

Building Language Skills with The Seattle Times

September 17, 2015

Article: “Author Dave Pilkey finds bottomless humor in underpants”

Thursday, September 10, 2015 in the e-Edition of The Seattle Times, page B5

Pre-Reading:

Before reading the article, read the title and look at the photographs. What does it mean to have bottomless humor? Have you heard of the Captain Underpants books? Based on the photograph, what do you think they are about?

Vocabulary:

As you read, look for the following vocabulary words that appear in today’s article. Write down what you think the words mean based on the “context,” or how the words are used in the sentence in which they appear. Next, look up the definitions in a dictionary and see how close your guess was for each word.

quest

visibly

installment

saga

literary

overbearing

hypnotizing

offset

unapologetic

entitled

crusader

feature

dyslexia

mashup

Comprehension:

1. According to Pilkey, when children are two and three, what do almost all adults talk about?
2. How many copies have The Captain Underpants books sold worldwide?
3. How many installments of the series are there?
4. Who are the series two main characters, George Beard and Harold Hutchins, named after?
5. What is the storyline of the series?
6. What is one reason the book has made news?
7. What did Pilkey say he wanted to show about the George and Harold?
8. When will DreamWorks' film about the characters be released?
9. What does Pilkey say about movies that are exactly like the books they are based on?
10. What was Pilkey's experience in school?
11. What is Pilkey's mission now?
12. What was Pilkey's assumption when he was a boy in school?

Post-Reading:

Read the following passage from the article and discuss the following questions in a group:

“I assumed that if you didn't do well in school you were not going to do well in life,' he said. 'I've never known anyone who struggled the way I did and turned out OK.' 'I am very surprised,' he said. 'And very happy.'”

Do you or did you have the same assumption Pilkey had that if you didn't do well in school you wouldn't do well in life? Has that assumption changed? Who else do you know, in your family or a famous person, who did not do well in school but has done well in life? Why do you think that is? What did you learn about Pilkey's school experience that probably helped him do well in life? How can you learn from his experience?

Building Language Skills:

Read the following passage, and complete the activity below:

“The book made news because in it, George and Harold meet their future selves — and while George had a wife and two kids, Harold had a husband and twins. No big.

‘I've known these kids for the last 20 years and I always thought that Harold might be gay,’ Pilkey said. ‘I wanted to show that they have been true to themselves and live happy, healthy lives. I wanted them to be happy in the future and in loving relationships.’”

Choose a young character or characters from a book you enjoy. Now write about them meeting their future selves, just as George and Harold do. How are your adult characters different from the young characters? What might a reader of both the young and older characters be surprised by? What qualities or characteristics about the characters would remain the same? Share your story with a partner or a group.

Comprehension Question Answers:

1. When children are that age almost all adults talk about is potty training.
2. Captain Underpants books have sold 70 million copies worldwide.
3. The latest book is the twelfth installment.
4. George Beard and Harold Hutchins are named after “Curious George” and “Harold and the Purple Crayon” as well as the two Bailey brothers of “It’s a Wonderful Life”.
5. The two boys rebel against their overbearing teachers by hypnotizing their principal and turning him into their comic book creation, Captain Underpants.
6. When Harold and George meet their future selves George has a wife and two kids but Harold has a husband and twins.
7. Pilkey wanted to show that they have been true to themselves and live happy, healthy lives. (He) wanted them to be happy in the future and in loving relationships.”
8. The DreamWorks film will be released in 2017.
9. Pilkey gets bored when movies are exactly like the books they are based on.
10. Pilkey grew up in Cleveland. He had dyslexia and ADHD and got into a lot of trouble in school. He was often sent to sit in the hall where he drew comics.
11. Now Pilkey’s mission is to tell children that there is hope for everyone, even if they have certain challenges.
12. Pilkey assumed that if you didn’t do well in school you wouldn’t do well in life. He is surprised and happy to know that is not the case.