

The Homework Machine



By

Dan Gutman

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one chapter of *The Homework Machine* and is comprised of five of the following different activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . and many others.

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel: friendship, death of a parent, honesty, the value of hard work and perseverance, personal growth, and loyalty.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

Meet the D Squad, a foursome of fifth graders at the Grand Canyon School made up of a geek, a class clown, a teacher's pet, and a slacker. They are bound together by one very big secret: the homework machine. Because the machine, code-named *Belch*, is doing their homework for them, they start spending a lot of time together, attracting a lot of attention. And attention is exactly what you don't want when you are keeping a secret.

Before long, things start to get out of control, and *Belch* becomes much more powerful than they ever imagined. Now the kids are in a race against their own creation, and the loser could end up in jail . . . or worse! [The Publisher]

A complete synopsis and other helpful reviews can be found online at such sites as the following: <http://nutmeg2009.sblc.wikispaces.net/The+Homework+Machine>

Author Biography

Dan Gutman

Dan Gutman was born in New York City and raised in Newark, New Jersey – by his mother alone from age 12, when his father abandoned them. He graduated from Rutgers University with a degree in psychology and started graduate school in that field. As of 2008 he lived in Haddonfield, New Jersey with his wife and two children. Dan Gutman has written over twenty books in the *My Weird School* series. He has also written the *Million Dollar* series, featuring children who get a chance to win a million dollars in various sporting events.



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Name: _____

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Chapter 1



Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. There are four very different protagonists in *The Homework Machine*, all sharing equal billing: Snik, Kelsey, Judy and Brenton. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an interesting **protagonist**?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

humiliate	motivated	discrimination	enthusiastic
pursue	incompetence	totalitarian	distraction

1. Do you think it was _____ which caused Joey to lose the election?
2. Jackson was finally fired due to complete _____ on his part.
3. Having the canaries in the classroom proved to be a great _____ to all of us.
4. What career do you think Jasmine will _____?
5. She sure wasn't as _____ as I thought she would be about winning the race.
6. Money is what _____ Kevin in everything that he did.
7. Although John did not mean to _____ anyone, he must learn to guard his words.
8. It was unfortunate that the people from that poor region live in such a _____ country.

Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the start of Chapter One?

2. How did Sam Dawkins come by the nickname, *Snik*?

3. What was Judy's mom's first reaction to her daughter getting into trouble.

4. After reading Chapter One think of one **positive** adjective which would describe each of the four main characters.

Snik		Brenton	
Judy		Kelsey	

5. What does Kelsey mean when she says *Brenton was a genius when it came to school and stuff, but he was real stupid when it came to other stuff*?

6. Would you like to have Miss Rasmussen for a teacher? Why or why not?

7. Judy believes that Snik had low self-esteem. Do you agree? Why or why not?

8. Reread Snikwad's *Ten Commandments of Homework*. Which of his commandments make the most sense to you? Why?

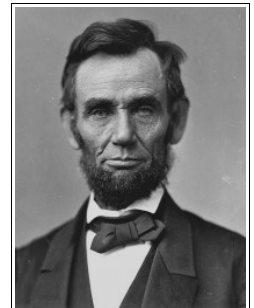
9. Brenton's statement, *But it was a fatal blunder on my part to have told him about the homework machine*, is an example of **foreshadowing**. Foreshadowing is defined as *a warning or indication of a future event*. What unfortunate thing do you think might happen as a result of Snik being told about Brenton's homework machine?

Language Activity



A. Abraham Lincoln Quote

Brenton makes the point that President Abraham Lincoln used the phrase, *That is cool*, in one of his speeches. Abraham Lincoln also said, *In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years*. What do you think Abraham Lincoln was trying to tell his listeners in this particular saying? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?



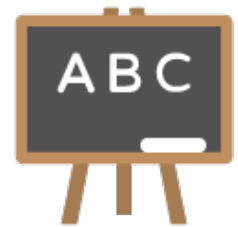
B. Personification is giving human qualities to something that is not human. Here's an example from Chapter One: *the Colorado River slowly sliced this gash into the earth.*

Describe how the Colorado River is personified in this example.

Create your own example of personification.

As you continue to read through the novel be on the lookout for other examples of this literary device. If you should find one, come back to this question and enter it below.

C. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: from Chapter One: *f*orest *f*ires



Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

The sound of a chainsaw	
A hailstorm.	
Your own choice.	

D. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter One is, *The kid is like a human computer*. What two things are being compared in this example?

--	--

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) the sound of an accordion

--

b) two noisy boys swimming

--

Look for a **simile** in the remaining chapters of the novel. If you find one return to this question and record it below.

--

E. Homophones

This section includes a number of examples of words that have homophones. Examples of homophones include **horse** – **hoarse** and **way** – **weigh**. Two words are **homophones** if they have the same pronunciation but different meanings, origins, or spelling. Think of two more examples of homophones and use each in a sentence showing the meaning of each word quite clearly.



Example 1

Homophones	Sentence
1	
2	

Example 2

Homophones	Sentence
1	
2	

Extension Activities



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A story-board can tell the story of only one scene - or the entire novel. Complete the story-board below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6