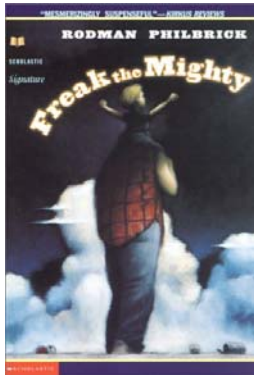


# FREAK THE MIGHTY

## CONCEPT/VOCABULARY ANALYSIS



**LITERARY TEXT:** FREAK THE MIGHTY BY RODMAN PHILBRICK

### **ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS:**

FREAK THE MIGHTY IS DIVIDED INTO 25 SHORT CHAPTERS. IT IS AN INFORMAL NARRATIVE OF THE CHARACTER MAXWELL (MAX) KANE, WHO MEETS KEVIN (ALSO KNOWN AS FREAK) AND TOGETHER, FORM “FREAK THE MIGHTY.” THEY BECOME INSEPARABLE FRIENDS WHO CREATE ADVENTURES AND LEARN ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THE WORLD AROUND THEM. THE END OF THE BOOK INCLUDES “FREAK’S DICTIONARY,” A LIST OF TERMS THAT KEVIN USES THROUGHOUT THE STORY.

### **THEME:**

- **FAMILY:** SEVERAL NONTRADITIONAL FAMILIES ARE REPRESENTED IN THIS NOVEL: MAX LIVES WITH HIS GRANDPARENTS; KEVIN’S MOTHER IS A SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLD; BOTH BOYS HAVE ABSENTEE FATHERS; WE LEARN MAX’S FATHER IS IN PRISON; KEVIN’S FATHER IS MENTIONED IN THE BOOK BUT NOT PORTRAYED. OVERALL THE STORY LACKS FATHER FIGURES AND STUDENTS WILL NEED TO IDENTIFY OTHER ROLE MODELS WITHIN THE BOOK.
- **ACCEPTANCE:** IS DIFFERENT BAD? MAX AND KEVIN BOTH ARE LABELED DIFFERENT AND NOT ACCEPTED BY THEIR PEERS BECAUSE OF THEIR DISABILITIES; HOWEVER, THEIR STRENGTHS (MAX’S PHYSICAL STRENGTH AND KEVIN’S COGNITIVE ABILITY) MAKE THEM UNIQUE MEMBERS OF THEIR COMMUNITY; THESE STRENGTHS HELP TO BREAK THE NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

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INDIVIDUALITY, PEER PRESSURE AND OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES CAN BE ADDRESSED.

- **OVERCOMING THE CYCLE OF UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:** THE STORY DESCRIBES MAX'S MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS, IN WHICH EVERYONE TELLS HIM HE RESEMBLES HIS FATHER WHO IS IN PRISON. ONE OF MAX'S INTERNAL STRUGGLES IS TO NOT BECOME LIKE HIS FATHER SINCE MAX'S FATHER IS ABUSIVE AND AGGRESSIVE; MAX NEEDS TO OVERCOME HIS PAST AND CREATE HIS OWN LIFE.
- **FRIENDSHIP –TEAMWORK:** MAX AND KEVIN'S FRIENDSHIP IS BUILT ON COOPERATION. KEVIN TEACHES MAX WORDS FROM HIS VOCABULARY AND EXPANDS HIS IMAGINATION. MAX HELPS KEVIN BECOME MORE MOBILE, ALLOWING THEM TO HAVE IMAGINATIVE ADVENTURES IN THE BOOK. THROUGH THIS STORY, STUDENTS LEARN THE VALUE OF WORKING TOGETHER.
- **HEROISM:** KEVIN RESCUES MAX WHEN MAX IS KIDNAPPED BY HIS FATHER AND HAS A CENTRAL ROLE IN THE STORY AS A HERO. KEVIN REPRESENTS A YOUNG BOY WHO STUDENTS CAN RELATE TO. DISCUSSIONS SURROUNDING THE ELEMENTS OF TRUE HEROISM CAN BE RAISED; STUDENTS CAN ALSO QUESTION THE STEREOTYPICAL HERO OR FALSE PERCEPTIONS OF HEROES DEPICTED IN POPULAR CULTURE OR MEDIA AND IDENTIFY WHO THE HEROES ARE IN THEIR OWN LIVES AND WHAT MAKES THEM HEROES.

