family after Arnie breaks his hand trying to punch Rod

BKR (Billy Becker) Rod's enemy at school who turns out to be an interstellar criminal who is being chased by the Galactic Patrol so he can be brought to justice for his cruelty

Bonehead Rod's dog, which has to be bribed with a dog biscuit so the aliens and Rod can leave Rod's house without being detected by Mrs. Nesbitt

Captain Grakker the alien commander who demands Rod's help; he is often reprimanded by Madame Pong for his lack of diplomacy

Eric and Linda Albright Rod's energetic and mischievous three-year-old twin siblings, who insist on being called Thing One and Thing Two; BKR kidnaps them after he discovers that the Galactic Patrol has found him

Madame Pong the diplomat on the "Ferkel," who is second in command of the ship; she is sympathetic to some of Rod's personal problems

Mickey Rod's friend who likes to play jokes and does not believe Rod's story about the aliens

Miss Maloney Rod's teacher at school, who is annoyed when Rod tells her aliens ate his homework

Mrs. Albright (Mom) Rod's sympathetic mother, who is having a difficult time supporting the family since the disappearance of Rod's father; she is extremely worried when Arnie's father threatens to sue her

Mrs. Nesbitt the Allbrights' neighbor who watches the twins when Rod's mother goes searching for Rod; she has poor eyesight and does not notice that the twins are kidnapped while she is caring for them

Phil (Phillogenous esk Piemondum) an alien plant form that is not detected by BKR's equipment; therefore, it is able to stay on the ship and provide rescue after the crew surrenders to BKR

Plink the small blue creature that lives with Phil and works as Phil's assistant

Rod Albright the young boy who helps aliens capture an interstellar criminal; Rod is deeply troubled by the disappearance of his father several years earlier

Snout (Flinge Iblik) the alien ship's Mental Officer, who is close friends with Grakker; Snout is accidentally injured by Rod while trying to transmit instructions to Rod telepathically

Tar Gibbons a four-legged alien who insists on being referred to as "it," since in the English language there is no better word for something that is neither male nor female

Vocabulary

addled confused

consigned assigned or relegated to

fugitive a runaway from justice

generate to create or produce

hoosegow prison or jail

obstruct to block or stop

Synopsis

Sixth-grader Rod Albright is making a volcano for his school science project when a tiny spaceship lands in the papier-mâché. He and his

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three-year-old twin siblings watch as a small alien named Grakker exits the ship. Grakker roughly orders Rod to help him, but another alien, Madame Pong, inserts a diplomacy module in Grakker's head. The aliens want Rod to take their ship to a place where they can enlarge it. Rod takes them to a secluded field called Seldom Seen. The ship's enlargement fails, so Rod has to bring the crew members and their ship, the "Ferkel," to his room.

Despite Grakker's instructions to keep their presence a secret, Rod visits his friend Mickey and tells him about the aliens. When Rod returns home, Grakker asks if he kept their secret. Rod has not lied since he was punished for lying to his mother about eating a cookie, so Rod admits he told someone. Angry at this, Grakker shoots through Rod's earlobe with a ray gun. Next, Madame Pong asks Rod if he knows BKR, a criminal who is using the name Becker. Rod tells them about a bully named Billy Becker who harasses him. The aliens decide to investigate Billy. Then additional crew members, Snout, Tar Gibbons, and Phil, introduce themselves.

The next day Madame Pong gives Rod a transmitter earring. Rod takes Grakker, Madame Pong, and Snout to school. A classmate named Arnie sees Grakker and thinks he is a toy. Arnie steals Grakker, but after lunch Rod finds Grakker back in his desk. At recess Arnie tries to punch Rod for stealing Grakker, but Snout slows time so that Rod can duck. Arnie punches the wall and breaks his hand.

After school the aliens try to enlarge the ship again but cannot accomplish this without their missing F/D Gizmo. Grakker orders Rod to take them to Billy Becker's house the next day, since they suspect Billy's father is BKR. Then Rod's mother comes to tell Rod that Arnie's father has threatened to sue them. She asks Rod to give Grakker to Arnie, but Rod objects.

The next morning Rod and the aliens go to Billy's house. Rod, Grakker, Snout, and Madame Pong go inside, where they find Billy's android parents in a closet, and Snout realizes that Billy is BKR. During a confrontation between BKR and the aliens, Rod is

shrunk and escapes with the alien crew in their ship.

On the ship, Madame Pong gives Rod a tour, which ends when Snout figures out that BKR's next move will be to kidnap someone in Rod's family. They rush to Rod's house. On the way, they tell Rod that BKR's crime is cruelty. As the crew prepares for the rescue mission, Snout tries to transmit operating instructions for a rocket pack to Rod telepathically. Though Rod accidentally hurts Snout in the process, Rod gains enough information to control the pack. Once in Rod's house, the group finds that BKR has taken the twins to Seldom Seen. There, they find BKR suspending the twins over a pit of flames. Grakker swears to surrender the ship if BKR will free them. BKR assumes there are six life forms on board, so Madame Pong realizes BKR's scan did not pick up Phil the Plant. Madame Pong takes command from Grakker and orders Phil to stay on the ship. The remaining crew members leave the ship, and BKR puts them in Rod's sister's lunchbox, which also holds the missing F/D Gizmo.

