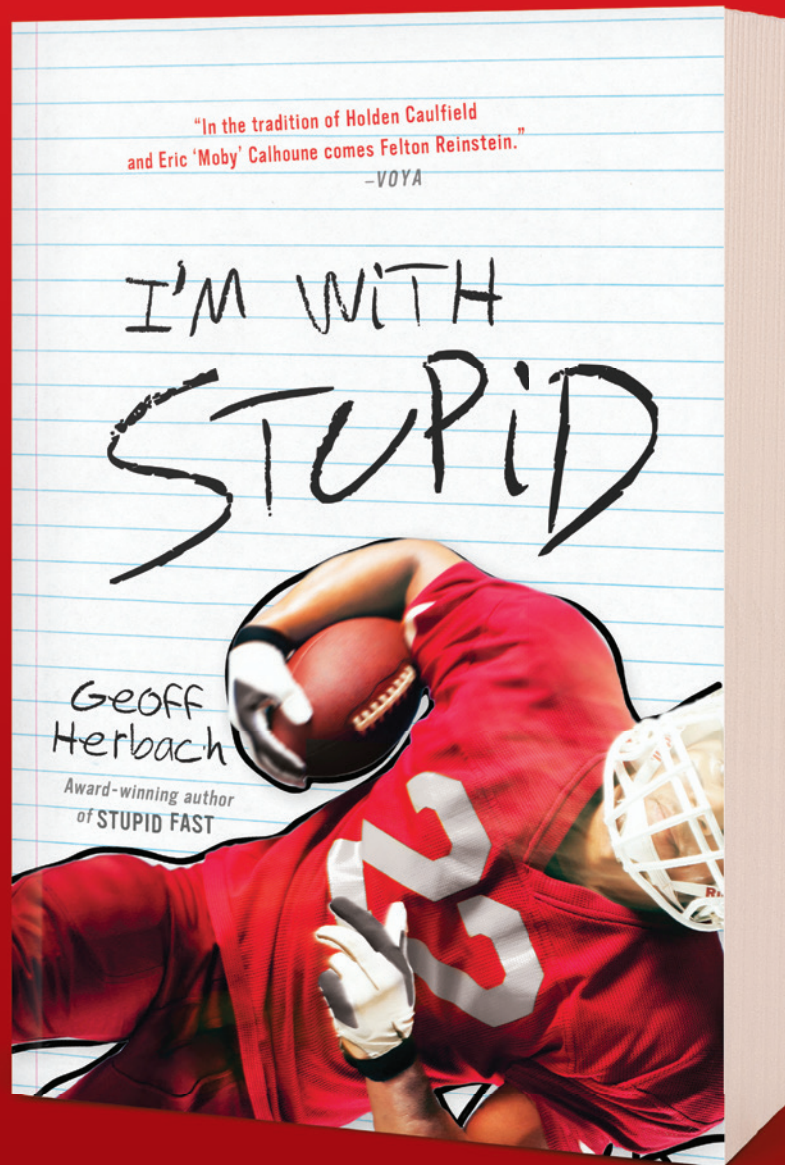


Discussion Guide

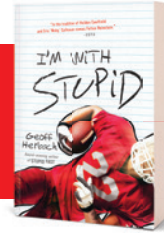


An Educator's Guide to *I'm With Stupid* by Geoff Herbach

A Common Core Standards-aligned activity guide for grades 9 and 10

Prepared by We Love Children's Books

I'm With Stupid by Geoff Herbach Discussion Guide



I'm With Stupid is the follow-up to *Stupid Fast* and *Nothing Special*.

As football star Felton Reinstein's senior year progresses, the stresses on him continue to build. Everything is coming to a head—he has to commit to a college, deal with the memories of his late father, and figure out how to handle the suicide of a younger student. His experimentation with alcohol doesn't help matters, either.

But what shines through is that Felton really is a good kid, and his friends are good friends. And, as he works through his rough patches, he develops a whole new appreciation for his family, his friends, and what's really important in life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Geoff Herbach is the author of the award-winning *Stupid Fast* YA series featuring Felton Reinstein. His books have received a variety of awards and accolades, including the 2011 Cybils Award for best YA fiction; Junior Library Guild selections; and being listed in the year's best by the American Library Association, the American Booksellers Association, and many state library associations. Herbach is also the author of the literary novel *The Miracle Letters of T. Rimberg*. He has produced radio comedy shows and toured rock clubs telling weird stories. Geoff teaches creative writing at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Geoff, his wife Stephanie, and their children live in a log cabin on the side of a bluff.



