

Nick and Tesla's Robot Army Rampage Educators' Guide

About the Book

In this second novel of the Nick and Tesla series, the precocious brother-and-sister duo find themselves solving another baffling mystery. As the story opens, their Uncle Newt takes a consulting gig at a cut-rate amusement park, engineering animatronic figures for a cheap *Hall of Presidents* knockoff. One perk of the job is that Nick and Tesla have unlimited access to the amusement park all summer long—but the kids quickly discover that one of the park employees has a sinister plan. They'll have to build a few robots of their own to foil him! Readers are invited to join in the fun as each story contains instructions and blueprints for five different projects. Learning about science has never been so dangerous—or so much fun!

About the Authors

“Science Bob” Pflugfelder is an elementary school teacher based in Newton, Massachusetts. He has made many television appearances on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *Live with Kelly and Michael*, *The Dr. Oz Show*, and other media outlets. These are his first books.

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Pre-Reading Activities/Topics

1. The names of our two main characters are Nick and Tesla, an obvious reference to Nikola Tesla, an inventor and engineer best known for his work with electricity and electromagnetic energy. Teachers may wish to have students predict the significance of the characters' names, given the novel's title and relevant information about Tesla.
2. The genre of the novel is mystery. Teachers may wish to discuss traits of an effective mystery (problem or question, suspense, answer or resolution) and use a basic plot chart to identify the “parts” of the plot in which each trait is emphasized (introduce problem in exposition/intro; suspense increases in rising action to the climax; answer to the problem in resolution of plot).
3. Several characters are the victims of stereotyping. Teachers may wish to define this term prior to reading and either present or have students discuss real-life examples. Additionally, students should examine the effects of stereotyping in society.

Ongoing Activities

Several activities can be done throughout study of the novel. Each activity is designed to help students become aware of the development of various aspects of the story. All activities can be assigned beginning with Chapter 1. They could also become part of any summative assessment.

1. Compare and contrast Nick and Tesla. What kind of kids are they? How are they alike and different? Use specific examples throughout the novel to support the inferences made.
2. Keep a log of quotations that are significant to the plot. These quotations might be particularly revealing about a character, increase suspense, exemplify the use of foreshadowing, etc. Students should copy the quote, note the page number, and then explain the quotation's significance.
3. The primary conflict in the story is the search for a stolen comic book. There is an ongoing secondary conflict, however: Nick's feeling of abandonment and his not knowing when his parents will return. Chronicle the development of this secondary conflict and explain its function in the novel.

Chapter Questions

Teachers may wish to use these chapter questions to check for comprehension either on an individual basis or through group (large or small) discussion. The questions range from those using basic recall skills to more complex, inferential questions.

CHAPTER ONE

1. What is the backstory to the arrival of the twins (Nick and Tesla) in Half Moon Bay? In other words, why do they live with their uncle instead of their parents?
2. How does Nick feel about his parents' absence? How do you know?

CHAPTER TWO

1. Visualize the Wonder Hut. Draw what Nick and Tesla expected to see compared to what they actually see when they arrive.
2. *Curiosity* is named after what other robot?
3. How does Tesla try to distract Nick from thinking about their parents' absence? What does that tell you about her relationship with her brother?

CHAPTER THREE

1. How does Uncle Newt feel about Dr. Sakurai? Cite evidence from both Chapters 2 and 3 to support your answer.
2. Who are DeMarco and Silas? Describe their personalities using evidence/examples from the chapter.
3. Define "stereotype." Silas has stereotyped Nick and Tesla as nerds. What "evidence" does he use to make this determination? How does Tesla react to being described as a nerd?
4. Identify a stereotype in your school. Explain how accurate or inaccurate this stereotype is, based on your knowledge of the people in that group.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Describe the Half Moon Bay police department.
2. Compare the Treasure Trove to the Wonder Hut and Hero Worship, Inc.
3. Why is Tesla so intent on finding the stolen comic book?

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Who do the kids think has the stolen comic book? What evidence do they have?
2. Dobek believes the kids are in the store for what reason? How is this assumption another example of stereotyping? How does Dobek feel about young people? How do you know?
3. What weakness of Dobek's do Nick and Tesla plan to use against him?
4. Why does Dobek need to be distracted and gotten away from his counter?

CHAPTER SIX

1. How has Duncan, the clerk at the Wonder Hut, changed since we are first introduced to him? Consider appearance and attitude, especially toward the kids.
2. Compare Duncan's treatment of Nick and Tesla with Dobek's behavior and attitude toward them. Cite specific examples to support your interpretation.
3. Why does Silas grab the "bugs" from Tez and run across Main Street without looking at traffic?

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. What is in the envelope that Silas takes from the Treasure Trove?
2. What key error have Nick and Tesla made about Dobek?
3. How does this error make the problem of finding the stolen comic book more complicated?
4. How does Sgt. Feiffer know that Dobek didn't steal the comic book?

