

NOVEL STUDY

Includes chapter summaries, discussion questions for each chapter, themes and a bank of activity/lesson ideas.

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However your students will be experiencing *Space Cadets*, whether through read-aloud, guided reading groups, literature circles or reading independently, this novel study exists as a teacher resource to supplement that reading. Specifically, it has been organized into two sections, corresponding to the goals I had when I created the unit:

## 1. Background Information

Teachers are busy. Crazy, crazy busy. I know this because I was immersed in the insanity for thirty-one years. So this first section is all about giving you the background you need to support your students without having to do a bunch of research. And you know what? If there's anything you want to know about the book that isn't in this first section, you can contact me at [hello@robinpawlak.com](mailto:hello@robinpawlak.com) and I'll do my best to pass that information on to you. I want to make this as easy for you as possible.

## 2. Idea Bank

Again, in the interest of saving you some time, I've compiled a list of activities for you. This is not a prescriptive, step-by-step teaching unit, because frankly, as a teacher I wasn't a fan of those. Instead, the goal is just to give you some options. You'll do your own thing anyway, which is exactly as it should be.

And of course, all of the ideas could be adapted to use with other novels, so if you find something that works well with *Space Cadets*, feel free to use it again elsewhere.

Finally, this idea bank is starting small, but I will be adding to it in the near future. Fire me an email at [hello@robinpawlak.com](mailto:hello@robinpawlak.com) and I'll send along updated versions as I create them. Even better, share one (or more!) of your ideas with me that I can add to the idea bank.

## About the Author



I was a teacher for 31 years in Red Deer. I had boatloads of fun with my students, but three decades is a long time, so in the summer of 2016 I decided to retire to something a little quieter. Nowadays, I spend most of my time in my office, making stuff up and muttering to myself. Some say this is a sure sign that all that time with children drove me mad. This may be true. But if a guy writes his imaginings down, he can call himself an author, which is a somewhat more respectable title than lunatic. If you visit [robinpawlak.com](http://robinpawlak.com), you'll find even more of my madness on display, including short stories for children (ages 8-108), teaching resources and some *Space Cadets* bonus material.

I love to connect with my readers, and will do a free author visit\* with any class that's doing *Space Cadets* as a read-aloud. In general, I am mindful of tight school budgets, and keep school visits very affordable, so even if you're not doing a read-aloud, connect with me at [hello@robinpawlak.com](mailto:hello@robinpawlak.com) and set up a visit.

*\*in person in Red Deer and surrounding area, or via video (Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger, etc.) for those farther afield.*

You can follow me on Instagram [@1robinpawlak](https://www.instagram.com/1robinpawlak) or Twitter [@1robinstweet](https://twitter.com/1robinstweet), or check out my Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/1robinpawlak/](https://www.facebook.com/1robinpawlak/).

## *Novel Summary* (with spoilers)

What if your imagination could take you anywhere? Literally.

Twelve-year-old Simon loves to daydream—a little too much, according to his twin sister Casey, who prefers real-life adventures. She leads the two into their father's workroom, which is strictly off limits, and they are zapped by their father's mysterious invention. Afterward, exhausted and dazed, Simon imagines that he is flying a spaceship. Suddenly, he finds that he can no longer control the fantasy, and he and his sister end up stuck in space. For real.

As the children get their bearings, a massive alien ship approaches. Simon and Casey are taken prisoner by the evil Gamnilians, an alien race bent on galactic domination. In jail they come across an unexpected ally in Geet, a fearful but clever little alien who wants exactly what they want: freedom, and to find a way home.

Geet hatches a plan, and everyone has a part to play. Along the way, the children make some shocking discoveries. First of all, they find that they are now in a completely different universe created by Simon's imagination. Secondly, they discover new abilities that they've acquired as a result of the accident with their father's machine. Casey's intelligence is greatly enhanced, and she uses her massive brainpower to adapt to the new technology around her. Simon learns that he has acquired the ability to imagine things into reality, but his powers are far from straightforward. With Geet's help, he develops these skills just in time to play a crucial role in the trio's life or death escape.

Ultimately, they are all able to get home, which is bittersweet when the time comes for the children to say goodbye and return to their own universe. While they know that they will miss their new friend Geet, they know that this is not the end. Their connection with this universe—and with Geet—is strong, and they will certainly be back for more adventures.



## Chapter-By-Chapter Breakdown

No.	Title	Words	Summary
1	House Arrest	1563	S&C (Simon & Casey) play cops & robbers in the house, fight, & are busted by their mom
2	Cousin Ernest	1175	We meet Cousin Ernest, S&C avoid spending time with him by playing hide & seek
3	Ready or Not...	807	S&C hide inside their dad's machine, Ernest finds them, they get zapped
4	Waking Up	372	S&C wake up & stumble out of the machine in a daze
5	Space, Please	1062	S&C are left alone & watch TV, Simon gets bored & imagines flying a spaceship
6	ODD	1341	Simon's daydream seems real & he can't control it
7	Wish upon a Star	1103	An alien ship (the Deathfighter 7) approaches, Simon tries to evade it but fails, he wishes Casey was there & she appears
8	The Gamnilians Say Hello	1018	Casey tries to figure out how to fly their ship, the aliens (Gamnilians) demand their surrender
9	Under Attack	963	Casey flies the ship & escapes, but the Gamnilians catch them
10	Fire	1292	Fire breaks out on S&C's ship, which is pulled into the Deathfighter 7
11	Out of the Fire, into the Frying Pan	1904	S&C's ship is about to blow up, the Gamnilians save them, S&C are interrogated

## Chapter-By-Chapter Breakdown

No.	Title	Words	Summary
12	Space Cadet	2056	S&C are taken to prison overnight, they await an appointment with the commodore in the morning
13	Who's There?	1503	A mysterious visitor named Geet comes to their cell
14	Geet	1254	S&C meet Geet, they agree to work together to escape
15	Commodore Lusec	2049	S&C are taken to Commodore Lusec, interrogated, then sent to the Doctor
16	Doctor Appointment	1811	S&C try to escape from the Doctor, Casey is knocked out
17	Just Imagine	1796	Geet communicates with Simon via the brain probe the Doctor is using on him
18	Reality Check	1053	As they continue to communicate, Simon finds out about the new abilities he & Casey have gotten from their father's machine, & he gets his first chance to try his skills out
19	Mind into Matter	958	Simon wakes up in the Doctor's lab to find Casey busy & the Doctor sleeping, he makes a pin using his imagination
20	Gone	1659	The Doctor wakes up, chases S&C, then disappears, Geet contacts Casey & gives her a task
21	Refuge	1191	Simon awakes to find that he & Casey have been teleported to Geet's hideout on the Deathfighter
22	Breaking Bread	1665	S&C & Geet rest, eat & debrief in safety until an alarm sounds

