



JIMMY'S PARENTS ARE ALIENS

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TEXT TYPE: Fiction: Narrative—Fantasy Novella
GUIDED READING LEVEL: R

SUMMARY: Jimmy is just like any other 12-year-old boy, except for one thing... his parents are aliens! In order to keep their identity a secret, Jimmy's parents travel back to their home planet Amtron once a month for special serum injections through a portal hidden in their closet. Although the portal is off limits to Jimmy, his friend Andy can't help but explore further. Jimmy and Andy quickly find themselves on Amtron and must explain themselves to Jimmy's parents on their return to Earth.

TEXT FEATURES

- chapters
- dashes
- ellipses
- italics

VISUAL LITERACY

- cover illustration

TEXT SUPPORTS

- sequential plot
- topic of interest to students

POSSIBLE TEXT CHALLENGES

- fantasy text form
- narrator point of view

FOCUS COMPREHENSION STRATEGY

- sequencing

FURTHER COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

- making connections: text to text, text to self
- evaluating

ORAL LANGUAGE OPPORTUNITIES

- List/Group/Label strategy
- Reading Buddies activity
- sharing ideas
- discussing with a group
- role play (option 3 in Focused Rereading)

WORKING WITH WORDS

- word solving and building: connects word patterns to solve unfamiliar words
- language predictability: using context to work out word meanings
- language predictability: idiomatic expressions

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Observe each student's ability to:

- retell main events in sequence
- link one event with another
- think about cause and effect
- recognize signal words in text
- use content in text to make connections to self and other texts

ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Select from the following:

- Sequencing Strategy Checklist
- Comprehension Strategies Anecdotal Record

BEFORE READING

Making Connections: Text to Text

Activate and build prior knowledge

- The following can be done as a List/Group/Label activity (see Oral Language Strategies in the *Grade 6 Literacy Support Guide*). Engage students in a brief discussion about the fantasy genre. Like realistic fiction, fantasy stories have plot, characters, and setting. However, fantasy stories usually deal with things that are seemingly impossible. Ask students to share what they know about the fantasy genre, as well as titles of fantasy books they've read.

Text Features

Introduce supports and challenges

- Begin by writing the following two sentences from the novella's first paragraph on the board:
 - 'When it comes to James Brennan—or Jimmy, as most people call him—he's a pretty normal 12-year-old boy.'
 - 'He plays soccer with his friends and chess with his dad and, if his parents would let him, he'd play video games all night long... but they don't let him.'

Using a Reading Buddies activity (see Fluency Activities in the *Grade 6 Literacy Support Guide*), ask paired students: *How would you read these two sentences?*

Discuss the use of the dashes and ellipsis. A dash is used to indicate a sudden change of thought or a break in the flow of the sentence in order to clarify the previous portion of the sentence. An ellipsis is used in place of missing text or, as in the case above, to show a pause in thought or speech. Mention that it's important to know about this kind of punctuation so that the reader can fully understand the author's intended message.

Word Solving and Building and Language Predictability

- Have students read the last sentence on page 3 together, 'In order to keep them looking like humans during the two years they spent there, the medics assigned to their team gave them injections of a special serum once a month.' Ask them to use word patterns and context to figure out what the words 'medics' and 'serum' mean.

Language Predictability

- Discuss the author's use of idioms by asking students to explain the meaning of the following sentences (idioms are underlined):
 - 'They met after joining a top-secret operation run by the Amtronian government to study life on Earth, and fell head over heels in love.' (page 3)
 - 'When it came to the subject of their home planet, however, his mother and father were tight-lipped.' (page 5)
 - 'Jimmy didn't miss a beat.' (page 12)
 - 'My dad's going to have to bite the bullet and call a plumber soon.' (page 12)

Sequencing

Set a purpose for reading

- Provide students with 6–8 sticky notes, and as they are reading have them place the stickies at what they think are the key, or main, events in the story. They should think about where the event fits in the general plot of the story—what came before it and what might happen as a result of this event. When students are finished, have them jot down a summary line of each event on the stickies.

Provide for early finishers

- Students can write creative and humorous tabloid headlines that convey this story’s subject matter. Provide samples of appropriate tabloid headlines (which focus on similar content to this novella, rather than entertainment-related themes) if possible.

DURING READING

Monitor reading

- Assist students with word solving, vocabulary, and comprehension. Provide a comprehension prompt that highlights the focus strategy (sequencing), e.g., *What caused this event to happen? Did something happen before that to cause this action? What happened to make the character do this?*

ESL NOTE: You may also wish to work closely with your ESL students to monitor and ensure their comprehension of idioms, as well their overall understanding of the main events in the story.

Observe

- Make observations on your assessment tools. (See the Sequencing Strategy Checklist and the Comprehension Strategies Anecdotal Record in the *Grade 6 Literacy Support Guide*.)

AFTER READING

Revisit the purpose for reading

- Give students a few minutes to ensure that they have recorded the main events on their sticky notes. Have students then turn over their sticky notes and take turns choosing a random sticky note from their pile to place on a storyboard timeline. Have students read the event as they place it on the timeline. Allow for discussion regarding the placement of the events, as some events may appear to be out of order and might need to be moved on the timeline. The timeline might look as follows:

| | | |
|-----------|--------|-----|
| | | |
| Beginning | Middle | End |

Sequencing

Come to a consensus on the main events of the story by asking students to pare down the sticky notes to the main events. Ask students if they feel anything is missing or if the order of events needs adjusting.

Check on outstanding challenges

- Discuss the concept of the narrator by asking, *From whose point of view was the story told? Did this make a difference to the story? Skim back through the story to look for parts where the narrator's personality came through* (e.g., where the author interrupted the flow of the sentence by using a dash, or paused text flow with the inclusion of an ellipsis). Have students share parts where they think the narrator's personality and identity came through.

Note successful strategy use

- Point out positive reading strategies you observed, e.g., *I noticed how Enza read the dialogue on pages 22 and 23 with expression. She paid attention to the punctuation and the italics to guide where she paused and where she put emphasis on certain words. As a result she had a good understanding of what she was reading.*

FOCUSED REREADING

Three options are provided for focused rereading in the next Guided Reading lesson. Choose an activity that meets the needs of your students, or you might select a Reader Response activity from the *Grade 6 Literacy Support Guide*.

Written

- Reread the description of Amtron (first paragraph on page 16). Have students visualize one of the buildings and write a descriptive paragraph about what Jimmy would see, hear, and feel if he were to have entered one of the buildings. Encourage students to use sensory language in their descriptions.

Artistic

- Students create a 'storyboard' of the story's main events agreed on by the group. Encourage students to utilize speech and thought bubbles, as well as signal and transitional words and phrases, in order to move the plot along.

Oral/dramatic

- Have students role play the dialogue on page 23 when Jimmy's dad asks, 'What's the story, boys?' Ask students to discuss the feelings involved from the different viewpoints: parent, child, and friend. Then, have students create a new role play in which the same three viewpoints are presented and the same feelings are elicited, but with the topic changed to reflect an event or issue that participants might realistically have to deal with.

Inferring: Visualizing

Sequencing

Evaluating and Making Connections: Text to Self