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Dr. Sakurai is full of surprises. Identify one thing she does that is surprising to Nick and Tesla. Identify one thing she does that might surprise the reader. What does she do, in other words, that isn't in keeping with the personality she has shown so far?
2. Why won't Nick and Tesla let Silas keep the photo he took from Dobek? What other of Silas's traits are Nick and Tesla concerned about?
3. Who comes up with a plan to return the photo to Dobek? How do the other kids respond?

CHAPTER NINE

1. How do Nick and Tesla return the photograph to the Treasure Trove?
2. Why does Tesla move closer to the jewelry store that is being robbed?

3. Reread the paragraph on page 140 that begins “Even if they...” What impact does this paragraph have on the reader?

CHAPTER TEN

1. What additional information about the robbery at the jewelry store do Nick and Tesla learn by reading the newspaper the next morning?
2. How helpful do you think the description on page 156 of the robbers will be? Why?
3. Identify at least five of the ten words misspelled in the article about the robbery.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. What did Nick and Tesla create for Angela, the owner of the jewelry store that was robbed. Why?
2. How has Silas’s situation become more dire, with his family’s need to find the stolen comic book even greater than before?
3. What system do the jewelry store and the Treasure Trove have in common?
4. How do we know that, despite the attention the current mystery is getting, Nick still misses his parents?
5. How do you think the jewelry store was robbed? Who do you think is the culprit and why?

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. How do Nick and Tesla think Dr. Sakurai is able to rob businesses throughout Half Moon Bay?
2. Who is the real culprit?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. Explain how this chapter functions as the climax of the novel.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. Contrast DeMarco’s parents’ reaction when picking him up at the police station to the reaction of Silas’s dad.
2. What does Nick learn when he checks for messages at home?
3. Explain how this chapter is an example of a cliffhanger. What is the function of a cliffhanger?

Targeted Vocabulary

Vocabulary instruction is often subjective; the methods for vocabulary instruction are varied. The targeted list is organized by chapter, and the chapter lists are all related by concept. Some focus on characterization, for example. Others focus on setting. Teachers can pick and choose, adding and/or deleting words based on their students' level and the school/district protocol for vocabulary instruction.

CHAPTER ONE

bounding (7)
reluctantly
scrambled
plodding (8)
dismissively
genial (9)
billowing (10)
bellowed (11)
roiling (12)
asphyxiating
spewed (13)
forlornly (16)

CHAPTER TWO

eccentric (19)
shuffling (20)
haunted
shambled (21)
grunge (22)
grimy
illegible
wincing (23)
unflattering
protruded (25)
bewildered (28)
quivering (29)
distracted (30)
flinched (31)
begrudgingly (33)
subdued
improvise (34)
provoke (36)

CHAPTER THREE

pheromones (45)
subliminal
chagrined
addicted (50)
adrenaline
excitable (51)
mellow
burly (53)
hunched
sarcastic (54)
rhetorical
appalled (56)
furrowed (57)
sheepishly (59)
snarky (62)
gravely (63)

CHAPTER FOUR

consideration (68)
conjoined
vintage (72)
drab
chamber pot (73)
looming (75)
scowl
sneered (76)

CHAPTER FIVE

dawdled (77)
smirked (78)
rococo chaise longue (79)
simpering (81)
hooligans
aliases (82)
listlessly
pessimistic (83)
attentive
haggle (84)
profoundly (85)
impressed (86)
inoculated
innocuous (87)

CHAPTER SIX

assumed (94)
scurried (96)
contradict (98)
generic
buccaneer
admiringly (99)
promotional
spluttering
cringed
skeptical (104)
inconspicuous (107)

mulled (89)

CHAPTER SEVEN

shy (112)
lunging (113)
meddling
wilted (115)
gaped (119)
alibi (120)
confirmed
deduction
curfew (123)

CHAPTER EIGHT

chafe (125)
dubious (126)
simulate
modifications (127)
sophisticated
distorted (128)
stifling
deftness (129)

CHAPTER NINE

aerodynamic (140)
spastically (145)
stashed (146)

CHAPTER TEN

gloomy (149)
hibernate (150)
despite (151)
impressive
synchronizing (153)
synchronous
culprit (154)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

undetectable (164)
noxious (165)
innovative
contorted (166)
grotesquely
putrid
cherubic (170)
vigorous (173)
gouges (174)
incorrigible

CHAPTER TWELVE

queasy (182)
confrontation (183)
puzzlement (184)
pathetic
bluff
badgering (188)
scheme (192)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

pensively (199)
fiendishly
abrupt (200)
saline solution (206)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

grimly (208)
glares
wry (210)

Chapter Summaries

ONE

Nick, Tesla, and Uncle Newt are blown out of Uncle Newt's basement when one of his projects goes awry. Heading into town for breakfast, they see a robot behind the counter of the closed restaurant.