## Chapter-By-Chapter Breakdown

No.	Title	Words	Summary
23	On the Path to Safety	1697	S&C & Geet are discovered, Geet teleports S&C out with some cool equipment, but he stays behind
24	On Our Own	1113	S&C are left alone to prepare for an important mission
25	Taking Control	1996	S&C lose contact with Geet, then create a distraction for him by stealing a Gamnilian fighter ship via remote control
26	Crash and Burn	2345	S&C carry out Geet's plan to crash the fighter into the outside of the Deathfighter
27	Together	956	Realizing that they've just crashed the fighter into the very spot where they left Geet, S&C make the difficult decision to move on without him
28	Distractions	1773	S&C enter the hangar to take their ship & escape, Geet arrives & risks his life to help them, Geet is cornered by a Gamnilian
29	Now or Never	2369	Simon saves Geet, S&C & Geet escape
30	Valiant	2052	As they travel to Geet's home (an asteroid), S&C & Geet debrief, just as they are about to arrive safely the Gamnilians show up
31	On the Doorstep	1689	The Gamnilians have them trapped until Casey executes a daring maneuver & Geet teleports them to his home
32	Boom.	2515	S&C & Geet work together, each using their unique abilities, to defeat the Gamnilians
33	Beyond My Wildest Dreams	2015	Geet connects with Simon's mind to communicate with him during some weird dreams, & with Geet's help Simon imagines/dreams himself & his sister home



## *On Themes in General:*

Themes are the “big ideas” in literature. They can often (but not always) be expressed in a single word. Some common examples would be *love*, *war*, *family* and *coming of age*. Generally, authors develop themes in their writing intentionally: There is something they want to say about a particular topic, and they weave a story to help them do just that.

Having said that, once a writer publishes his novel, he loses control of all of that. Their readers are in charge now. They may well connect with the author’s chosen themes, and having done so, are free to agree or disagree with what the author has to say. Beyond that however, they may pick out themes that the author did not even intend. For the experts (writers, literary critics and . . . wait for it . . . teachers) to say at that point that they are wrong, that isn’t the correct theme, or that this isn’t what the author was trying to say, is all really beside the point. One of the beautiful things about books is that when they are passed on from author to reader, everything from that point on is up to the reader, who gets to decide how she wants to imagine it, what she wants to think about it and most importantly, what it means to her. As a writer I care less about a reader getting it “right”—seeing the book exactly as I do—than I do about the reader making it his own, integrating it with his own life experience, and being enriched by the process, whatever conclusions he may come to.

With all of that as a caveat, I’ll share with you some of the themes I had in mind when I wrote *Space Cadets*. Hopefully these will be a good starting point for discussion with your students. I encourage you to have your students consider these critically, as I believe they should with everything they read. Perhaps some of this will resonate with them, or maybe they’ll find their own connecting points with the literature. In any case, my hope is that as you explore the text, you and your students will be able to relate the story to your own lives in some meaningful way.

## *Some Themes in Space Cadets:*

### *Imagination*

This theme is a natural since imagination is so central to the plot: Without Simon's imagination, there is no story. (Just as without my imagination, there would be no novel, and without the readers' imagination, the story wouldn't matter anyway.)

The two main characters represent opposite approaches to imagination. Casey, who is all about action, has little time for it. A natural risk-taker, she likes her challenges and adventures in real life. She might wonder, *Why dream about it when you can do it?*

Simon, on the other hand, loves to daydream. He has a vivid imagination and is easily able to slip into different worlds. It's how he passes the time when he's bored, and his go-to for stress management. On page 74, Casey correctly asserts that he goes too far, using it to hide from reality.

So when Simon finds that his imagination has actually created reality—and that the new situation is not only completely out of his control, but incredibly dangerous—what should be a dream come true becomes more of a waking nightmare.\* He is forced to deal with his fear, and to learn to control his mind in order to control his world. \*\*

*\*Page 75 (last paragraph): "How could I explain what it was like to imagine flying through space—like I had a thousand times before—then suddenly finding out it's real . . . and that you're terrified. It's easy to be a hero when it's just make-believe . . ."*

*\*\*On page 248 (last paragraph), Geet says, "It is your mind. Your dreams, your memories, your imagination. You decide what to do with them."*

# Themes

Some questions about imagination for discussion with your students:

- What would the world be like without imagination?
- Is it possible to imagine too much?
- Is it better to *dream* or to *do*?

## Courage

This theme is linked to Simon's character arc. While Casey is a natural risk-taker, Simon struggles with fear. The events of the story, many of which would be frightening for anyone, push him well beyond his comfort zone. His turning point comes when, wedged between his fear and the reality of watching Geet get captured by a Gamnilian soldier, he finds the courage to risk his life for his friend, just as Geet had done for him.

The message I wanted to communicate to my readers is summed up by Geet on page 215 (*6th paragraph*): "Brave is not how you *feel*. It is what you *do*." I think that all children (all humans, really) struggle with fear. For some, like Simon, it's a daily battle, whereas the Caseys of the world perhaps wrestle with it less so. Making the two main characters opposites in this regard gave me a chance to showcase both ends of the spectrum, and to illustrate some important truths:

- Just because a person seems brave doesn't mean they're never afraid. Fear is a completely normal human emotion, and everyone feels it sometimes.
- Often the reason people seem like they're not afraid is because they're good at hiding it—even from themselves.
- Even the most fearful people can find courage. In fact, in some ways, those who face down fear on a regular basis are the most courageous.

Some questions about courage for discussion with your students:

- When is fear a good thing? When is it a problem?
- Do all people feel fear?
- What are some healthy ways to deal with fear? What are some harmful ways?

### *Family/Sibling Relationships*

I'm convinced that realistic characters are essential in children's literature. Middle grade readers, perhaps more than any others, simply aren't interested in characters that don't ring true, especially if those characters are children. I think that when that happens they come to the conclusion that the adult author just doesn't understand kids and they write the whole book off. I don't blame them.

For that reason, I wanted the relationship between Simon and Casey to be authentic, and the fact of the matter is that siblings (children especially, but not exclusively) often aren't very nice to each other. They tend to compete for their parent's approval and attention, and fight for status and power within the sibling relationship. At the same time, there is a closeness that comes with shared genes and circumstances, making for a rather messy love/hate dynamic.

Simon and Casey's relationship would include all of that, and be further complicated by the fact that they are twins, and the only children in the family. I tried to capture all of that in their interaction, and almost certainly failed to a degree. But my hope is that there is enough there that it rings true for my readers, and that those who have siblings might recognize a little bit of their own relationships in the novel.

