

Fragile Bones: Teacher's Guide

A novel study.

Introduction

Fragile Bones is a contemporary novel appropriate for grades seven and up. It is written in two voices so the reader can see how two teens think differently when confronted with the same situation. This guide is to encourage individual reading, literature circles or class novel discussion. The guide will help increase awareness about those who are born with autism. It is also a novel that can promote discussion about bullying, over-achievement, and diversity.

Novel Summary: Fragile Bones

Meet Harrison and Anna:

Harrison is a fifteen-year-old boy with an uncanny ability to recite every bone in the skeletal system whenever he gets anxious – and that happens a lot. The meaning of “appropriate behaviour” mystifies him: he doesn’t understand most people and they certainly don’t understand him.

Anna is a graduating senior with the world at her feet. Joining the Best Buddies club at her school and pairing up with a boy with Asperger’s/autism is the perfect addition to her medical school applications. Plus, the president of the club is a rather attractive, if mysterious, added bonus.

Discussion Questions for the Students: Prereading

1. What is autism?
2. What is high functioning autism?
3. What are some ways that someone with autism can cope?
4. Can a child with autism go to school? Learn how to read? What are some jobs that people born with autism can do later on in life?
5. Are there organizations that help those who are born with autism?
6. Do you know anyone who was born with autism? Explain what that person was like? If you don’t know someone with autism tell what you think it is or what that person is like. Remember they all are very different.

7. In your own words what is discrimination. When have you felt that you might have been discriminated against?
8. What is bullying? What would you do if someone was bullying your friend?
9. Going to medical school takes a lot of schooling? What are the steps?
10. What is the Best Buddies Club? Do you think you could have such a club at your school?
11. What activities could students do that belonged to the Best Buddies Club?

Activities for the Students to do: Prereading or Postreading

1. Research the autism spectrum disorder. Why is it classified to be a spectrum disorder? Where does Asperger's fit into the autism spectrum disorder?
2. Watch videos on kids with autism. Make a list about how they think differently.
3. Make a poster or brochure about the Best Buddies club that could be put up on a bulletin board in your school or be handed out to students to encourage them to join.
4. Brainstorm activity ideas that a Best Buddies club in your school could do. How could they make such a club work? Organize a mock schedule of events for a Best Buddies club in your school.

Novel Discussion Questions:

Chapter One and Two.

Pages 1-31

Summary

Harrison is going to a Best Buddies meeting at the school even though he doesn't really want to. His older brother, Joel, waits for him to take him home. Harrison is uncomfortable at the meeting and also uncomfortable on the ride home with his brother because Joel speeds. Anna also attends the meeting but she is excited to be there. The next morning she goes to see Mrs. Beddington and finds out that her Best Buddy is going to be Harrison Henry.

Before Reading

Discuss the Best Buddies program.

Discuss Asperger's/autism.

After Reading

How did Harrison react when he had to go to the meeting? How did Anna react when she went to the meeting? What is the difference between the two characters reactions?

How does Harrison cope with new stress?

What are some of the things that Harrison likes?

How does Anna react when she finds out that Harrison Henry is her Best Buddy? Who are the secondary characters that were introduced? What do you think their roles will be throughout the novel?

Let's talk about the Writing

***Literary Devices**

What literary devices did the author use to create the characters of Harrison and Anna? Make a list of literary devices.

***Voices**

How did the author change the voice of Harrison so he doesn't sound like Anna? What distinguishes the two voices?

***Character Description**

In your words describe the character of Joel.

Plot Summation - Summarize what has happened in the first two chapters.

Relating to Your Life – Have you ever had to go to something that you that they were nervous about? What were some of *your* coping mechanisms? (This can be an event with your parents, an audition of some sort, a meeting for something, the start of a new year at school etc.)

Chapter Three and Four

Pages 32-59

Summary

Harrison gets a phone call from Anna and at first he doesn't want to talk to her. But then he talks to her and she seems nice. His mother has a conversation with him and girls. At dinner Harrison's food get mixed together and he has a meltdown. Anna meets with Harrison at school

and everything goes well and they decide to meet for ice cream. She meets up with Justin and really likes him but doesn't know if he likes her back. On Saturday, Anna and Harrison meet for ice cream and it goes well although Anna is still learning how to deal with him and hopes she did okay.

After Reading

What happens to Harrison at the ice cream store? How does Anna handle him?

Why does his mother have to drive him?

What does the title of the novel mean?

What habits does Harrison have? What does he know that is inappropriate behaviour?

What does Harrison want to do after he finishes high school? Do you think he will be able to do such a job?

What does Anna want to be?

What does Anna want to get Harrison to do?

What did you think about Justin?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Foreshadowing**

The author is foreshadowing a few events in this chapter. Can you write down a few ideas on what is being foreshadowed?