TWO

Nick, Tesla, and Uncle Newt meet Dr. Hiroko Sakurai, the new owner of the Wonder Hut, who happens to be a former colleague of Uncle Newt. On returning home, the kids decide to build their own robot.

THREE

Nick and Tesla are summoned by their friend DeMarco to Silas's parents' comic-book store. Silas and his father tell Nick and Tesla the store has been robbed. The only item stolen is a valuable comic book that Silas's father had planned to sell to save the store.

FOUR

Nick and Tesla visit the Treasure Trove, owned by a competitor of Mr. Kuskie and one of the only people to know that Mr. Kuskie, Silas's dad, had the valuable comic book.

FIVE

While Nick and Tesla are at the Treasure Trove, they overhear Dobek speaking on the phone and infer that he has the comic book and is planning to sell it. With Silas and DeMarco's help, Tesla begins to devise a plan to distract Dobek in order to retrieve the comic book.

SIX

Nick and Tesla create remote-controlled bugs to use to scare Dobek. Uncle Newt has a crush on Dr. Sakurai, who has been giving robots to area businesses to promote the Wonder Hut.

SEVEN

Silas lets the bugs loose in the Treasure Trove, taking the manila folder he believes contains the comic book. Unfortunately, the folder contains an autographed picture, not the missing comic book, and the kids learn that Dobek has an alibi for the night of the robbery. Nick, Tesla, Silas, and DeMarco must now try to return the photo, which has already been reported stolen.

EIGHT

Silas shares a plan with Nick, Tesla, and DeMarco. Although Nick isn't sold on Silas's plan, Tesla calls Silas a genius. Dr. Sakurai and Uncle Newt go to dinner together.

NINE

Nick and Tesla successfully return the photograph to the Treasure Trove, albeit in a unique way. While returning the photo, they witness a robbery at the jewelry store across the street. Complicating the situation, the kids believe the robber sees Tesla before escaping.

TEN

Reading the newspaper the next morning, the kids learn more about the robbery.

ELEVEN

Nick and Tesla build a robot of their own to give to Angela, the owner of the jewelry store that was recently robbed, as a replacement for the one lost in the robbery. While there, Tesla and Nick ask Angela questions about the store and the robbery, and Tesla tells them she believes she knows who robbed the store.

TWELVE

DeMarco and Tesla confront Dr. Sakurai, mistakenly believing that she is the culprit. However, Duncan, Dr. Sakurai's assistant manager at the Wonder Hut, claims responsibility and

commands the robots he has built to surround DeMarco, Tesla, and Dr. Sakurai. Unknown to Duncan or Dr. Sakurai, Nick and Silas are hiding in the back room.

THIRTEEN

Nick and Silas run into the room as Duncan attempts to blow up all the robots simultaneously. Because Silas has sprayed the robots with a saline solution from the super soaker he and Nick had made, the robots' circuits short out, rendering them harmless.

FOURTEEN

Duncan is arrested, and all the kids go home. Uncle Newt returns to the Wonder Hut to help Dr. Sakurai clean up, leaving Nick and Tesla home alone. Nick checks for messages before going to bed and hears his mother's voice, warning them of dangerous people who, she thinks, are after the kids and now know they are staying with Uncle Newt.

EXTENDED WRITING/RESEARCH TOPICS/OPPORTUNITIES

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) ask students to conduct basic research. The ability to formulate a question and use credible sources makes up two important components of this task. A third is the ability to write unified informative and argumentative pieces. The following general topics can be used as interdisciplinary writing assignments for both English language arts and science objectives. Depending on how the topics are worded, they can be used as either informative writing topics or argumentative topics.

1. Uncle Newt is named Newton Galileo Holt. Have students write an informative essay comparing Uncle Newt to one of his namesakes. OR Have students write an argumentative essay about which of the three namesakes best represents Uncle Newt.
2. The robots Nick and Tesla build are controlled remotely, but the kids also consider hydraulic and pneumatic power when constructing them. Have students write an informative essay about one of these types or a comparison essay comparing all three. OR Have students write an argumentative essay about which method is more effective, feasible, etc.
3. Compare each of the following stores to its owner: the Wonder Hut and Dr. Sakurai; the Treasure Trove and Dobek; Hero Worship, Inc. and Mr. Kuskie. How do the stores symbolize the characteristics of their owners?
4. There are several stereotypes in the novel that affect how the characters interact with one another. In an informative essay, identify one such stereotype in the story and explain how this stereotype exists in the real world and affects people's behavior.
5. Dr. Sakurai drives a Tesla. Write either an informative paper about recent breakthroughs in the electric car industry or an argumentative essay about some aspect of the electric car industry.