How this all plays out is different for each character. Even though they're twins, Casey plays the role of "oldest child". She's physically stronger, more confident and knows what she wants. Simon is essentially her opposite: sensitive, fearful and someone who likes to think things through before acting. As a result of their personality differences, Casey is the more aggressive of the two, at times coming off as a bit of a bully when it comes to her brother. Simon doesn't like confrontation and will attempt to make peace if possible, but when he goes on the attack, sarcasm is his weapon of choice.

As the story progresses, the differences between the two children become a source of increased friction. With all of its danger and uncertainty, the adventure plays more to Casey's strengths than Simon's, and he tires of constantly being upstaged by his courageous sister. For her part, Casey is frustrated by Simon's fearfulness, along with his tendency to daydream.

## Themes

Ironically, it is the same trying circumstances that force the children to rely on one another, and as a result come to a deeper appreciation of the unique strengths offered by each, and the way in which the strengths of one offsets the weaknesses of the other. They rediscover that, beneath all of the acrimony, genuine love and appreciation not only exists, but trumps just about any obstacle that they are ever likely to face.

All of this is especially true for Casey, as the shift in her respect for and treatment of her brother constitutes the bulk of her growth over the course of the novel. Circumstances force her to recognize that much of what she has always seen as weakness in Simon in fact represents areas of strength that she herself lacks.

### *Friendship*

In this novel, we watch the birth and development of a close friendship between Geet and the twins. It begins with fear and suspicion (Chapter 13, beginning on page 81), and continues only after some hard questions and negotiation (Chapter 14). Simon is on board early on, but Casey takes some convincing. From her point of view at this point, the relationship is tenuous, based strictly on a common goal and the fact that each side has something that the other needs.

The challenging events that take place soon after serve to both test and strengthen the new friendship. Simon continues to advocate for Geet when it appears to Casey that he has deserted them (Ch. 16, pp.104/105 & 107), but by the end even she comes to trust and rely upon him. By the conclusion of the novel, after they've faced life-or-death challenges side by side, the bond has been forged. When the children finally get what they've wanted most and are able to return home, the moment is made bittersweet with the realization that going home means leaving Geet behind (Ch. 33, p. 250).

In discussing this theme, it might be useful to have students consider their own friendships. How did they begin? Have they changed over time? Are friendships made stronger or weaker by adversity? What would you be willing to sacrifice for a friend? What would you never give up?

## Discussion Questions



### Pre-Novel

Without opening the book, based only on what the cover shows you:

- What is the genre of this novel\*? (*science fiction, action/adventure*) Have you read any other books in these genres? What about other media (TV, movies, video games)?

*\*You might consider doing the [genre\(s\) introduction lesson](#) in the Idea Bank at this point.*

- What roles do think are played by the characters on the cover? (*protagonists, villain*)
- How much does the cover of a book influence whether you decide to read it?

### Chapter 1

- Where did this chapter take place? (*in the living room of the kids' home*) Then how do you explain the police, the sirens, the warehouse, etc.? (They were playing and imagined those things.)
- What did you learn about the characters in this chapter? How are they similar/different? (*Now might be a good time for the [character analysis activity](#) in the Idea Bank*).
- The chapter ends with foreshadowing. What is foreshadowing? (*when an author gives the reader a hint about something that will happen later in the story*) Why might an author use foreshadowing? (*to build suspense or to pique interest, in this case potentially encouraging the reader to continue to the next chapter*)

### Chapter 2

- What new information did you learn about the the twins in this chapter?
- Simon and Casey are opposites in many ways. Why might an author chose two main characters that are so different? (*it creates more opportunity for conflict, it's way more fun/interesting than two characters who are exactly alike*)
- Did you catch the foreshadowing in the chapter? (*the last line, as well as the references to the "Danger!" sign on Dad's door*)
- Prediction Time: Based on the hints we've gotten so far, what do you think might happen next?



## Discussion Questions

### Chapter 3

- Explain what just happened. *(the kids just got zapped by their father's machine)*
- Prediction Time: What do you think the result might be?
- Who is most to blame for what just happened: Simon, Casey or Cousin Ernest?

### Chapter 4

- How are Simon and Casey doing after the incident in their father's machine? *(they're disoriented, uncoordinated, can't think straight or speak properly and Simon has a huge headache)*
- Did anything in this chapter surprise you? Do you need to change the prediction you made after the last chapter, or are you sticking with it?

### Chapter 5

- Fun Fact: *All of the cow facts in this chapter are accurate.*
- Why does Simon daydream? *(he's bored)*
- Why does he daydream about space? *(There's a question about space in the game show that makes him think about his favourite TV show, Space Journey.)*
- Fun Fact: *Captain Clark is not a real character on a real show named Space Journey, but Captain Kirk is a real character on a real show named Star Trek, and the author happens to be a Trekkie.*

### Chapter 6

- Explain the title of this chapter. *(It has a double meaning: ODD stands for Onboard Digital Dictionary, and the events this chapter seem very odd to Simon.)*
- At the top of page 34 it says, "... my thoughts were the swirling flakes in a snow globe." This statement obviously isn't meant to be taken literally. It's a metaphor, which is a kind of figurative language where one thing is directly compared to another. What do you think the statement means? *(He can't think clearly. His thoughts are just going round and round—oh wait, that's a metaphor too! Um . . . His head his spinning . . . Oops! I did it again. Well, hopefully you get the idea.)*
- Why might the author chose to end the chapter where he did? *(It's a cliffhanger—the idea is to stop at a point where the reader where be curious and want to read on. In this case, the hope is that you want to know why the computer has never heard of Earth.)*

## Discussion Questions

### Chapter 7

- Simon's daydream has gotten way out of control and he's stuck in a bad situation. What has he tried so far to solve his problem? (*call Control and ask for help, stop imagining, imagine home, ask the computer, imagine he's a great pilot and he can fly the ship*)
- Keeping in mind everything above, and considering that his sister arrived as soon as he imagined her, can you think of an explanation for what's happening? (*It's very unlikely that students will be able to figure it all out yet since there hasn't been enough information given at this point. They need to know that it's okay to be puzzled—it's what keeps us reading—and that at least now they have a way to know when they actually do have it all figured out: They'll know enough to be able to explain everything above.*)

### Chapter 8

- *Before reading the chapter:* Casey's reaction to finding herself in the spaceship is very different from Simon's. Pay attention to how she reacts and be ready to talk about the differences after we read the chapter.
- Simon has always been a better reader than Casey, yet she seems to be able read the very complicated information on the computer even though he can't. Why might that be? (*The incident in their father's machine has altered her brain, making her smarter. If students don't get this yet, that would be understandable. Just add it to the "list of things we need to find out."*)

### Chapter 9

- Page 49: Listen for another example of a metaphor on this page. (*Near the bottom of the page: She was a statue, stoney eyes fixed on the Deathfighter.*)
- Page 51: Simon says, "Do you think this is all because of Dad's machine?" What do you think?