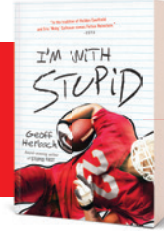
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To learn more about Geoff and his books,
visit www.geoffherbach.com
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PRAISE

"In a surprisingly hilarious first-person narrative, Felton provides an original voice as he approaches manhood—a selection that boys will relish." —VOYA

"Felton's family problems and personal anxieties are deeply felt but leavened considerably by his wry, self-deprecating narration." —*School Library Journal*

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PRE-READING QUESTION

The main character and narrator of this book is a senior in high school and one of the top college football recruits in the state of Wisconsin. His father was a successful college athlete who committed suicide. Ask the class: How might these circumstances affect him and change his attitudes toward his life?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Vocabulary

As students read the novel, have them keep an eye out for words or phrases that are unfamiliar or used in an interesting way. Instruct students to keep a list of these words and phrases. Have them write down what they believe the meaning of the word or phrase is from context. Then have them consult reference materials to identify the literal meaning, the part of speech, and the etymology of the word or phrase. *L 9-10.4, 9-10.6*

I'm With Stupid

As a class, have students discuss the title of the book. Why is the book called *I'm With Stupid*? Discuss the different places in the book where this phrase appears. How does it relate to Felton's father? How does it figure in Felton's relationship with his mentee? How does it relate to himself? *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2 SL 9-10.1*

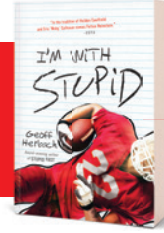
Sign on the Dotted Line

I'm With Stupid provides a behind-the-scenes look at Felton Reinstein, a statewide star in football and track, and the challenges he encounters in his life. In some cases, his problems are the same as those of any high school student. In other cases, his unique circumstances create their own difficulties. One example is the additional stress created by the way his choice of college becomes a media event. How does choosing a college become a different decision for Felton, compared to his peers? As a class, discuss the mix of advantages and disadvantages his status gives him. How does he view the "privileged" status he has? How does he take advantage of it? How is it a burden? Have students cite specifics from the text to support their answers. *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 SL 9-10.1*

Brother 2.0

Felton becomes a mentor to a young, bullied student named Tommy Bode. In some ways, Felton treats Tommy as a surrogate little brother. Break students into pairs. Have one of the students in the pair write an essay to summarize and explain Tommy's circumstances and his reaction to Felton's help. What happens to him during the course of the book? How does he change and grow through the text? What does Felton learn from their interactions? Have the other write an essay examining Felton and his brother Andrew's interactions. What are the dynamics of Andrew's

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relationship with his older brother? Working together, have the pair compare the two characters, identifying similarities and differences. What roles do each serve in Felton's life? Have them discuss the themes and large issues in Felton's life that are embodied in his relationship with each of these characters. Based on their discussion, have students revise and edit their work. Later, come together as a class and ask students to share their insights. *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 W 9-10.1, 9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.10 SL 9-10.1 L 9-10.1, 9-10.2*

Charting Reactions

At the conclusion of the story, Felton and Abby have a confrontation with Jerri and Terry, Abby's father. During this highly charged scene, the relationships between these characters change dramatically and quickly. Have students create a description of the scene, recording the key comments or actions and the reactions and attitudes of each character. Remind students to cite specific reasons for their impressions about each character. How does the content of their speech convey what they are thinking? How do their actions? The way they are described? Come together as a class and create a diagram or chart of how the relationships between the characters evolve in this scene. *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 W 9-10.4, 9-10.10 SL 9-10.1*

Point of View

I'm With Stupid is written in the first person. The reader gets to see the story from the main character's point of view. As a class, discuss the pros and cons of writing in first person versus other points of view—third person, multiple viewpoints, etc. Have students rewrite a passage or event from the book using a different point of view. Students may use the point of view of a different character or the third person. Working as a class, compare the rewritten passages with the original text. How does the altered point of view change the way the story is told and read? *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.3 W 9-10.3, 9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.10 SL 9-10.1 L 9-10.1, 9-10.2*