**SETTING:** TAKES PLACE IN AN AMERICAN URBAN AREA; THE STORY FOCUSES ON KEVIN AND MAXWELL'S NEIGHBORHOOD AND SCHOOL, MAX'S HOME (WITH HIS GRANDPARENTS), KEVIN'S HOME, AND THE TENEMENTS KNOWN AS THE "NEW TESTAMENTS." (THIS ALLUSION MAY NEED EXPLANATION)

**POINT OF VIEW:** THE STORY IS TOLD FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF MAX, ONE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS.

#### **LIST OF LITERARY TERMS:**

##### **FORESHADOWING**

THROUGHOUT THE NOVEL, STUDENTS CAN LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE ELEMENTS OF FORESHADOWING THAT OCCUR. EXAMPLES INCLUDE THE ENDS OF CHAPTERS 10 AND 15 WHICH CREATE SUSPENSE. STUDENTS CAN MAKE PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE STORY.

## VOICE

FREAK THE MIGHTY CAN BE USED WHEN TEACHING STUDENTS ABOUT VOICE. STUDENTS CAN WRITE READER RESPONSES OR PERSONAL NARRATIVES REFLECTIVE OF THE NOVEL. STUDENTS MAY USE “FREAK’S DICTIONARY” AS AN EXAMPLE OF STYLE AND RECREATE IT IN THEIR OWN CREATIVE WORK FOR THIS UNIT.

## AFFECTIVE ISSUES RELATED TO THE WORK:

- STUDENTS MAY KNOW FAMILY MEMBERS OR FRIENDS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES; FREAK THE MIGHTY CAN INCREASE THE SENSITIVITY STUDENTS HAVE TOWARDS THEIR PEERS WHO EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT CHALLENGES.
- STUDENTS MAY BE AWARE OF BULLYING (IN THEIR SCHOOLS OR ON THE INTERNET) THAT IS GOING ON IN THEIR COMMUNITY. STUDENTS SHOULD BECOME AWARE OF THESE SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THEIR SCHOOLS AND NEIGHBORHOODS AND ADVOCATE CHANGES.
- STUDENTS MAY FEEL SOCIAL PRESSURES TO FIT IN AND BE LIKE THEIR PEERS. THEY MAY FEEL THAT UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS ABOUT THEM SET THEM APART FROM THEIR PEER GROUPS AND DIMINISH THEIR INDIVIDUALITY.

## VOCABULARY ISSUES:

KEVIN USES MANY TERMS THAT WILL NEED TO BE DEFINED FOR STUDENTS ON A LOWER READING LEVEL. THERE IS ALSO SLANG USED THROUGHOUT THE BOOK THAT WILL NEED TO BE STUDIED BY THE STUDENTS.

## BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:

KEVIN MAKES ALLUSIONS TO KING ARTHUR THAT SHOULD BE EXPLORED WITH TEACHER-DIRECTED INSTRUCTION OR STUDENT RESEARCH. KNOWING KEY CHARACTERS (GUINEVERE, ARTHUR, LANCELOT) AND THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD (KNIGHTS, ARMOR) WILL HELP STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND DIALOGUE IN THE BEGINNING CHAPTERS.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF DIVERSITY:

STUDENTS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS WILL BE ABLE TO APPRECIATE THE STORY OF FRIENDSHIP FOUND IN FREAK THE MIGHTY. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, A LOT OF VOCABULARY WORDS THAT WILL NEED TO BE DEFINED. VOCABULARY (ESPECIALLY KEVIN’S UNIQUE VOCABULARY AND CULTURAL TERMS) SHOULD BE ADDRESSED DURING PRE-READING STRATEGIES SO THAT STUDENTS GOING TO THE TEXT WILL BE ABLE TO EXTRACT MEANING.