### Chapter 10

- The interaction between Simon and Casey is a little different in this chapter than it has been for most of the book. How is it different? Why? (*They're in a life-or-death situation, and have each other's backs, looking out for each other and even sacrificing for each other, rather than bickering.*)

### Chapter 11

- Explain the title of this chapter. (*It's a play on the saying "Out of the frying pan into the fire". In this case they move from the fire in their ship to an*

## Discussion Questions

*equally dangerous situation in the Deathfighter.)*

- Note: The Gamnilians talk to each other in their own language. There is a Gamnilian translation guide at the back of the book, but I recommend not looking at it until you are finished the chapter at least. For one thing Simon, the narrator, doesn't know what they're saying, so if you don't look the words up you and your students will be in the same boat, having to figure it out as you go. (It's good practice with using context clues.) Secondly, flipping back and forth will disrupt the flow of the reading.

### Chapter 12

- The title of the novel, *Space Cadets*, has a double meaning. Starting in the last paragraph of page 73 you get a clue to help you understand half of it. After reading that, can you explain the title? (*Figuratively, Simon is a space cadet who is always daydreaming. Because of that, they end up in space, learning to survive there like actual space cadets.*)
- The chapter ends with an important conversation between Simon and Casey (*from the 2nd paragraph of p. 76 to the end of the chapter*). What does Casey reveal about herself here? What does she help Simon learn about himself? (*Casey reveals that even she is sometimes afraid. She helps Simon see that in spite of his fear, he can be courageous.*)

### Chapter 13

- Simon had a nightmare at the beginning of the chapter. At what point did you realize it was a dream?
- Often our dreams are connected to what is happening in our life, and they sometimes also reveal our fears. How is Simon's dream connected to what's been happening? What does it reveal about him?
- You'll be meeting Geet in the next chapter. So, just for fun . . . Prediction Time! Is Geet a good guy or a bad guy? What do you think he looks like?

### Chapter 14

- Now that you've met Geet:
  - Is he pretty much what you expected, or were there some things about him that surprised you?
  - What are some of the characteristics that might make Geet a good person for Simon and Casey to team up with?

### Chapter 15

- What are the characteristics that make Commodore Lusec a good villain?
- Lusec asks the twins what they were doing near his ship, but doesn't believe

## Discussion Questions

their answers. Why not? *(Simon blabbers as if he might be making things up, he says things that sound like nonsense, he says he's not a commander but is wearing the uniform of a Casimonian Defense Force commander, and Casey finally says they don't know why they're there)*

- Prediction: Who is the Doctor, and what will he do when the kids arrive?

### Chapter 16

- On page 104, Casey brings up the fact that Geet isn't there and doesn't seem to have their backs like he said he would. Simon defends him. What do you think? Has he ditched them? Is he working for the Gamnilians? Has something bad happened to him? Or is just busy? Or watching over them, ready to help if they really need him?
- On page 108 (3rd paragraph) is an example of another type of figurative language called a *simile*, where two things are compared using *like* or *as*: "Shock, rage, pride and fear shot off like fireworks inside me." What does the sentence describe? *(Simon is experiencing a bunch of different, strong emotions all at once.)* Have you ever felt like that?

### Chapter 17

- The beginning of the chapter describes Simon doing something that already happened much earlier in the book. Why? *(The Doctor is doing a brain probe on Simon which is making him experience this event over again.)*
- How does Geet communicate with Simon? *(He speaks into his mind through the brain probe.)*
- What does Geet teach Simon to do? *(to get control of the brain probe by using his imagination, so that he isn't stuck in the same old memories)*

### Chapter 18

- In this chapter, Geet tells Simon what he found out about how the accident with their father's machine affected the twins:
  - What was the machine designed to do, and how did it work? *(The machine was meant for healing. You point it at an injured body part and it supercharges the cells so they heal faster, especially if you exercise that part right away.)*
  - How did the machine affect Casey? *(She exercised her memory and thinking skills, so those parts of her brain improved.)*
  - How did the machine affect Simon? *(He exercised his imagination, and it got so strong that what he imagined became real.)*
- If you could make things real by just imagining them, what would you imagine? What would be good about having that ability? What would be the downside?

## Discussion Questions

### Chapter 19

- Simon struggles to make a pin. What are his challenges? (*distractions, he thinks too much, he tries too hard*)
- At the end, when he tries to show the pin to Casey, it's not there. Why? Did he lose it again? Did it only exist in his mind? Something else? (*They'll find out in Chapter 22.*)

### Chapter 20

- The title of the chapter is "Gone". In this chapter, what's gone? (*at the beginning of the chapter it's the pin, at the end it's Simon*)
- Is the last sentence in the chapter a metaphor or a simile? (*a simile, it uses both "like" and "as"*)

### Chapter 21

- What does the title of the chapter tell you about what is likely coming? (*A "refuge" is a safe place, so they will probably be safe in this chapter.*)

### Chapter 22

- In this chapter, everything is calm, so the kids get a chance to talk with Geet, and they are given lots of new information. List as many of these things as you can. *Answers:*
  - *Geet got just about everything in his little hideout by taking it from the Gamnilians.*
  - *He's been a prisoner there for 442 days.*
  - *He teleported Simon's pin into his hideout and used it to finish his 2nd teleporter (which allowed him to transport the twins).*
  - *Simon could fly the shuttle at first but not later because the spaceship was imaginary at first, but once it became real he could no longer control it.*
  - *Simon created a new universe with his imagination.*
  - *Simon was able to imagine Casey into the new universe because he was relaxed and not distracted.*
- Fun Fact: The quiet times in books, when there's a break from the action, are often used by authors for *exposition*, which is where they tell you important things you need to know.

### Chapter 23

- Chapter 22 ends with a cliffhanger: Geet says, "We must go. They know." In Chapter 23, we find out that he's referring to the Gamnilians. What do the Gamnilians know? (*that Simon, Casey & Geet caused the explosion in the Doctor's laboratory, that they're still alive, possibly that Geet is working with them*) What do the Gamnilians *not* know? (*where they are, about their father's machine*)

## Discussion Questions

- On page 158 (3rd paragraph) Geet tells Simon that “Sometimes the path to safety leads through danger.” Why does he say this? *(In their situation, they were safe, but it was only temporary. Since the Gamnilians would eventually find them if they stayed, the only way to be truly safe would be to face the danger of leaving their hideout.)*
- What would likely happen if the commodore managed to get ahold of their father’s machine? *(He desperately wants to control the galaxy, so he would likely use it to help him. He could use it to become like Simon, so that he could imagine whatever he wants, including more powerful weapons than anyone has ever seen.)*

