

Professor Gargoyle Educators' Guide

About the Book

Strange things are happening at Lovecraft Middle School. Rats are leaping from lockers. Students are disappearing. The school library is a labyrinth of secret corridors. And the science teacher is acting very, very peculiar. Robert Arthur knew that seventh grade was going to be weird but this is ridiculous!

With the help of some unlikely new friends, Robert discovers there's more to Lovecraft Middle School than meets the eye. Can he uncover the secrets of the school before it's too late?

Genre

Children's horror

Themes

- Supernatural events
- Friendship
- Bullying
- Courage
- Middle school
- Technology

Before Reading

- Activate prior knowledge by asking students what scary stories they have read, what makes these stories scary, and why they like scary stories.
- Let students explore LovecraftMiddleSchool.com, or show them the short video on the website under "Extra Credit" to introduce the book.
- Have students browse the book for a few minutes. Then create a class Clues, Problems, and Wonderings (CPW) chart. Similar to a KWL chart, a CPW chart is appropriate to use when studying fiction. Keep the chart displayed in your classroom. As a class, in groups, or individually, students can add to one of the three following columns as they read the book:
 - *Clues*: In this column, list students' ideas concerning the book's plot, characters, and setting based on the title, author, genre, illustrations, chapter titles, bold print, and other "clues."
 - *Problems*: Have students scan a few pages of the text looking for unfamiliar words, confusing illustrations, unusual formatting, and so on. List them in the "Problems" column, and revisit them as students read the book.

Wonderings: Use this column to write questions students have about the book's plot, the content of the illustrations, connections to other books written by the same author, et cetera. As students read, refer to this column often to see if they have found answers.

While Reading

Chapters 1–5:

- *Vocabulary words:* anatomical, descended, flushed, gnashing, haphazardly, indicating, lumbered, outlandish, perimeter, plunged, pneumatic.
- Make a graphic organizer for the Five W's of Scary Story Writing: who, what when, where, and why. As they read *Professor Gargoyle*, have students complete the Five W's for the book: *Who* are the main characters? *What* is the story about? *When* does the story take place? And so on. Download a PDF of the Five W's graphic organizer at www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson407/5w.pdf.
- Print copies of the Character Map graphic organizer at the end of this guide, and distribute to students so they can keep track of characters as they are introduced. Have them sketch each character and write the character's name with a brief description, and include a space for students to write how each character has changed by the end of the novel.
- At the end of Chapter 4, Robert is transported from the library to another place. In the last two paragraphs of the chapter the author uses sensory descriptions to make the story interesting. Have students find words and phrases in these paragraphs that show what Robert saw, heard, smelled, and felt. Discuss words and phrases authors use in scary stories to make readers feel nervous or frightened.
- Have students choose an interesting scene that hasn't already been illustrated in the book and draw their own illustrations. Then have students write descriptive captions for their illustrations.

Chapters 6–10:

- *Vocabulary words:* cranium, distraction, executing, exhilarated, fetid, hideous, kiosks, maw, mesmerized, monozygotic, monstrosity, polycephaly, reprimanded, ventriloquist.
- *Science connection: polycephaly.* Robert named his two-headed rat Pip and Squeak. Help students research real two-headed animals by Googling images for *polycephaly* and searching the term on YouTube for appropriate videos). In pairs or individually, have students find a two-headed creature they are interested in, draw it, and write a short story about it in their writing journals.
- *Social studies connection: bullying.* Many students have experienced being bullied at school, at home, or online. Help students define and discuss bullying. Why is it so hard to tell an adult when you're being bullied? Why won't Robert tell Mr. Loomis the truth about how horribly Glenn treats him? What do you think Robert should do about Glenn? What can adults do to help when a kid is being bullied? What can other kids do? How could bullying be prevented at your school?
- In Chapter 8, Professor Goyle takes Pip and Squeak from Robert. Ask students to predict what Robert and Karina will do next. Write these predictions on chart paper and revisit them at the end of Chapter 9.
- *Poetry connection: found poetry.* For each student, make a photocopy of two pages from the book with interesting, descriptive prose (e.g., pp. 72–73). Ask students to highlight or underline words they like. The words can be random, interesting words,

words that catch students' attention, or words that students feel go well together. Have students write down their selected words on a separate sheet of paper and then mix and match the words until they "find" a poem.

