

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO

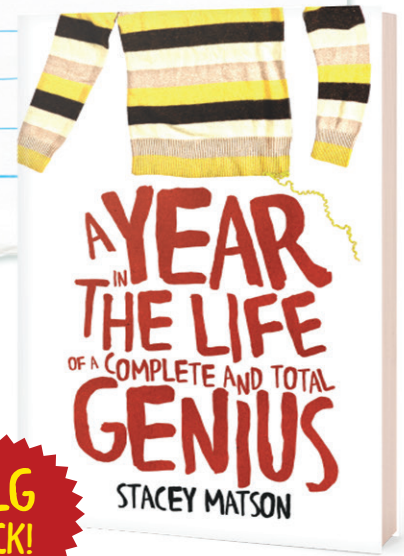
A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius

by Stacey Matson

A Common Core State Standards–Aligned Activity Guide for Grades 5, 6, and 7

Note: The activities in this guide align with Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts for grades 5, 6, and 7, but standards for other grades may also apply.

Prepared by We Love Children's Books



JLG
PICK!

ABOUT THE BOOK

Arthur Bean is a genius—it's just that no one else realizes it quite yet. He's going to be a world-famous author, and the first step is to win this year's story-writing contest. What he writes is pretty funny, but it gets him in trouble too...with his English teacher, the school newspaper advisor, that cool girl Kennedy, and Arthur's nemesis, Robbie Zack. But all great authors spark controversy, so Arthur's not too concerned. Through letters, email exchanges, notes from his teachers, and doodles, readers enter the often mixed-up mind of Arthur Bean, creative genius. A book that is by turns funny and touching, students will recognize their own lives in Arthur's view of life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stacey Matson grew up in Calgary, Alberta, where she always dreamed of being an author. When she discovered the MA in children's literature in Vancouver, she realized that there was a place to fulfill her childhood dream of writing full-time. So off she went to Vancouver, where she discovered that passions lead places, and she began to write in earnest. She also discovered the Writers' Exchange, a literacy program for at-risk kids, where she now works. In addition to writing, she also sells Christmas trees, works part-time at the Vancouver Aquarium, and is working on a sequel to *A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius*. When she can, she sees new places or old friends—sometimes both at the same time—and continues to write! Visit her at www.staceymatson.com.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Based on the title, what do students expect the book to be like? Will it be funny or serious? Now read the blurb on the back of the book to the class. What further information does it provide? Do they think the main character really is a “genius”? Why or why not?

Explain to students that the book they are about to read is told using writings, diary entries, and notes between the main character and the supporting characters. Do students think that writing a book in this style would be more difficult than one with a single point of view? Why or why not?

One of the challenges the main character faces is writer’s block. Discuss with students times when they have had trouble writing something—or even coming up with an idea. What tricks or techniques have they used to work through it?

Vocabulary Words

Have students keep a list of interesting and unfamiliar words they encounter while reading this book; the list should include the page number and the meaning of the word based on context. Then have students look up the words and compare the dictionary definition to their own. Working as a class, come up with synonyms and antonyms for their words. Discuss why students think the author used a specific word and not one of the synonyms.

RL 5.4, 6.4, 7.4; RF 5.4; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; L 5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5, 7.4, 7.5

POST-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Character Map

There are four main ways in which an author develops a character: the physical description, what the character says, what the character does, and what others say about the character. Working as a class, create a character map of Arthur. How do the other characters view Arthur? What do their opinions say about themselves as characters? Using this exercise as a model, have each student create a map of one of the other characters. Come together as a class and have volunteers share their character maps. Which of the four categories provides the most important information about a given character? Does the style of the book make one category easier or more natural than the others?

RL 5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 7.1; W 5.4, 6.4, 7.4; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Point of View

A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius is written as a collection of letters, notes, and journal entries. Have students read any other books that were written in a similar way? As a class, discuss the pros and cons of writing in this format as opposed to a more traditional first-person, or even a third-person narrative. Have each student select a significant event from the book and rewrite it in a third-person narrative. Working as a class, compare the rewritten passages with the original text. How does the altered point of view change the impact of the story?