### Chapter 24

- Geet gives each of the twins a job. What is Simon’s job? *(communicating with Geet using the device on his finger)* What is Casey’s job? *(creating a distraction by using a remote control to steal a Gamnilian fighter)*
- By the end of the chapter, the kids lose contact with Geet. Why do you think that happened? *(possible answers could include a bad connection, that he had to hide/leave in a hurry, that the Gamnilians found him)*

### Chapter 25

- The title of the chapter has more than one meaning. How many can you think of? *(Since Geet isn’t there and they’ve lost contact with him, the kids are on their own, so they have to take control of the situation. Also, Casey learns to use a remote control to fly a Gamnilian fighter, so she is literally taking control. Finally, Casey is having some problems and Simon tries to help, but she won’t listen. He tries to grab the remote and take control, but Casey wins the battle.)*
- By the end of the chapter, the twins fly the fighter right out of the hangar. How might that help Geet? *(Gamnilians are searching for them. As soon as a fighter is stolen, they will think that they’re all in that fighter, so they’ll stop looking in other places, which should give Geet more time to finish his task and join the kids.)*

### Chapter 26

- Once again the kids communicate with Geet, then lose contact. Where is he? *(Simon and Casey believe he’s still at the hideout. He talks about deleting data.)*
- Geet tells them to ramp up the distraction by crashing the little fighter into



## Discussion Questions

the Deathfighter. At the last moment, Simon notices something about the location of the crash and he tells Casey to stop. What is he worried about? *(She's crashing it into a storage room with crates and barrels stacked up in one corner, just like Geet's hideout.)*

### Chapter 27

- Simon and Casey are on their own, and face a big decision. Should they go on to the hangar (and their ship) or stay and wait for Geet? In the end, Casey convinces Simon that they should go. Do you agree with that decision?
- On page 191, Casey says that Simon thinks too much, and that, "Sometimes you gotta think, and sometimes you just gotta *do*." Agree or disagree? Is it possible to think too much? Too little? Should a person always do both, or are there times when you need to do one and not the other?
- How has the relationship between Simon and Casey changed since the beginning of the book? *(Earlier, they were bickering and competing much more. They still do that at times, but overall they have each others' backs, and are cooperating more.)* Why the change? *(Possible answers include: tough times often bring people together, sometimes in life-or-death situations you either cooperate or die, facing danger makes you realize how much you care about your loved ones)*

### Chapter 28

- Of the three main characters (Simon, Casey and Geet) who has been the most heroic so far in the book? Who has been least heroic?
- Now that Geet is trapped, the kids must decide once again whether to go on without him. What would you do?

### Chapter 29

- In order for Simon, Casey and Geet to escape, everybody had to play their part. What did each of the three characters do that helped them succeed? *(Some possible answers: Simon saved Geet, closed the shuttle door and guided Casey. Casey got the shuttle started and flew them out. Geet distracted the Gamnilians twice, came up with the idea of going out backwards, merged the Valiant's shields and played with the shuttle bay's force field to keep the Gamnilians from destroying the valiant's shields)*
- Each of the three also had their failures in the hangar. What were they? *(Simon alerted the Gamnilians by knocking something over and making a big racket, Casey took a long time to start the ship, Geet got caught by the Gamnilian)*
- This chapter shows that Simon is different than he was at the beginning of

## Discussion Questions

the novel. How has he changed? (*Simon struggled with fear throughout the story. Yet in this chapter, he saved Geet in spite of the fact that it meant risking his own capture or even death.*) Why do you think he changed? (*Some possible answers: He has had to face danger throughout the story which has helped him to learn that he can face danger and survive, he has learned from and been inspired by Casey and Geet, people grow when they're pushed outside their comfort zones*)

### Chapter 30

- The title of the chapter is "Valiant", which is also the name of Simon and Casey's shuttle. Here is a definition of *valiant* according to the Cambridge English Dictionary:  
very brave or bravely determined, especially when things are difficult or the situation gives no cause for hope  
Which of the characters in *Space Cadets* would you describe as valiant based on their actions so far? Do you think anyone can be valiant, or just certain people?
- Courage is a major **theme** in *Space Cadets*. On p. 215, Geet says, "Brave is not how you *feel*. It is what you *do*." Discussion:
  - Is it possible act courageously even though you feel afraid?
  - What are some of the bravest acts you can think of? Do you think people feel afraid when they find themselves in those kinds of situations?
  - Is it a good idea to act one way even though you feel something very different inside?
  - Is there a difference between *brave* and *foolish*?

### Chapter 31

- Fun Fact: "On the Doorstep" is the title of a chapter in *The Hobbit*. Bilbo, Gandalf and the dwarves have journeyed a very long way and are right outside the mountain that is their destination. They find the secret door and believe they've reached their goal. Unfortunately, though, they can't open the door and are stuck there, right on the doorstep: so close and yet so far.
- On p. 225, Geet said, "We cannot surrender. But we cannot fight. I am working on another plan." At the end of the chapter, as they're about to blow up, he has Casey fly right at the Deathfighter, guns blazing. What do you think his plan was? What do you think will happen?

## Discussion Questions

### Chapter 32

- Each of the three main characters (Simon, Casey and Geet) had to play their part in order to defeat the Gamnilians. In the end, they each used their unique skills to make it happen. What abilities did each one contribute? *(Geet used his cleverness and skill with technology/inventions. Casey used the new intelligence she gained from her father's invention. Simon used his supercharged imagination.)*
- How does it affect Simon when he imagines something into reality? *(He gets weak, dizzy and he's kind of out of it.)*
- Did you see any evidence of anyone behaving valiantly in this chapter?

### Chapter 33

- Simon is exhausted after all of the imagining he had to do earlier, and he falls asleep. His dream is very strange, and includes references to many of the characters and events from the story. How many can you find?
- Geet uses a machine to connect with Simon's mind and communicate with him through his dream. He tells Simon that in order to return home, he just needs to imagine it. How come he can do that now, but it didn't work when he first arrived in the new universe? *(He wasn't ready then. Once the daydream became real, he didn't know how to control it. Now that he's had practice, he has the skill to control reality with his mind.)*
- On page 248, Geet says, "It is *your* mind. *Your* dreams, *your* memories, *your* imagination. *You* decide what to do with them." Agree or disagree? How much control do we have over our minds? Does what we think matter?
- Imagination is a major [theme](#) in *Space Cadets*. How important is imagination in real life?
- Which character . . .
  - changed the most from the beginning of the book to the end?
  - would you most like to have around when you're facing danger?
  - was the most annoying?
  - was the funniest?
  - do you admire the most?
  - would you most like to have as a friend?
  - would make the worst friend?

