

# **Educator Discussion Guide**

## ***How Lunchbox Jones Saved Me From Robots, Traitors, and Missy the Cruel***

By Jennifer Brown

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2018**  
**Grade 6-8**

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### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Seventh-grader Luke Abbott goes to the losing-est school in history, Forest Shade Middle School. When his father forces him to join the after-school robotics team, the Rallying Robo-Raccoons, he doesn't have much hope of winning. The only trophy on display at his school is for Best Secretary. Once on the robo-team, Luke is mixed up with a group of misfits and oddballs. These include Lunchbox Jones, a burly eighth-grader who carries a mysterious lunchbox and is feared by all. There's also Mikayla, aka "Toezilla", who eats, writes, and paints with her feet. Worst of all, Luke is on the team with Missy the Cruel, a petite bully who has taunted him since elementary school. At home, Luke would rather play video games and avoid his older brother Rob, who Luke feels has betrayed him by joining the Marines.

Brown combines well-observed middle-school humor with lots of heart in this comedy about unlikely friendships. Exploring themes of friendship, betrayal, and growing up, this is a coming-of-age story with many memorable moments of fun and family drama, sure to entertain young readers.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jennifer Brown lives in Kansas City, Missouri with her husband and three children. She grew up in Kansas City on a family farm where she originally dreamed of becoming a teacher. However, she was always writing. Jennifer Brown gives her husband the credit for inspiring her to become the writer she is today, and she dedicates every book to him.

Biographical information taken from author's website at  
<https://jenniferbrownauthor.com/bio/>

Accessed 25 June 2017

Jennifer Brown also won the first ever Louisiana Teen Readers' Choice Award for her debut novel, *Hate List*.

## **PREREADING ACTIVITIES**

### **Robotics**

- Ask your students what they know about robots. Do they have a favorite robot from a movie or television show? Ask them for examples of robots from films, literature, and elsewhere, and provide several examples of your own. Discuss real-life robots, how they are used for various purposes, and examples of robots that are used for educational and scientific purposes. One exciting example would be the Mars Rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, which have been on Mars since 2003. NASA has lost contact with Spirit, but Opportunity is still active and sending in transmissions from the red planet! More information on the rovers can be found at <https://mars.nasa.gov/mer/home/>
- Discuss with your students the possibilities of creating their own robots with robotics kits. If your school has a robotics team, ask if any students are involved or if any are interested in joining. If your school does not offer this type of activity, identify local resources that do, such as public library programs. For examples, multiple robotics-related programs are offered for free to teens at the East Baton Rouge Parish Library: <https://www.ebrpl.com/Source/Source201706.pdf> See the section of their newsletter titled “Technology and Making for Teens” on page 15)
- Discuss opportunities to participate in robotics tournaments similar to the one in the novel. Louisiana hosts a number of robotics competitions for students. One example is the Regional Autonomous Robotics Circuit (RARC) which is a series of three competitions for students in grades 3-12. The events build upon one another and allow students to showcase STEM skills through a series of challenges. More information, including inspiring videos and photos can be found at the RARC website: <https://nicerc.org/rarc/>

Note: Videos are embedded from YouTube, which may be blocked by school filters.

Site accessed 25 June 2017.

### **Friendships**

Ask your students to share about their friendships. Ask them if they have a best friend and, if they do, how they met their best friend. Discuss unlikely friendships. Did they ever meet someone they didn't have a lot in common with, but became good friends with anyway? Ask students if there ever was someone they didn't befriend because they heard bad things about them. Have they ever assumed the worst about someone, without really getting to know them? Ask your students what are some good ways to initiate a friendship and overcome prejudice and judgement. Write their suggestions on the board for all to see. Brainstorm ideas on how to be a good friend. Have your students each make a list and discuss.

Activity ideas taken from the “Friendship” teaching guide found at <http://www.goodcharacter.com/BCBC/Friendship.html>

Includes further discussion questions and activities as well as a list of good qualities in friends. The website, Good Character, also offers other free content to teachers for character and life skills education.

Site accessed 25 June 2017.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe Luke's attitude toward school? Interested? Disengaged?
2. What are the differences/similarities between Luke's school life and his home life?
3. What is Luke's relationship with his brother like in the beginning of the novel? Why does Luke feel betrayed?
4. Think about Luke's friendship with Randy. Have you ever been friends with someone solely online? How does this affect the friendship?
5. Forest Shade Middle School is presented as the "losing-est" school ever. How do the students react to this? Is winning competitions an important aspect of school? Are you a part of any teams? How does it make you feel to win? To lose?
6. What various conflicts does Luke face when practicing with the robotics team? How does the team get along at first? What steps do they take to overcome their problems?
7. How do Luke's friendships develop throughout the course of the novel? What mistakes does he make? What are the consequences?
8. Why does Missy pick on Luke so much? Are there any obvious reasons? What do you think of her character?
9. Missy has been Luke's bully since elementary school. Have you ever been bullied? How would you deal with being bullied? What are some of the consequences of bullying?
10. How does Lunchbox Jones "save" Luke Abbott?
11. What does Lunchbox Jones keep in his lunchbox? What is the meaning behind this and how does Luke relate?
12. How does Luke reconcile with his brother Rob?
13. What are the results of the robotics tournament? How do the teammates react and why?
14. Has Luke learned any important lessons by the end of the book? Suggest at least 3 lessons and use examples from the book to prove your points.
15. How is Luke's life different in the end of the book versus the beginning? What key events produced changes in his situation/outlook?
16. What skills do you need to be on a robotics team? Can anyone join or do you have to be "good" at math and science?
17. What are some STEM activities related to the book that you would like to try or see implemented at school?

## CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

### **Health and Physical Education:**

Mikayla is always using her toes in the novel to do different tricks and tasks. Have your students develop the same agility and coordination by playing "Toe Tag". Find instructions and a video here: <http://www.nyrr.org/youth-and-schools/running-start/pe-lesson-plans/elementary-school/fundamental-athletic-skills/toe-tag>

### **Technology/Engineering:**

- Have your students create their own robots from everyday items. No big budget needed. See this article for 5 great ideas: <https://www.wired.com/2012/08/robots-everyday-stuff/>
- Luke is enthusiastic about playing video games and video game designers are mentioned as well as a VG tournament in this book. Have your students browse user-generated games on Scratch, such as "Speed Cube" at <https://scratch.mit.edu/projects/153211834/>.

This simple game requires coordination, precision, and planning. Simple as it is, users can look inside the code to see its complex makeup. Students can create their own games at [https://scratch.mit.edu/projects/editor/?tip\\_bar=home](https://scratch.mit.edu/projects/editor/?tip_bar=home) and use the “Getting started with Scratch” tutorial for assistance.

### **Art:**

Based on the descriptions and personalities of each character, have your students draw their own interpretations of Luke and his robotics team. Have students use details from the novel to support characterization. Afterwards, have students compare interpretations and determine which details indicate who is who.

### **Language Arts:**

- Divide students up into small groups. Have each group select a scene from the novel and identify key themes, conflicts, and emotions present in that moment. Have each group discuss their findings. Following the discussion, each group will create their own scene that depicts similar themes and conflicts. Have students create their own scripts (4-5 pages in length) and perform their scripts during class. End this project with students responding to at least one performance via a written assignment. Students should respond to other students’ performances (not their own) and evaluate and compare the themes of the original novel’s scene and the classroom performance.
- Have students learn about various literary elements and definitions involving character analysis. Have students then create a Character Analysis T-Shirt. Handouts for both definitions and the t-shirt activity can be found in the following lesson plan: <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/responding-literature-understanding-character-analysis/>

### **Social Studies:**

Review the following lesson plan:

[https://lpb.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/eng06.sci.engin.design.lp\\_robot/what-is-a-robot/#.Wag4xxJZgqS](https://lpb.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/eng06.sci.engin.design.lp_robot/what-is-a-robot/#.Wag4xxJZgqS)

Use this lesson plan to determine class knowledge of robots/robotics and to expand knowledge about the social role of robots in society. The plan is geared toward grades 3-5/13+, but can be a great starting point for ensuring students familiarity with the subject of robotics and its applications. Expand the reach of this plan further by dividing students into small groups to collaborate on a report about a specific type of robot. Have each group research their chosen topic and present the type of robot, its history, and present day application in society to the class.

### **Vocabulary:**

Flounced	Saunter	Gnarly
Envision	Nonplussed	Quarantined
Chassis	Piddle	Infuriate
Program	Miniature	Nauseating
Industrial	Skitter	Plutonian
Disbanded	Frantically	Engraved
Forfeit	Mangled	

## RELATED WEBSITES

### **How Lunchbox Jones Saved Me from Robots, Traitors, and Missy the Cruel (Official Website)**

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/how-lunchbox-jones-saved-me-from-robots-traitors-and-missy-the-cruel-9781619634541/>

Find *Lunchbox Jones* book info and related titles, plus reviews and much more here at the official website from publisher Bloomsbury.

### **Science Schmience and How Lunchbox Jones Saved Me from Stem Boredom by Jennifer Brown**

<https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2015/08/11/science-schmience-and-how-lunchbox-jones-saved-me-from-stem-boredom-by-jennifer-brown/>

A blog post from author Jennifer Brown and how writing and researching robotics for *Lunchbox Jones* helped inspire her with enthusiasm for STEM.

### **Robotics News & Articles**

<http://spectrum.ieee.org/robotics>

A website dedicated to news, videos, and articles relating to robotics.

### **Red Stick Robotics**

<http://www.redstickrobotics.org>

Louisiana-based organization providing robotics courses and competitions, STEM programming initiatives, and robotics-related summer camps.