

Educator Discussion Guide

GREETINGS FROM WITNESS PROTECTION!

By Jake Burt

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2019-2020

Grade 6-8

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Nicki is a spunky thirteen-year-old girl that is continuously rotating through the foster care system. She is waiting for her dad to be released from prison so he can take her out of foster care and be a family with her again, but she is beginning to lose hope that this will ever happen. In the meantime, she is approached by U.S. Marshalls to become part of project family to help protect witnesses in a big case who are going into witness protection. The family she is joining is on the run from revenge seeking mafia crime bosses. The next thing Nikki knows, she, her new mother, new father, and new little brother need to learn how to adapt to their new life, new identities, new school, and become a real family. In addition to this Nikki, has to obey the new five rules the U.S. Marshalls make her swear to follow, all while dealing with her troubled past...as if middle school wasn't tough enough already. The street skills Nikki learned growing up come in handy. Nikki is an engaging and fun protagonist. Readers will root for her and laugh out loud as her as she stumbles through these challenges.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jake Burt is from Columbus, Ohio, but has lived in many different states and countries. His favorite subject is writing, but he also teaches math, social studies, and ecology. He taught in preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school. He also loves to play sports and board games, which influence his stories.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at

<http://www.jburtbooks.com/about/>

Accessed 29 September 2018.

BOOK AWARDS

Indies Introduce Summer / Fall 2017, Middle Grade

Brightly Best Children's Books of 2017, According to Kids

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

NEW LIFE

Ask the students if anybody knows what witness protection is. Ask if anybody knows anybody in witness protection. (All should be no because the program should protect their identity). Think to yourself about the kind of things a person in witness protection might go through. Answer the following questions in your notebook and share your answers:

1. If you had to completely change your identity, what would your new first and middle name be? (Your new name can be anything that will not make you look suspicious).
2. If you could live in any city where would you want to live and why? (Consider city size, weather, and distance).
3. What would you be the saddest to leave behind? (Consider people, spots in the city, and personal items).

FAKE FAMILY

Look at the cover of the book. What do you notice? (The faces of the other family member are blurred out). Why do you think the faces on the cover are blurred out except for one person's face? What do you think this tells us about the book we are about to read? Open up your notebook and draw a picture of what you think the blurred out faces might look like. What will their faces look like? Do they look kind, annoyed, or angry and why?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think Nicki feels about being in foster care? Use examples from the text.
2. How do you think it feels to start over in a new family?
3. Would you take the position in witness protection to help the family? Why or why not?
4. Do you think Nicki's special skills, like pick pocketing, will help her out in the story?
5. What other kind of skills do you think would be helpful in protecting a family in witness protection?
6. What are the positive and negatives of Nicki joining witness protection?
7. What do you think of Janice and why?
8. Describe Janice and Charlotte's relationship and how it changes through the book. Use examples from the text to support your answer.
9. What are the 5 rules? Pages 58-62
10. How would you feel if you had to live by these 5 rules?
11. Which of the 5 rules do you dislike the most? Why?
12. Describe Jackson's behavior towards Charlotte and the process of going into Witness Protection. Use examples from the text.
13. How would you respond to Jackson's behavior if you were Charlotte?
14. Why does Charlotte (her new name) act out and take her mom's jewelry?
15. Do you think Charlotte's response to the bullies at the mall is a good thing? Why or why not?
16. What is the best and worst part of Charlotte's first day of school?
17. How does the Trevor family feel when they find out Arturo is free?
18. Does Charlotte act responsibly during the election?
19. What are the consequences of the Trevor family being on social media?
20. What are the positives and negatives that Brit knows their secret?
21. What are the steps Charlotte and Jackson took to become closer?
22. Why did Arturo involve Charlotte's real dad in his plan? Use examples from the text.
23. Who do you think made the smartest move when Arturo broke into their house? What did they do?
24. If witness protection worked in other families, why did it not work with the Trevor's?
25. Why do the Trevor's want Charlotte to stay with them?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Health and Physical Education:

Charlotte has a special skill of pickpocketing. This gives her quick hand eye coordination. In the story Charlotte caught a cup and most of the pencils before it hit the ground. Pair off student, have one student drop a pencil, and one student try to catch the pencil. Raise the number of pencils each time. Remind the students not to throw the pencils and be gentle.

Art:

In “Art class” with Mr. Jordanson, he has the kids create fantasy gardens. They are fantasy gardens because they do not have to only consist of regular flowers. Mr. Jordanson does not throw away any drawing, so be creative. Make sure to be neat and do not leave any white space. Think of things spatially and include a background.

Language Arts:

- According to Wikipedia, “Foreshadowing is a literary device in which a writer gives an advance hint of what will come later in the story. Foreshadowing often appears at the beginning of a story, and it helps the reader develop expectations about the upcoming events.” Accessed 10 July 2019. The author definitely used foreshadowing in this story. Discuss with your class what foreshadowing hints were dropped at the beginning of the book that gave clues about what could happen later on.
 - Some examples include:
 - The Taser in Fancypaws
 - Charlotte having a problem with taking things that don’t belong to her
 - Charlotte not seeing her father in years but he was out of prison
 - Arturo and the crime bosses being so good at finding people, etc.
- At the end of the story the Trevor family is being relocated to Arizona. Write the next chapter of the book. Use your imagination to find out what happens next. Make sure to explain how this time will be different. It must include the improved relationship with family, moving into the new house, and starting another new school.
- At the end of most chapters, there are many different examples of how to send a message. For example, a letter, an email, and a recorded message. Pick one format, a partner, and send them an urgent message. Make sure you are formatting it correctly.

Science:

- To stay in hiding, the Trevor family had to change up their appearances, so they cannot be found. Finding small differences quickly can be challenging. There are games people play where there are 10 differences between to very similar photos and you have a limited amount of time to find all the differences. Here is an example, <https://www.rd.com/culture/spot-10-differences-picture/>. You can play a game like this sharing different images with the class.
- Discuss what are some ways that people going into WITSEC can disguise their appearances. Ask students for examples of simple small changes people can make. Then ask them what would be some larger, more drastic changes to help disguise people for safety. You can segue into a brief discussion on the history of disguises and how spies have used disguises for centuries. You may want to share this fascinating 9 minute video where a Former CIA Operative explains how spies use disguises, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JASUsVY5YJ8>.

Math:

Charlotte gets a thousand dollars for a whole new wardrobe and school supplies. How many shirts, pants, dresses, jackets, pairs of shoes, and school supplies do you think you can buy. Think about what each item might realistically cost and add it up. Also think about what item might be more important and need more of in your wardrobe.

Social Studies:

Charlotte originally lived in New York, New York and had to move to small town Durham, North Carolina. Compare and contrast rural and urban life in a Venn diagram.

Vocabulary:

| | | |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Menagerie | Skittering | Trajectory |
| Velveteen | Kleptomania | Emphatically |
| Monstrosity | Skedaddled | Memento |
| Venture | Silhouette | Incinerate |
| Distinguish | Murmur | Petulant |
| Bodega | Dynamic | |

RELATED WEBSITES

U.S. Marshals Service: Witness Security Program

<https://www.usmarshals.gov/witsec/>

Explore and learn more about U.S. Marshals. Witness Security Program is pinned, but feel free to investigate the other tabs after reading the description.

25 US Witness Protection Program Secrets You've Always Wanted to Know

<https://list25.com/25-us-witness-protection-program-secrets-youve-always-wanted-to-know/>

Go through the list of 25 secrets about Witness Protection Program

City of Durham

<https://durhamnc.gov>

Learn what it is like to live in Durham, North Carolina.