## Idea Bank: *Some Thoughts on Read-Alouds*

I'm a huge fan of read-alouds. They provide teachers with a unique opportunity to combine instruction with nurturing a love of reading in their students. On top of that (if that isn't enough!) I've often found that they create shared experiences that can help a class bond and can be referred back to later in the school year.\*

Having said that, I've learned (from my own mistakes) that there are ways to kill a good read-aloud. Typically, I found that it happened when I would try to do too much. Seeing so many opportunities to teach my students so many things, I would plan myriad activities, all brilliant in my own eyes. And some of them were actually pretty good. And my students learned a lot. But then, inevitably, this would happen: I would say, "Hey, let's read *(insert book name here)*." And the students would groan. And what I eventually realized was that it didn't have a lot to do with them not liking the book. It was because we'd been reading it *forever!*

Yes, it is possible to have too much of a good thing.

Upon realizing this, the first thing I did was to make a new rule for myself: *Read-alouds shalt not ever take more than one month.* Whatever amazingness was going to take place was going to have to be squeezed into the four weeks that I felt would allow me to maintain student interest and enthusiasm.

That forced me to ask myself some hard questions. Why do I do read-alouds? What are the greatest benefits? And how can I get the most bang for my buck within a short time frame?

Here are the answers I came up with:

### ***Biggest Benefits of Read-Alouds***

Create a shared positive experience that will . . .

- Nurture a love of reading in my students
- Bring us together as a class
- Give us something to refer back to later in the school year\*
- Provide an opportunity to learn about reading and writing together in the context of good literature

The problem, of course, is that by focusing too much on the fourth bullet we can annihilate the other three. What I learned was that it was possible to have a very successful read-aloud (hitting each of the four points above) without doing *anything* but reading and chatting a little about it as we went along. So please understand that by no means do I recommend trying to do all of the activities suggested in the idea bank. In fact, I beg you, please don't! Less is more. Rather, think of these as possibilities that you use sparingly to augment a great reading experience with your students.

*\*sometimes these focused on things we learned about reading or writing, whereas at other times they arose from a key theme, like perseverance, friendship, etc.*

## Idea Bank: *Genre(s) Introduction*

### Objectives:

- Students understand the definition of a genre in literature (as well as TV and movies).
- Students access their own experience and background knowledge to identify examples of sci-fi and action/adventure stories

### Duration: 15-20 min.

Keep it short and simple! The goal is review/overview and reminding kids of their previous experience with the genres of sci-fi and action/adventure. Resist the temptation to go too in-depth—you want to hit the ground running with the novel study rather than getting bogged down in details and definitions.

### Activities:

#### 1. Discussion (whole class):

- "What is a genre?"  
*A genre is a kind of story. Each genre has its own unique characteristics, and stories within a genre share most, if not all of those characteristics.*
- "What are some story genres?" (story rather than book, to include TV and movies as they tend to overlap, and are easy for kids to identify)  
*Common genres include romance, horror, crime, mystery, sci-fi, action-adventure, thriller, comedy, historical fiction, fantasy (and many others).*

Turn & Talk: "Tell your partner which genre(s) you read most often."

#### 2. Discussion (whole class): Show the cover of *Space Cadets*, ideally by projecting it so that students can get a good look at it.

"We'll be reading this book together. Based on the cover, what genre do you think it belongs to?"

*Based on the alien as well as the high-tech background, it would be reasonable to assume that it is science fiction, or sci-fi.*

#### 3. Discussion (partner/small group, then debrief as a class):

- "What are some sci-fi stories (books, TV shows, movies) you know?"
- "What are some of the characteristics of sci-fi stories?"  
*Some possible answers: technology that is far more advanced than what we have today, often takes place in the future, set in an alternative world {such as a galaxy far, far away}, usually includes aliens, often there are journeys through space*

## Idea Bank: Genre(s) Introduction

### Activities:

4. Optional: Show a few short clips from iconic sci-fi movies/TV shows. Alternatively, you could show one of these short clips at the beginning of each class for the first week or so. A few clips I recommend would be from:
  - *Star Trek*:  
"Beam me up, Scotty": Show the transporter in action. Also, "The worst fight scene ever" Google it. It's hilarious!
  - *Star Wars*  
"I am your father."
  - *Toy Story 2*  
"Buzz, I am your father."
  - *Galaxy Quest* (This movie is a parody of sci-fi movies & TV shows, especially *Star Trek*.)  
"Beaming up a pig lizard" is pretty funny, if you have a twisted sense of humour. Your students will love it!
5. Discussion (whole class):  
"Can you think of any books/movies/TV shows that might fit into more than one genre?"  
*It is actually quite common for stories to overlap genres. For example, Star Wars is science fiction, which is a subcategory of fantasy. At the same time, it has many of the elements of action-adventure.*  
"Space Cadets is actually listed as 'sci-fi action/adventure'. Can you think of any action/adventure stories?"  
*The Hunger Games, Harry Potter, Percy Jackson and The Maze Runner are some that students will be familiar with.*
6. Turn & Talk:  
"You and your partner may discuss *any* of the following in the next 3 minutes. If you finish talking about one question, just go on to another."
  - What is a genre?
  - What is your favourite book genre? Is it the same for TV and movies?
  - Have you ever read a book that is either sci-fi or action-adventure? If so, what is your favourite?



## Idea Bank: *Character Analysis, Simon and Casey*

### Objectives:

- Students identify significant traits of the two main characters.
- Students compare and contrast the two main characters.
- Students recognize that for main characters, most of the information about them is given early in a novel, but that more can be added as the novel progresses.
- Students recognize that characters can (and usually do) change somewhat over the course of a novel.

### Duration: *about an hour in total*

This is really one big lesson in four parts: after chapters 1, 3, 5 and 33 (the end of the book). The first part might require 20-30 minutes. The rest will likely only take 10 minutes or so each.

### Activities:

1. Written Work (partners or small groups):  
**After the first chapter**, students fill out the Venn diagram ([page 28](#)) with character attributes for Simon and Casey. Remind students to include basic information (age, gender, etc.), physical appearance and personality traits.
2. Discussion (whole class):
  - Students share the traits they have identified for each character, and whether they apply only to one character, or to both. Encourage students to add to their diagram whenever they hear something that they have not already written down.
  - "Authors try to give readers a lot of information about the main characters as early as possible. We already know quite a bit about Simon and Casey, and we've only read the first chapter. We'll be doing this again after chapter 3. Listen for more character details as we read the next two chapters."
3. Written Work (partners or small groups):  
**After chapter 3**, students adjust their Venn diagrams as needed. They should be able to add a little more from the last two chapters\*, but not nearly as much as they did after the first chapter. They may also need to delete somethings they had previously written—sometimes we think we know a character, but as we read more, find out we were mistaken.  
*\*For example, these two chapters clearly show that Casey tends to be a risk-taker, whereas Simon prefers to follow the rules and stay out of trouble.*

## Idea Bank: *Character Analysis, Simon and Casey*

### Activities:

#### 4. Discussion (whole class):

- Give a little bit of time for students to share new discoveries.
- "Simon and Casey are opposites in many ways. Does that make the story better or worse?" (*Obviously this is a matter of opinion and students may think differently, but from an author's perspective, putting opposite characters together creates far more conflict than if those characters were exactly alike. And conflict is what makes stories worth telling. No conflict = no story.*)
- Once again, this activity will be repeated after chapter five, so students should continue to listen for information about Simon and Casey.

