

Discussion Guide



An Educator's Guide to *Stupid Fast* by Geoff Herbach

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

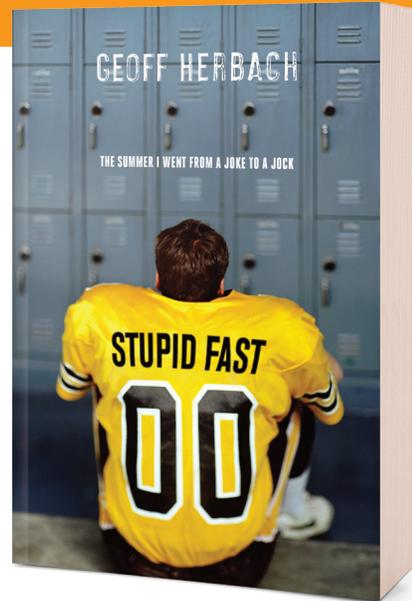
Stupid Fast by Geoff Herbach

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A wryly humorous coming-of-age tale narrated by Bluffton High School's most unexpected and reluctant sports star: awkward, confused, and self-deprecatingly witty 15-year-old Felton Reinstein.

Felton has always been on the smallish side—but suddenly during sophomore year he starts growing... and growing. During PE one day, he pours all his energy into a 600-yard race, beating everyone else by more than 150 yards. The coach convinces him he needs to join track and then go out for football. Felton has never been interested in sports, but there's no doubt that he is, in his own words, “stupid fast.”

A novel that brilliantly captures the spectacle of high school sports, all of the gawkiness and weirdness of puberty and a changing body, as well as the complexities of family drama and first romance, *Stupid Fast* tackles the issues of integrity, personal responsibility, and identity with darkly comic wit and surprising tenderness.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wee Wisconsin boy GEOFF HERBACH wanted to play for the Green Bay Packers or join the Three Stooges. His tight hamstrings left him only writing. Now he teaches at Minnesota State, University Mankato, where he blows his students' minds with tales of football and comedy glory, none of which are true. Visit Geoff online at www.geoffherbach.com.

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2012 YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults

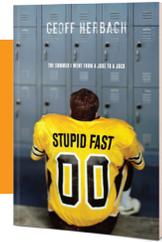
2011 ABA Best Books for Children Selection

2011 Junior Library Guild Selection

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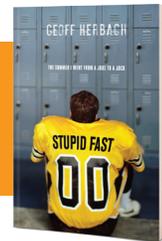
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Felton talks the way he does?
2. Why would Andrew say at the beginning of the book that being good at sports is bad for a young man?
3. Why do you think Ken Johnson, and people like him, treat other kids badly?
4. Discuss the idea that you can never get away from yourself. Do you have a voice in your head that distracts you or keeps you awake at night? What is this voice?
5. Do you trust Cody at the beginning? Why or why not?
6. Why can't Felton not watch Aleah as she practices piano?
7. What makes Felton decide to lift weights with Cody and the team?
8. Why is it so strange that Jerri drinks alcohol after the Jenningses come over for tea?
9. What do you think is the first clue that Andrew is losing it?
10. Why is it important in the story that Andrew burns his clothes?
11. When Felton knocks Ken Johnson down and catches the ball Ken throws at him—how is his confidence affected? Do these events help Felton?
12. Why does Felton refer to himself as “The Barbarian”?
13. Do you think Ken Johnson meant to hurt Felton as much as he did?
14. What do Felton’s new friends learn from their interaction with him over the summer?
15. List what Felton learns over the course of the book. Do you think he has gained the skills he needs to be okay in the future?

Enrich your book discussion group with these discussion questions and delve deeper into the issues presented in Stupid Fast. The guide is free and may be printed out or photocopied for use in the classroom, library, bookstore, or at home.

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Discussion Guide based on Common Core Standards



Felton Reinstein lived a fairly “normal” life considering he lived with the memory of his father’s suicide. Jerri, his mother, never talked about his father and encouraged Felton to “leave the past behind and re-engage” (p. 173). In this coming-of-age novel, Felton has discovered he is a “stupid fast” runner and has emerged a star athlete. His new outward identity has changed and affects every aspect of his life, both within his family and with his peers.