Next, when BKR takes the lunchbox to the Becker house, Madame Pong inserts a berserk module into Grakker's head, and Grakker attacks the side of the lunchbox until the lunchbox falls from the countertop and pops open. The escaped aliens keep BKR occupied while Rod tries to climb the "Ferkel" and replace the F/D Gizmo while receiving instructions from Phil, who is piloting the ship. BKR sees Rod and threatens to crush Madame Pong, whom he has recaptured. Tar Gibbons saves Madame Pong by attacking BKR's ankle. Knowing Rod's father has been missing for years, BKR cleverly offers to tell Rod where his father is if Rod will not install the F/D Gizmo. Rod is tempted, but Snout reminds him of BKR's cruelty. Rod installs the F/D Gizmo, and the "Ferkel" enlarges and destroys the Beckers' house. Safe in their ship, the aliens heal their wounded.

When Rod and his companions get back to his room, Phil points out that Rod's volcano is too large to get out of his room. Distraught, Rod throws himself on his bed. When he wakes up, he finds the aliens have repaired and shrunk the volcano. After enlarging the volcano outdoors, Madame Pong

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promises him a good day in school. At school the android Mr. Becker tells everyone that Billy blew up his own house. He also tells Arnie that he has spoken to Arnie's father and there not only will be no lawsuit, but Arnie is probably in trouble. That afternoon, Rod and the twins accompany the aliens to Seldom Seen to say good-bye.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How does Rod feel toward his brother and sister?

Rod has some problems coping with his brother and sister. He thinks they behave badly and are frequently obnoxious. He also resents that he is often put in charge of them. Despite these feelings, Rod is inclined to be kind to the twins, and he tries to take good care of them. He does not want them to come to harm and is horrified when BKR kidnaps them.

Literary Analysis

What are Grakker's strengths and weaknesses as a leader?

Although Grakker has some difficulty with diplomacy, illustrated by the way he talks to Rod, he is obviously dedicated to his mission and his crew. Grakker takes rules very seriously and is a model of honorable behavior for his people. For example, he sacrifices the "Ferkel" in order to save the twins. Grakker is also a good warrior who puts all his effort into accomplishing his goals. When the crew is trapped in the lunchbox, Madame Pong programs Grakker into the berserk mode so he can get them out of the box. Although his abrasive manner often offends people, Grakker is very efficient about getting things done and does not waste a lot of time arguing with others. Grakker's ambition does cause the aliens to be in compromising situations sometimes. Grakker orders the aliens into BKR's house without a clear plan of what to do if BKR catches them there. Grakker's sense of honor also complicates matters when the aliens have an opportunity to trick BKR while they are surrendering the ship.

Inferential Comprehension

What are some of the reasons it has been so difficult for the Galactic Patrol to track down BKR?

In the first place, BKR is immensely wealthy and, therefore, has the means to buy weapons and technology that help him hide. BKR also fled to Earth, a planet that the League of Worlds does not have contact with and only knows about by monitoring its broadcasts. Also, the Galactic Patrol does not anticipate that BKR will be disguised as a child.

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Constructing Meaning

What clues does the reader have that aliens from the League of Worlds think the people of Earth are sometimes cruel?

Madame Pong tells Rod that her people are not ready to establish contact with the people of Earth. She also lets Rod know that most of their information about Earth comes from broadcast material and that she thinks the people of Earth are very troubled. When Rod says children are supposed to be protected from danger on his planet, Madame Pong then questions why children are allowed to be in places where people are shooting at one another. When Snout explains what BKR's crime was, he says "causing needless suffering is a sickness," so Rod then thinks he knows why Earth has not been allowed to join the League of Worlds.

described, have the students try to guess what Grakker and Snout's quarters might look like based on what the book says about these characters.

Teachable Skills

Identifying Persuasive Language Rod is often offended by the methods that Grakker uses to persuade him to help the Galactic Patrol. Have the students reword some of Grakker's commands to Rod in a way that would be more diplomatic in tone.

Comparing and Contrasting The aliens that Rod encounters are all very different but do share some similarities. Have the students make two lists, one telling what the aliens have in common with each other, and the other explaining what is unique about each of them. Have the students include BKR in their analysis.

Responding to Literature BKR tries to use Rod's pain over the loss of his father to manipulate Rod into helping him. Have the students discuss what they might have done if they were in Rod's place. Have them explain why they might or might not have listened to BKR.

Recognizing Setting The inside of the "Ferkel" has many different environments to accommodate the diverse life forms that live on the ship. Have the students use collage materials to create a picture of the inside of the ship using the details provided in the book. Although it is not