#### 5. Written Work (partners or small groups):

**After chapter 5**, students once again adjust their Venn diagrams as needed. (*There is really no new information in chapter 4. In chapter 5, we see more of Casey's temper, determination and competitiveness, which students may or may not have identified previously. For Simon we find out about his favourite TV show, and, most importantly, his vivid imagination.*)

#### 6. Discussion (whole class):

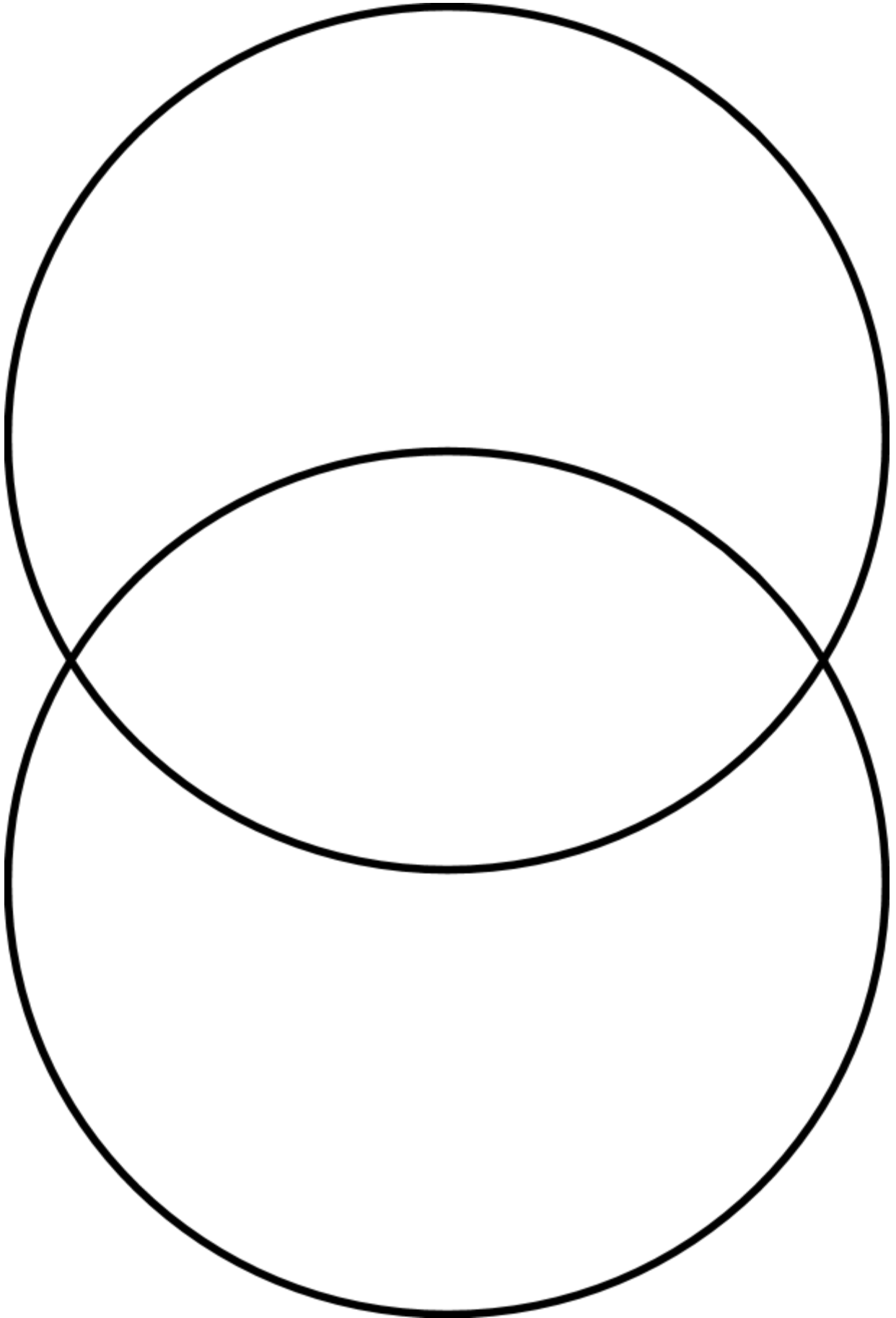
- Give a little bit of time for students to share new discoveries.
- "Where did we get the most information about the characters?" (*first chapter*) "Do you think we'll find out more about these two characters as the story continues?" (*While the vast majority of character information comes early on, that information is generally refined as the novel progresses. We sometimes get brand new information. More often, we get to know characters on a deeper level. And of course, characters can also change as the story goes along.*)

#### 7. Discussion (whole class, and/or small groups/partners):

- **At the end of the book**, students look over their Venn diagrams. "Have these characters changed at all during the novel?" (*Simon wrestled with fear throughout most of the story. By the end, even though he was afraid, he was able to act heroically in the face of danger, risking his life for Geet and later bombarding the Gamnilians with 'meteorites'. Casey changes in a very different way. She was always strong and courageous, but she also learned to be more considerate with Simon, and more cooperative instead of competitive all the time.*)
- Why do you think these characters changed? (*People often grow/learn when they are forced outside their comfort zone. The events in this book presented a different set of challenges to each character, requiring each to face their weaknesses. Authors put their characters in difficult situations on purpose, trying to 'push their buttons'. The change that happens as a result is called a character arc.*)
- "Do you think character arcs happen in real life? Do difficult circumstances cause us to grow?" (*This realization can help kids—and adults—recognize that life is a story, and that problems actually make better stories and stronger characters!*)

**CASEY**

**SIMON**



## Idea Bank: *Connect with the Author*

I love to connect with my readers, and I think it's great for students to interact with authors. There are a couple of ways we can make something like that happen for your students:

### 1. Classroom Visits

Because I'm relatively new to the world of publishing, I'm currently offering free author visits to teachers who are doing *Space Cadets* as a read-aloud with their classes. While in-person visits are only possible in Red Deer and surrounding area, I've found that video visits (Skype, Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger, etc.) are very effective. If you're interested, just contact me at [hello@robinpawlak.com](mailto:hello@robinpawlak.com) and we'll set something up. We can make these work with a single class or a larger group.

