



ALIEN IN MY POCKET

Forces of Nature by Nate Ball



DISCUSSION GUIDE

BOOK TALK

When Zack's family plans their annual camping trip, none of them think they might get eaten by bears, lost in the woods, or washed away in a river. Of course, with the exception of Zack, no one in the family knows about Amp, the four-inch-tall blue alien that crash-landed in Zack's room. Nor do they know that when Amp is around, trouble is not far behind—especially on a camping trip. Problems erupt when Amp decides to build a fire that almost burns down the park, and then gets the kids lost in the woods. But in the end, Amp leads Zack and Olivia safely back to camp with only a paperclip compass to guide the way. For this adventure—all's well that ends well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Zack hate camping? What occurs on this camping trip that makes it such a disaster?
2. Why doesn't Zack want his friend Olivia to go camping with his family?
3. Why is the ranger so reluctant to let Zack's family enter the park? Does Zack's family prove his suspicions to be accurate? Why or why not?



4. What role does Amp play in changing Zack's outlook toward science? How does Zack plan to use his newly-discovered attitude to his advantage?

The above questions correlate to CCSS: Speaking and Listening: SL.3.1, SL.4.1, SL.5.1; Reading Literature: RL.3.1, RL.4.1, RL.5.1; Language: L.3.1, L.4.1, L.5.1 and L.3.3, L.4.3, L.5.3

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A SLEUTH OF BEARS

Bears present a serious potential threat for campers in national parks. Ask students to research the type of bears most common in national parks, the problems campers and bears have coexisting, and the precautions campers can take to protect themselves. Then, with a partner, ask students to create and illustrate a poster or flier that can be distributed to a state or national park to help warn campers of the dangers. Students should also include a brief description of the species of bear living within the park(s), what the bear eats, when and where it sleeps, and the time of year bear cubs are born.

SWEET DREAMS—OR NOT

Zack refers to dreams several times in the book: his recurring dream of eating a salami-and-earthworm sandwich in front of his classroom (page 16), his troubling dreams about fruit salad and snakes (page 38), and Taylor's habit of laughing in his sleep at invisible dreams (page 14). Ask students to investigate the science behind dreams, including talking and laughing in one's sleep. Based on the information they obtain, have each student create a miniposter that includes an illustration of one of Zack's dreams or one of their own and the scientific explanation for the dream. Have students share their illustrations and explanations in small groups and post them in the classroom.

CROOKED TREES AND HYPOTHESES

Olivia presents a hypothesis on why she thinks the trees have grown crooked in the Crooked Forest. Ask students to investigate the possibility of Olivia's hypothesis and, based on the information they glean from their research, to write a one-page explanation of why they either agree or disagree with Olivia's hypothesis. If they do not agree with Olivia, have students develop and write a hypothesis of their own to explain why the trees have grown crooked. To accompany their hypotheses, have students create a series of sketches with captions that demonstrate the process that may have created the Crooked Forest.



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