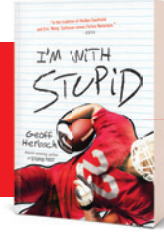
The Play's the Thing

Repeatedly in this book, Felton finds the play *Hamlet* coming to mind. He is so caught up in the story that he even goes to his teacher to discuss it more deeply. For him, it embodies many of the issues he is dealing with, and he finds his experiences echo the actions of the play. Have students use specific examples from the text to document the similarities Felton identifies. In addition, have them identify any other similarities from *Hamlet* that they might notice which Felton does not identify. *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3, 9-10.9 W 9-10.1, 9-10.4, 9-10.9 9-10.10*

That Old College Try

Felton's list of what he liked about Stanford is an important element in the story, and how his counselor views it provides a great deal of insight into Felton. How did Felton view his list? How did his counselor? Have each student create a similar list from Felton's point of view describing one of the schools he did not select and also provide an analysis similar to Dr. Green's, showing what deeper significance these points hold. Come together as a class and have students share their work. *RL 9-10.1 W 9-10.10 SL 9-10.1*

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Running Around in Circles

Andrew says that Felton has an addictive personality. Later, Felton uses it to describe himself. Have students research this term. Then have them review the text for instances of addictive behavior. Citing the specifics from the story, have them document their findings and come to a conclusion as to if this description fits Felton. *RL 9-10.1 W 9-10.1, 9-10.4, 9-10.7, 9-10.8 9-10.10*

Painful Lessons

One of the most important and painful lessons Felton learns in this story is the nature of his relationship with alcohol, as well as that of his friends and their families. Working as a class, track how Felton's life is affected by his use of alcohol. Cite specifics in the text to identify how alcohol changes his athletic performance, his personal relationships, and his emotional state. Does it help him to deal with his problems, or hinder him? After the discussion, have students select another character from the book who is affected by alcohol, either directly or indirectly. Compare and contrast this character to Felton. Working as a class, discuss the overall view of alcohol and underage drinking presented in this novel. *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 W 9-10.1, 9-10.4, 9-10.10 SL 9-10.1*

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Mom's the Word

Felton's mother Jerri has some problems of her own. As a class, discuss her character arc. How does she act at the beginning of the novel? How does Felton feel about his mother as a person? How does he feel about her as a parent? How has their relationship grown and changed by the end of the novel? *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 SL 9-10.1*

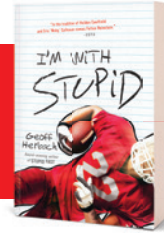
Change Reaction

In this book, Felton's actions elicit dramatic responses from people he does not know. This sort of reaction is one of the by-products of being a prominent figure. As a class, discuss the way people react to Felton's high-profile actions, such as choosing Stanford, helping to win a football game, or making the parody video of his friend's father. How do the reactions of strangers compare to the reactions of Felton's friends? His family? Do the reactions seem realistic to the class? Remind students to cite specific evidence from the text during discussion. *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 SL 9-10.1*

The Heart of the Matter

Have each student write down three main themes of this book. These can be specific to a single character, or apply to many characters. Collect them and collate the responses. Come together as a class to discuss these different themes. Identify how each emerges in the book and how it develops over the course of the story. Have students cite specific evidence from the text to support their analysis. Which emerged as major themes? Which emerged as minor ones? Which

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themes were mentioned most frequently? Which were mentioned most rarely? *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2*
SL 9-10.1

What Is Wrong with Me

Nothing Special deals with the problems of high school students, their friends, their parents, and their families. Some of these problems are minor; some are more consequential. Three of the major problems this novel addresses are alcohol abuse, bullying, and suicide. Have each student select one of these issues and write a short research paper on it. Working as a class, identify characters who are impacted by these problems. Then, have each student select a character and analyze his or her behavior in the book in light of their research. Is the condition described accurately by the text? How do the circumstances of the story contribute to the problem the student researched? *RL 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3 W 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.4, 9-10.5, 9-10.6, 9-10.7, 9-10.8, 9-10.10 SL 9-10.1 L 9-10.1, 9-10.2*