***Character Description**

In your own words describe Justin. Give him a physical description but also describe his personality.

Plot Summation- Summarize what happened these two chapters.

Relating to Your Life

How would it feel to know that you are different like Harrison? Have you ever felt different?

Have you ever wanted someone to like you so you try hard to please them?

Chapter Five and Six

Pages 60-79

Summary

Harrison gets a ride home with his mother and freaks out a little in the car. Then he gets home and watches television with Joel. He doesn't like it when anyone kisses. His friend Alan comes over and he is interested that Harrison has a Best Buddy who is a girl. They play Lego in Harrison's room. Anna has a little confrontation with her mother as they are discussing Harrison. She takes Harrison to the Science Center but when he wants to eat, she convinces him to go to a café on the street. Harrison gets agitated so she takes him back to the Science Center and they eat there. But when she goes to the washroom and comes back, Harrison is gone.

Before the Reading

Discuss Achondroplasia which is what Alan has.

After Reading

Harrison gets anxious in the car? What does his mother do to help him?

How did Harrison react to being out on the street?

How does Anna try to help him?

What do you think about Anna's mother?

What did Alan and Harrison talk about in Harrison's bedroom?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Cliff Hangers** – Sometimes authors end chapters on cliff hangers to make the reader think, “What will happen next?” Write a paragraph about an event that *might* happen in the next chapter.

***Character Description**

In your own words write a character description for Alan.

***Dialogue** – Joel and Harrison have a conversation on the sofa while watching a television show. Rewrite this scene from Joel's point of view.

Alan and Harrison have a conversation up in his room. Rewrite this scene from Alan's point of view.

Plot Summation

In your own words summarize the plot in these two chapters.

Relating to Your Life

What would you do if you were supposed to be looking after a person, or a pet, or even something for someone and they/it disappeared? Has that ever happened to you? Write about this and what you would do if something like this happened to you? Perhaps think about pet sitting and have the pet disappear.

Chapter Seven and Eight

Page 80-98

Summary

Harrison doesn't want to go to the café but Anna tells him it's okay to go back and they eat in the cafeteria. When Anna goes to the washroom, Harrison heads outside to go to the washroom because he doesn't like using public restrooms. He pees on his pants. When he gets home he takes his pants off right away. His mother asks him about his night. Anna spends time with Justin but he is evasive. She gets a phone call from Harrison's mother and they chat about what fun she had with Harrison. His mother sounds relieved. Then Anna asks her if Harrison would work on the Best Buddies dance committee. His mother tells her to ask him but when she does Harrison says no.

After Reading

Where was Harrison when Anna was looking for him?

Why do you think he doesn't like public restrooms?

What was the difference between Anna's walk down the street and Harrison's walk down the street?

Harrison's mother has to ask Harrison if she can touch him. Why do you think that is?

What happens when Justin and Anna are together?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Setting**

When describing the street scene how did the author use senses? Think of a setting and write about using your senses. It can be the setting of your choice. (An arena, ballpark, classroom, park, amusement park etc.)

***Foreshadowing**

Justin has a mystery surrounding him. Write down some reasons why you think he is so dark and doesn't talk very much.

Plot Summation

Summarize the plot using your own words.

Relating to Your Life

Have you ever tried to go somewhere but in the end not gone because you were too nervous or scared? Write about this.

Chapter Nine and Ten

Pages 99-124

Summary

Harrison has his only friend, Alan, over and he talks about girls. Harrison isn't interested in talking about kissing a girl because of germs. Joel tries to convince Harrison that a costume would be good to wear to the Halloween dance but Harrison doesn't know if he even wants to go to the dance. When Harrison and Anna are at the Science Center, she gets him a shirt with bones on it and tells him she thinks it could be a good costume for the dance. Harrison actually likes this. He sits in the front seat of the car because he doesn't see anyone with a red bicycle. Anna finds the shirt with the bones on it at the Science Center and hopes that Harrison will like it. And he seems to. The next day, Harrison phones Anna and invites her over for dinner. Anna has to miss a college fair to go to the dinner and her mother isn't happy. They have a fight and Anna leaves the house crying. Then when she gets to Harrison, because she has worn high heels, he has a meltdown.

After Reading

Why does Harrison have such bad feelings about Halloween?

How did Harrison cope with the number 5 when visiting the Science Center?

Why do you think Harrison doesn't want to wear a Halloween costume?

Anna and her mother have a disagreement. Why?

What happens when Anna goes to Harrison's house?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Conflict**

The author has put conflict in these two chapters. Conflict is important for every story, and it can be internal or external. Write a scene between two people that has some conflict in it, perhaps an altercation between two friends who don't agree on something. Now take that same scene, and one of the character's feelings about the altercation, and write about how that person is internally conflicted. How do they feel?