### CENTRAL QUESTIONS OR ENDURING ISSUES:

**WHAT MAKES A PERSON A HERO?** WHAT QUALITIES SHOULD OUR HEROES POSSESS? STUDENTS SHOULD LEARN FOR THEMSELVES WHAT THEY BELIEVE MAKES A TRUE HERO.

**WHAT MAKES A GOOD FRIENDSHIP?** STUDENTS SHOULD IDENTIFY WHAT ELEMENTS MAKE UP A GOOD FRIENDSHIP OR FAMILY RELATIONSHIP. ONE AFFECTIVE GOAL FOR STUDENTS IS TO APPLY THESE ELEMENTS INTO THEIR OWN LIVES.

### RESEARCH ISSUES/PROJECT IDEAS (CARROLL 32-39):

- HAVE GUEST SPEAKERS TALK ABOUT **DISABILITIES**. HAVE STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD TO LIVE WITH DISABILITIES. DISABILITIES CAN BECOME A TOPIC OF RESEARCH FOR STUDENT PAPERS. **ORAL PRESENTATIONS** IN THE COMMUNITY OR SCHOOL CAN BE A CULMINATING EXPERIENCE FOR RESEARCH.
- HAVE STUDENTS CREATE THEIR OWN **DICTIONARY OF TERMS** SIMILAR TO FREAK'S DICTIONARY AT THE END OF THE BOOK. STUDENTS MAY CHOOSE AN INTENDED AUDIENCE, SUCH AS A PARENT OR SIBLING.
- HAVE STUDENTS **REWRITE THE ENDING** OF THE NOVEL, INCLUDING THE INFORMATION THEY HAVE LEARNED ABOUT BIONICS. HOW WOULD THE STORY BE DIFFERENT IF KEVIN HAD SURGERY TO OVERCOME HIS DISABILITY?
- HAVE STUDENTS RESEARCH ABOUT BULLYING IN SCHOOLS OR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND **GIVE PRESENTATIONS** TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.
- STUDENT MAY HAVE SEEN THE FILM, "**THE MIGHTY**" (1998). STUDENTS MAY COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE FILM TO THE BOOK AND LEARN THE ART OF FILM ADAPTATION. (THIS FILM IS RATED PG-13; THE PERMISSION OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION SHOULD BE OBTAINED BEFORE USING THE FILM IN CURRICULUM.)

### INFORMATIONAL/FUNCTIONAL TEXTS:

THE FOLLOWING ARE NON-FICTIONAL TEXTS WRITTEN FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS:

### BULLYING:

- GOLUS, CARRIE AND JACK DESROCHER. TAKE A STAND!: WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT BULLYING (HEALTH ZONE)
- KAUFMAN, GERSHEN AND LEV RAPHAEL, AND PAMELA ESPELAND. STICK UP FOR YOURSELF: EVERY KID'S GUIDE TO PERSONAL POWER & POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM
- LEAVITT, JACALYN AND SALLY LINFORD, AND LAURA BUSH. FAUX PAW MEETS THE FIRST LADY: HOW TO HANDLE CYBER-BULLYING

### DISABILITIES:

- JANGO-COHEN, JUDITH. BIONICS (COOL SCIENCE)
- KENT, DEBORAH AND KATHRYN A. QUINLAN. EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
- MEYER, DON, (EDITOR) AND DAVID GALLAGHER. THE SIBLING SLAM BOOK: WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE TO HAVE A BROTHER OR SISTER WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
- SIROF, HARRIET. THE ROAD BACK: LIVING WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY

### KING ARTHUR:

- ADAMS, SIMON. THE KINGFISHER ATLAS OF THE MEDIEVAL WORLD
- CROSSLEY-HOLLAND, KEVIN. WORLD OF KING ARTHUR AND HIS COURT: THE: PEOPLE, PLACES, LEGEND, AND LORE
- KERVEN, ROSALIND. DK CLASSICS: KING ARTHUR

### WORKS CITED:

CARROLL, PAMELA SISSI. "A W(H)OLE IN THE MIDDLE: LANGUAGE STUDY FOR TRANSFORMED MIDDLE SCHOOLS" LANGUAGE STUDY IN MIDDLESCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND. IRA, 1998.