### 2. Email

As you go through the novel, questions may arise that your students would like to run by the author. I'm happy to reply to any emails your students send to [hello@robinpawlak.com](mailto:hello@robinpawlak.com). It's not always easy to respond to dozens at a time, but there are some more manageable things we could do:

- A different student could send a question or comment after each chapter.
- The class could compose an email collaboratively every so often with their thoughts and any questions, and send it along via their teacher.
- As a final assignment at the end of the novel, students could write letters with their thoughts (what they liked, their ideas for future books, questions, etc.). These could be sent via email after your assessment of them, and I could then send along an email or perhaps a video to your students in response.

Once again, if you're interested, just send me an email and we can make arrangements.

### 3. My Website

At [robinpawlak.com](http://robinpawlak.com), students will find *Space Cadets* bonus material, some short stories, and a feature called *Writing with Robin*, where I pass on tips for young writers. You might want to visit as a class, or just make the website available for students to explore on their own.

## Idea Bank: *Culminating Activity, Drama*

### Objectives:

- Students demonstrate their understanding of the plot and characters in *Space Cadets*.
- Students develop communication and interpersonal skills through creative expression in a group setting.
- Students celebrate the book and the experience they've had reading it together.

### Duration: 1¼ to 2 hours

I know, that's a pretty broad range of time. It will depend on your students as well as the choices you make as a teacher. Some factors will be your students' familiarity with drama, how polished you want the scenes to be, and how much time you feel you can afford.

### Activities:

1. **Assignment:** ***At the conclusion of the read-aloud***, students are presented with the following options for a final assignment:
  - Act out a favourite scene
  - Create and perform an alternate ending
  - Act out a potential scene from book 2
  - Interview a character from the book
    - Partners
    - Talk show format
    - Could be adapted to more than two students with multiple characters and/or interviewers
  - Interview classmates about the book
  - "Book in a Minute"

This is an amazing activity that I unfortunately only discovered late in my career. It is excellent for summarizing novels, movies or curricular content (social studies, science units, etc.). It is challenging for students at first, because it forces them to really think about the most crucial elements and summarize. Check out a couple of examples:  
Frozen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0DW0tunAcE>  
Forrest Gump: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOvgJ0TxdfI>

*A question I am often asked is, "What about students who are reluctant to perform?" In my experience (fourteen years as a middle school drama teacher, and over 30 years incorporating drama in the classroom), the more you do drama, the less this problem presents*

## Idea Bank: *Culminating Activity, Drama*

### Activities:

*itself—once kids try it and figure out that it's a safe environment, the vast majority become very willing participants. I would begin by encouraging them to at least try it, with a promise that if it just doesn't work for them they can complete an alternate assignment. Often, once they get going, they find out it isn't as scary as they expected. Ensuring that these students have background, non-speaking roles is also very helpful. If you have one or two students who just can't bring themselves to do it, an option could be completing any of the above as a written assignment, either as a script or short story. Another thing that often happens is that students start on the alternative assignment, see how much fun everyone else is having, and ask to join in later. That's a win!*

Assessment: Coming at the conclusion of the novel, this could be a good opportunity for an assessment activity. If so, you'll want to articulate this to your students in advance. Some aspects you might consider assessing would be:

- To what extent does the performance accurately depict details of plot and character from the novel?
- Does the performance show evidence of care and effort during rehearsal times? *(See below for some specific criteria in this category. These criteria may be established in collaboration with students during rehearsal.)*
- To what extent does each group member contribute to the collaboration and rehearsal process?

2. Activity (Groups: *You'll have to decide, of course, whether to pre-arrange the groups or allow students to create their own. Sometimes working with their best friends helps students to feel more confident with drama activities. As far as group size goes, 3 seems to be the magic number, but it depends somewhat on the students and the scene they'll be performing. In general, I allowed groups of 2-5. More than 5 is generally a bit of a gong show.*):

- Students meet with their group to determine which type of performance they will undertake and to begin brainstorming. This stage shouldn't go on too long. Generally, you want to see kids up on their feet working through their scene within 10 minutes. Scripts are a bad idea—they take forever to write, and force everybody to memorize lines, creating a stilted performance. Students also shouldn't try to plan out every detail before they begin to rehearse. All they need to get started is the basic idea. The rest they can work out as they go.
- Circulate amongst the groups and watch the performances. As you notice



## Idea Bank: *Culminating Activity, Drama*

### Activities:

areas for improvement, it is generally beneficial to call the class back together for mini-lessons about what makes an excellent performance. (*Some areas I found often arose included: volume, everyone knows their part, scene makes sense to the audience, scene includes a clear beginning, middle and end.*) Having one or two brave groups perform what they have so far is often very useful. The class can provide feedback. ("What did this group do really well? What could they improve?") Students then return to their rehearsal time with concrete steps they know they need to take in order to be ready to perform. This step may need to be repeated a couple of times. At the very least, call the students back in near the end, summarize the things that have been discussed/demonstrated, then give them 10 more minutes to finalize their performance. Overall, this portion of the lesson could take anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes.

### 3. Performance:

- Each group performs their scene for the class.
- Assess? If you've chosen to use this as an assessment, recording the performances, especially if you're not used to assessing drama, could be helpful.
- Enjoy! These kinds of performances are lots of fun, and a great way to celebrate the reading experience you've just had together as a class.



I hope this novel study unit will be beneficial for you and your students. I'd love to hear from you about your experience—it's so rewarding to know that the novel is getting out there, and that classes are enjoying it together! Also as you go through the unit, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [hello@robinpawlak.com](mailto:hello@robinpawlak.com). I want this to be a great experience for you and your students, and if I can make something a little clearer for you, I'm happy to help out. In addition, if there's something you do with the novel that works well for you, please share it with me. I'd love to include it in a future version of the unit (with your permission, of course). Speaking of such things, I do plan to update the unit over time (new lessons, the inevitable corrections, etc.), so if you'd like to receive the latest version when it comes out, just let me know at [hello@robinpawlak.com](mailto:hello@robinpawlak.com).

Finally, if you enjoy the novel with your students, there are a couple of ways you could help get the word out about this little independent author's book:

- Leave a review on Amazon or Goodreads. Because I'm a relatively new, independently published author, most people haven't heard about me or my book. Reviews help them know that others have read and enjoyed *Space Cadets*, and they'll be far more likely to take a chance on the unknown. Reviews don't have to be lengthy, 5 stars (the overall number of reviews matters more than the average rating) or include your name if you're shy.
- Send me an email about your experience doing the read-aloud with your students. I'd love to include a line or two on my website. It doesn't have to be a dissertation; a few positive words from a peer could go a long way toward generating interest from other teachers.
- Student reviews: This could be a great final assignment, and once again, would be something I'd love to include on my website. (Little snippets under a heading like "Here's What Kids are Saying About *Space Cadets*") Because, let's face it: What matters more than what children think about a children's book?

*Thanks!*  
*Robin Pawlak*