CCS-ALIGNED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Ask students to identify the themes in *Stupid Fast*: coming of age, mental illness, friendships, family relationships. Discuss in small groups which theme they believe is predominate, giving specific evidence from the text.

CC.9-10.RL.2

2. There are resources to guide teens in identifying who they are and the path they should choose for successful life. Herbach writes about changes in Felton’s identity. Lead a discussion about finding one’s identity. Are there experiences your students can identify with that have changed their identity?

CC.9-10.SL.1

3. Jerri, Felton’s “big hippy who doesn’t like hierarchy” (p. 4) mom, insisted Felton merely needed to “re-engage” to handle a difficult situation. Felton did not understand Jerri’s parenting skills. Discuss other behaviors Jerri had that Felton struggled to understand and how they emerged as a result of the family secret.

CC.9-10.W.9

4. Herbach describes the social classes of the small college town of Bluffton, Wisconsin: the townies, the “poop-stinkers,” the jocks, the “honkies,” and the college kids. Analyze how the author weaves them into Felton’s life and how he interacts with each group.

CC.9-10.RI.3

5. Ask students what “proof” Herbach gave for why Felton should not be a comedian. Do you believe he could be a comedian after experiencing such family drama?

CC.9-10.RI.5

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ACTIVITIES

1. Students research suicide prevention or mental illness to include symptoms and treatment. Create a pamphlet that could have been given to Jerri and her family with researched information about intervention, including support resources.

CC.9-10.W.8

2. Students formulate an argument or debate about body image. Use examples from the text to support Felton's view of body image in male athletes. Students research, using reliable print and electronic resources, to prepare for an in-class debate.

CC.9-10.W.1

3. Ask students to compare each of the main characters from the book; how did their changes impact other characters? Find excerpts from the text to support your character analysis. Use electronic collaborative mapping tools to provide online collaboration among your students. (Popplet or Lino are free online products.)

CC.9-10.RL.1

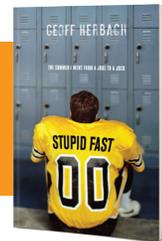
4. Which character in *Stupid Fast* was your favorite? Create a "Fakebook" page to include personal status, friends, and at least two written posts/conversations among their friends about one of the themes of the book.

CC.9-10.W.3

This guide was created by Deb Turner, an educator and LMC Director in Aurora, Illinois.

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PRAISE FOR *STUPID FAST*

“Felton is a hero for all readers—male and female. And Herbach is a writer to watch.”
—*Shelf Awareness*

“In the tradition of great young adult protagonists like Holden Caulfield and Eric “Moby” Calhoun comes Felton Reinstein... Surprises abound in this future youth classic.”
—VOYA

“In the end, Fenton’s sarcasm, anxiety, self-doubt, thoughtfulness, and compassion carry the day and perfectly capture the voice of his generation.” —*School Library Journal*

“Whip-smart and painfully self-aware, *Stupid Fast* is a funny and agonizing glimpse into the teenage brain... Young readers looking for a genuinely memorable first-person narrator—in the vein of Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* or Pete Hautman’s *Godless*—should really catch up to *Stupid Fast* this summer.”
—*Star Tribune*

“One of the most real, honest, and still funny male voices to come around in a while.”
—*The Hub*, YALSA

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“A great read for all teen and adult readers. I loved this!
It almost moved me to tears as it provides insight
into the mind of an adolescent.”

—*Library Media Connection Starred Review*

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“Felton’s manic, repetitive voice and naive, trusting personality stand out in a field of dude lit populated with posturing tough guys and cynical know-it-alls.” —*Kirkus*

“Felton’s self-deprecating take on his newly awarded A-list status is funny and compelling.” —*The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*

“In this struggling and often clueless teen, Herbach has created an endearing character coming to terms with his past and present.” —*Booklist*