RL 5.1, 5.5, 5.6, 6.1, 6.6, 7.1, 7.6; W 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.10, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.10; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Narrative Voice

One of the fun things about *A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius* is the format. Being able to read the notes and letters sent to Arthur by other characters gives us direct access to the way these characters speak and how they view events. As a class, discuss how the author uses these different narrators to tell the story. How are these viewpoints and voices different? What effect does changing the point of view have on the readers? Which viewpoint did the students like best? After this discussion, have each student choose an event in the book and write about it from the point of view of another character. Break students into pairs to exchange their work and revise it based on peer input. Have students read their entries to the class and then explain what evidence from the text lead them to write what they did.

RL 5.1, 5.6, 6.1, 6.5, 6.6, 7.1, 7.3, 7.6; W 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10, 7.4, 7.5, 7.10; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Friendship

One of the themes in *A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius* is the nature of friendship, and how friendships can develop. Break students into pairs and have them chart the significant events in the development of the friendship between Arthur Bean and Robbie Zack, including specific examples from the text to show what happened and how the boys reacted. Was this friendship a surprise to students? Was it realistic? Did the author make it seem convincing? Come together as a class and discuss their insights. Compare this friendship with that of Arthur and Kennedy.

RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Themes

Working as a class, discuss the main themes in *A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius*. What themes are expressed by multiple characters? Are any specific to one character? Have each student choose one of the themes in the book to explore in an essay. Students should cite specific evidence from the text to show the elements of the plot, characters, and setting that are used to communicate this theme. What do students feel the author is trying to say about this theme? Break students into pairs to exchange their papers and revise them based on peer feedback before submitting a final version.

RL 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2; W 5.1, 5.4, 5.5, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.5, 6.10, 7.1, 7.4, 7.5, 7.10; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Colorful Figures of Speech

A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius is full of the colorful writing of Arthur Bean. He enjoys using metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech. They appear frequently in his writing assignments as well. Have students keep a list of the favorite phrases they encounter, noting the page number and transcribing enough of the passage to provide context to the phrase. Break students into pairs and have them create a table that lists the figurative speech in the first column and defines the phrase in the second column. What purpose does using figures of speech serve?

RL 5.1, 5.4, 6.1, 6.4, 7.1, 7.4; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; L 5.4, 5.5, 6.4, 6.5, 7.4, 7.5

Writing Assignments

Arthur's teacher Ms. Whitehead assigns many different writing projects over the course of the book. Working as a class, review the last page of the book and discuss the exercises listed there. Have each student select one of the assignments from Arthur's class and complete it themselves, following the teacher's instructions. Break students into pairs to share their work and revise it based on peer feedback before turning it in. Were any writing exercises chosen more than others? What reasons did students have for selecting the assignment they did?

RL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; W 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.10, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.10, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.10; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Newspaper Article

In this book, Arthur Bean becomes a reporter for his school paper. One of the things he struggles with is not including his opinions when writing a newspaper piece. Have each student select an event in the news. Have them write an objective analysis of the event, reporting the facts in a neutral tone. Then have them compose a subjective report on the same event, including personal opinion and reactions. Break students into groups to share and revise their work. Then come together as a class and discuss the differences between "objective" writing and "subjective" writing. What are the strengths of each approach? Why are newspaper articles usually written in an objective style? Electronically publish two "classroom newspapers" using the articles, one *The Subjective Intelligencer* and the other *The Objective Times* for distribution to the students.

W 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.10, 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.10, 7.1, 7.2, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.10; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Humor

A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius is full of humor. Arthur's articles and writing projects are often very funny, as are the comments made by teachers and fellow students. Have each student pick their three favorite "funny moments" in the book and write a brief description of what happens and why it is funny to them. Come together as a class and discuss these scenes. Do the characters think that what is happening in the scene is funny? Do students agree on what parts of the book are funny? Does everyone feel they are funny for the same reason? What can students learn about writing humor from this exercise?

RL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1; W 5.1, 5.4, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.10, 7.1, 7.4, 7.10; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Solemnity

A Year in the Life of a Complete and Total Genius does have a more serious side. Arthur is struggling to come to terms with the death of his mother, as is his father. How does Arthur use his reading journal to work through some of these issues? As a class, discuss what we learn of Arthur's father and how he is coping with his loss. How does the author let the reader know how Arthur's father is doing? Does Arthur understand his father's behavior as well as the readers do?

RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3; SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1

Visit the Common Core State Standards website to read about the individual standards listed in this guide: **<http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>**