Chapters 11–18:

- *Vocabulary words:* abdomen, arachnophobia, bizarre, consume, demon, dimension, gingerly, gnawing, parallel, paranormal, teeming, tentacle, tethering, toxic, wincing, vortex.
- Follow up on the bullying discussion: How does Robert help Glenn in Chapter 11? Why does he say he helped Glenn? Ask students to predict how Robert and Glenn's relationship may change as a result of Robert's saving Glenn from the purple tentacles. Revisit these predictions after reading Chapters 12 and 13.
- After Robert and Glenn talk about the strange things that are happening at school and the possibility that Lovecraft Middle School may be built on the site of an old cemetery, how does Robert learn about the construction of the school? Have students reread Chapters 13 and 14 to trace Robert's research. Make a map or path to follow the steps he took to answer his questions. Talk about the facts Robert discovered and the ways he used research skills and critical thinking skills to find answers to his questions.
- Have students sketch Crawford Tillinghast and/or his mansion based on the descriptions in Chapters 13 and 14.
- In Chapter 16, readers discover why Professor Goyle is so strange and why so many creepy things are happening in the school. After discussing this chapter, help students add to the What and Why sections of the Five W's graphic organizer they received when they began reading. When students finish Chapter 18, help them explain how the problem was resolved.
- After reading about the slimy stuff Robert finds in one of the guest bedrooms of the Tillinghast Mansion while he and his friends search for a "gate" back to the school (Chapter 17), brainstorm what the characters might find in other rooms if they dared open the doors. Have students illustrate their ideas.
- "Crossing over" involves some chilling encounters with spiders and spiderwebs. Through a class discussion or a concept web, help students make text-to-text connections between *Professor Gargoyle* and other books that involve spider imagery. Why do authors use spiders so often in scary stories? What other creatures do authors use to make stories scary or creepy?
- After finishing Chapter 17, discuss the importance of the spell that Glenn remembered from the leather-bound book. Have students find the earlier sections of the novel where Robert finds this book and where Glenn first reads the spell. Discuss how authors introduce important details as they write so that readers can understand the plot as it unfolds.
- Discuss how the author sets the stage for the next book in the series.

After Reading

- Revisit the CPW chart and see whether students' comments under "Problems" and "Wonderings" have been resolved. Since *Professor Gargoyle* ends in a cliff-hanger (leading to the second book in the Tales from Lovecraft Middle School series, *The Slither Sisters*), students may have new questions to add to the chart even though they have finished reading the novel.
- Discuss how authors' ideas often come from real life, and help students find examples of how Charles Gilman used experiences from his life to write *Professor Gargoyle*. Discuss interesting "what if" situations from students' lives (e.g., What if I went to a new school and it was haunted? What if I found a secret attic in my school's library? What if I discovered that one of my friends was really a ghost? What if I saw my science teacher swallow one of the rodents in her classroom?). What ideas from your real life could you make into a scary story by using your imagination? Have students brainstorm and write as many ideas as they can in their writing journals.
- Explain to students that the author of *Professor Gargoyle*, Charles Gilman, is the pen name of Jason Rekulak, an editor who lives in Philadelphia. If they could meet the author, what would they ask him? After making a list of students' questions for the author, help them read an interview with him at LovecraftMiddleSchool.com (click on "Our Founders," then "Author Charles Gilman"), or print a copy of the interview for students to read either as a class or in pairs. Which of their questions are answered in the interview? Consider the author's invitation to e-mail him with students' remaining questions.
- Complete the same question-and-answer-finding exercise for the book's illustrator, Eugene Smith, at LovecraftMiddleSchool.com (click on "Our Founders," then "Illustrator Eugene Smith").
- As a class or in pairs, have students use their Five W's graphic organizer to complete a story cube. Use the Interactive Story Cube at www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/cube_creator/ (which students can print and assemble after completing), or download a printable story cube at www.innovativeclassroom.com/Files/Reproducibles/CubeTemplate.pdf.
- Have the entire class write a scary story together as a shared writing project. Brainstorm ideas for a plot (including setting, problem, and resolution), characters (including a main character and a villain), and an interesting ending.
- Have students complete a story cube as a prewriting activity for their own scary story. Then guide students through the writing process as they write, illustrate, and publish their own scary stories. Students can read their stories to each other as a small-group or whole-class activity.

Internet Resources

For Teachers

Reading and writing scary stories

- www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/thrills-chills-using-scary-407.html

Polycephaly (multiple-headed animals)

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polycephaly
- YouTube.com search for “polycephaly”

Bullying

- pbs.org/parents/itsmylife/resources/bullies.html?anchor=lesson_plans

For Students

Professor Gargoyle: Tales from Lovecraft Middle School #1

- LovecraftMiddleSchool.com

Writing scary stories

- learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/make-your-own/story-maker
- www.kidshealth.org/kid/grow/school_stuff/bullies.html

About the Author

Charles Gilman is the author of the Lovecraft Middle School series—and the pen name of Jason Rekulak, an editor who lives with his wife and children in Philadelphia. When he’s not dreaming up new tales about Lovecraft Middle School, he’s biking along the fetid banks of the Schuylkill River in search of two-headed rats and other horrific beasts.

About the Illustrator

From an early age, Eugene Smith dreamed of drawing monsters, mayhem, and madness. Today, he is living the dream in Chicago, Illinois, where he resides with his wife, Mary, and their daughters, Audrey and Vivienne.

Character Map for Professor Gargoyle

| Character's Name | Character's Name | Character's Name |
|--|--|--|
| Sketch | Sketch | Sketch |
| Description | Description | Description |
| How does this character change during the story? | How does this character change during the story? | How does this character change during the story? |

Clues



Problems



Wonderings



Name _____