***Dialogue**

Dialogue is important in writing fiction. The author has a scene between Joel and Anna where they are talking in the family room. This scene brings out a lot of information about Harrison that helps the reader understand him. Write a scene between two people that has a lot of dialogue. It can be two people talking about the topic of your choice.

Plot Summation

Summarize the plot in your own words.

Relating to Your Life

Have you ever been bullied by someone like Harrison was on Halloween?

Have you ever had an altercation with one of your parents that made you feel sad?

Have you ever stepped out of your comfort zone to do something that made you nervous? Write about this and how you felt afterwards?

Chapter Eleven and Twelve

Pages 125-142

Summary

Harrison has invited Anna to dinner but then he has a meltdown and ends up going to his room. At school the next day he is minding his own business when some boys decide to pick on him in

the hallway. This upsets Harrison a great deal. Anna hears the commotion in the hallway and runs to find out what is going on. When she sees Justin, ready to fight the boys picking on Harrison she pulls him off, knowing that wouldn't be a good thing for Justin. Anna and Justin go outside and Justin confides in Anna.

After Reading

How does Harrison cope at the end of dinner so he doesn't have to see the high heels again?

How does Harrison react when the boys steal his lunch?

Why is Anna feeling like such a failure?

What does Justin tell Anna?

How does Joel react to the news about Harrison?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Cliff Hangers** - Sometimes authors use cliff hangers at the end of a chapter to keep the reader turning the page. Where is the cliff hanger in these two chapters? What technique did the author use to create the cliff hanger? Write a scene that has a cliff hanger at the end of it.

***Descriptive writing** – There is a paragraph on page 132 where Harrison is walking down the hall and thoughts are running through his mind. Write a paragraph about walking down your hall at school, using every single sense.

***Using senses** – Make a list of places where the author has used different senses to describe the scene.

Plot Summation – Summarize, in your own word, these two chapters.

Relating to Your Life

Harrison didn't understand why his father was telling him to breathe when he was doing it on his own. Have you ever had something happen in your life where you are doing what you've been told to do but it doesn't seem to be enough?

Chapter Thirteen and Fourteen

Pages 143-164

Summary

Harrison is at home and he hears his mother and brother arguing. At dinner that night they all talk about Joel's hockey game and Harrison's mother suggests that he invite Anna to the game. He thinks that is a good idea and calls her after dinner. Then his friend Alan comes over. He brings a computer into Harrison's room, and he suggests they look up instructions on how to kiss. Anna and her mother have another argument. Anna talks to Justin and invites him to the hockey game as well. At the grocery store, Harrison has a bit of a meltdown but Anna deals with it. At Joel's hockey game, Harrison has a funny reaction to Anna being with Justin.

After Reading

How does Harrison react when his mother asks him if he wants to be homeschooled?

How does Harrison react to his mother and brother arguing?

What does Alan want Harrison to do on the computer?

Anna has another argument with her mother. What is it about? Why do you think her mother is being so hard on her?

Anna handles a situation with Harrison. What was the situation?

What happens at the hockey game?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Expressions** – We often talk using expressions. Harrison doesn't understand expressions and tends to view everything literally. Can you list some expressions that were used and how Harrison doesn't understand them?

***Point of View** – Authors write from certain points of view. *Fragile Bones* is written from Harrison and Anna's perspective. But there are other characters. Rewrite the scene between Alan and Harrison but write it from Alan's point of view.

Plot Summation

Summarize, in your own words, these two chapters.

Relating to Your Life

Have you ever had to invite someone to something and been nervous? A friend? Teacher? Coach? Parent? How did you get over your fears and initiate the conversation?

Have you ever had a friend try to convince you to do something you didn't really want to do?

Chapter Fifteen and Sixteen

Pages 165-179

Summary

Harrison goes to his brother's hockey game and Anna arrives but she is with Justin. This is confusing for Harrison because his mother only saved two seats. At the hockey game, Harrison's mother tries to get him to socialize and at first he doesn't want to but then he does go and stand with the others. When he sees Anna and Justin holding hands he doesn't like it. Anna is at the game and is confused by Harrison and not sure why he doesn't like her holding hands with Justin. There is one more meeting of the organizing committee for the dance. Gianni and Erika show Anna and Justin some dance moves. Anna wakes up the next morning in a panic that, perhaps, Harrison won't come to the dance.

After Reading

Why does Harrison not like it that Anna invited Justin to the hockey game?

Why does Anna *think* that Harrison is unhappy about her bringing Justin? How do their perceptions differ?

Why does Harrison not want to go in the lobby and talk to the others?

Anna is in a panic about something. What is it? And why does she feel so panicked?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Action Scenes** – On page 167 there is an action scene where Harrison is trying to walk through the doors at the arena. Put this scene into graphic novel format, showing Harrison's effort to get through the door. Use at least 8 panels.

Plot Summation

Summarize the plot in these two chapters.

Relating to Your Life

Have you ever had to meet a group of people and been nervous about meeting them? Perhaps showing up at a tryout or an audition or just going into a new class at school without any of your friends? Write about this and how you felt.

Chapter Seventeen and Eighteen

Pages 180-199

Summary

In the morning Harrison has his breakfast but is nervous about the dance so his parents dance in the kitchen to show him how it's done. This is confusing because his morning isn't going the way it always does. He goes to school and after school he goes to the dance. He is nervous but at first he does really well and is proud of himself. Then he drinks too much and has to go the restroom but he doesn't like restrooms so he attempts to go outside only he sees Anna and Justin kissing. He thinks about germs as he runs outside. When he is outside urinating a man yells at him and he runs from him and gets on a bus that is going the wrong way. For Anna the dance is a huge success and when she sees Harrison at the Lego table she tells Justin they should go out and get more juice. They go into the hallway and sneak a kiss then go back in. But Anna can't find Harrison. She waits and waits then she gets nervous wondering where he could be. She goes outside and tries to find him. A girl tells her that she saw the boy go on the bus. Anna knows she has to find him.

After Reading

Harrison likes to do everything in a certain order. What is off about his morning?

Harrison is worried about a lot of things. Name some of the things that make him nervous about going to a dance.

What sorts of things are set up at the dance to make it fun?

Anna thinks everything is going so well at the party. Why does she think that?

What happens when Anna figures out that Harrison is gone?

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Story Arc** – In every story there should be an arc. Each story follows steps to get it to the top. Chapter 18 is almost at the top of the arc. Can you describe how the author has brought the story to this point? Draw an arc and put the chapters from 1-18 on the arc with 18 being at the top. Write one sentence beside each chapter about the most important event from that chapter.

***Dramatization** - It can be fun to see words acted out. Work in groups to write a short script about the dance. (Leave out the kissing part!) Show the different areas in the room and even add

pick some music if you can, songs that might work for the dance. Show how Harrison leaves. Then show how Anna leaves and comes back in and sees that Harrison is missing.

Plot Summation

Summarize the plot of these two chapters.

Relating to Your Life

Have you ever had to go to an event that made you nervous and anxious? Write about how you felt.

Have you ever suddenly realized you lost something or you forgot something and you knew you might get into trouble? Write about this.

Chapter Nineteen, Twenty and Twenty-One

Pages 200 - 217

Summary

Harrison is on the bus and he knows he is going in the wrong direction. He figures out that he could get off at the Science Center. When he does get off the bus, he sees Anna and he is happy because she is familiar. Then he tells her not to touch him. Anna tells him she will drive him home. This makes him nervous. He only goes in the car with his mother or father or Joel. He gets into her car but doesn't like how she drives. This makes Harrison have a meltdown. Anna is driving and when Harrison starts screaming, she doesn't know what to do because she's in a middle lane. Finally, she pulls over and calls his mother. His mother tells her to wait, she will come and get him. Once Harrison has been picked up by his mother, Anna goes home. She feels like a failure and breaks down crying in front of her mother. Her mother consoles her. A few days later, Anna and Justin meet Harrison at the Science Center. Harrison feels good that he now has three friends.

After Reading

Anna offers to do something she isn't supposed to do. What is it?

What should Anna have done?

How does Harrison feel on the bus ride?

How does Harrison cope on the bus ride?

Does he come up with a good solution to his predicament?

What happens in the car? Tell from both points of view.

Let's Talk about the Writing

***Story Arc** – The author has concluded the story in these final chapters. A story arc goes upwards until it hits the climatic part (chapters 17 and 18) then it concludes. How did the author end the story? Were you expecting this ending? Rewrite the ending and make it how you would have ended the novel.

***Descriptive writing** – Harrison sits on a bus and so many things are bothering him. Write a scene where you are on a bus, going to the top of a mountain on a really narrow road.

***Dramatization** - Partner up and play out the scene where Anna and Harrison are in the car. Then switch roles. Make sure you play both roles so you can see how both people feel.

Plot Summation

Summarize the plot in your own words.

Relating to Your Life

Have you ever done something that you weren't supposed to do but you didn't do it on purpose? (Anna drives Harrison without thinking of the consequences because she is in a panic.) Write about this.

Have you ever had something happen where you felt like a failure? Write about this. And write about how you learned from this experience. And how you know you weren't a failure in the end. (Remember, Anna wasn't a failure she just *thought* she was.)

Activities – Postreading

- 1) Write an informative essay about autism. What are the different characteristics of people with autism? What are some of the ways that people with autism cope?
- 2) Research how the treatment of those with autism has changed over the years.
- 3) Write an informative essay on the Best Buddies program.
- 4) Drama idea - Take your favourite scene and rewrite it in script form. Then act it out. Perhaps it is a scene with two people talking.