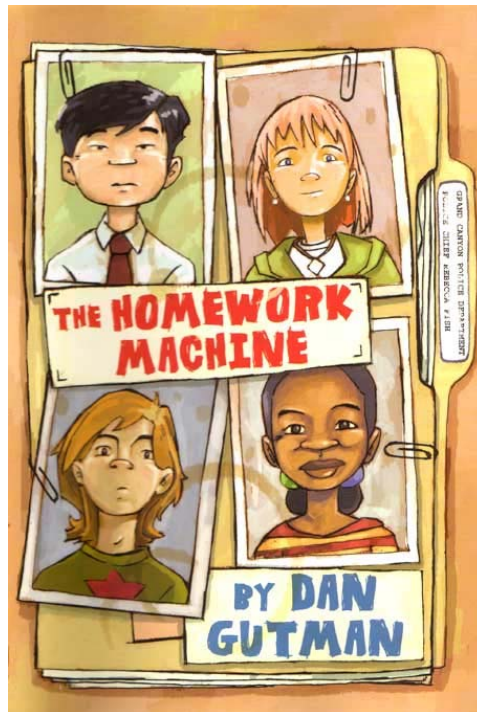


The Homework Machine

Resource Guide

Created by Katherine Abel



Gutman, Dan. *The Homework Machine*. Simon & Schuster. (2006).

Dan Gutman



<http://www.dangutman.com/> -- Dan Gutman Homepage

Includes virtual tour with Dan Gutman, so children can “meet” the author.

The author of almost forty books in a little over a decade of writing, Dan Gutman has written on topics from computers to baseball. Beginning his freelance career as a nonfiction author dealing mostly with sports for adults and young readers, Gutman has concentrated on juvenile fiction since 1995. His most popular titles include the time-travel sports book *Honus and Me* and its sequels, and a clutch of baseball books, including *The Green Monster from Left Field*. From hopeful and very youthful presidential candidates to stunt men, nothing is off limits in Gutman's fertile imagination. As he noted on his author Web site, since writing his first novel, *They Came from Centerfield*, in 1994, he has been hooked on fiction. "It was fun to write, kids loved it, and I discovered how incredibly rewarding it is to take a blank page and turn it into a WORLD." <http://www.bookrags.com/biography/dan-gutman-aya/>

Awards:

- Nominated: 2007 Disney Adventures Book Awards
- Nominated: 2008 ONEBOOKAZ (Arizona)
- Nominated: 2006-2007 Delaware Diamonds Award
- Child Magazine's Best Children's Books of 2006
- Booklist Editor's Choice 2006
- Booklinks' Lasting Connections of 2006
- 2006 New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading & Sharing.

Annotation

Brenton, Sam, Kelsey and Judy, four very different 5th graders become members of the D squad as they use Belch, a computer to do their homework. As the story unfolds, the characters learn about themselves and one another. This story is told in multiple voices as the kids, mothers and teacher make statements to the police.

Gutman has written many books for kids, and this one will be another favorite, as it is fast-paced, has great characters that students will relate to and humor that will cause them to want to read more. In addition to the fun for kids, they will also touch on computer ethics, the war in Iraq and what friendship really means.

Genre/Point of View: Multiple-Voice Narrative

Theme – Morality Tale about honesty and friendship. People can be friends with those who are very different from them. Don't judge a book by its cover or a person by their outward appearances.

Conflict – External –Very different kids get together because a homework machine, but as they become friends, they realize they are cheating one another and must destroy the machine. Their teacher, another student and the police are suspicious and they are trying to keep one step ahead of all of them.

Conflict Resolution – They each confess to the crime (cheating) and destroy the machine.

Characters –

- Sam, 11, (Snick), new to school and has had his share of school trouble in the past, somewhat of a class clown.
- Kelsey, 11, quietly carries her grief at losing her father, and is very much against the war in Iraq, known as a slacker or rebel.
- Judy, 11, is a *brainiac* - her bossiness and self-righteousness irritates others.
- Brenton, 11, is the smartest kid in school, and the one who invents Belch, the Homework Machine. A computer whiz and geek.
- Miss Rasmussen, first year teacher (5th grade)
- Ronnie Teotwawki, 11, another 5th grader who is suspicious of the others.
- Brenton's mom, she's excited about her son meeting friends.
- Sam's Mom
- Police Chief Rebecca Fish, the officer taking the statements, investigating the situation.
- Milner, man who is sending mysterious messages. Wants Brenton to work for him.

Setting -- Grand Canyon, Arizona, present-day, over the course of a school year

Interest Level (3rd -6th) and Reading Level (4.8)


Booktalk

You may have heard of Dan Gutman because he has written so many books for kids already. He really understands kids and is very funny. You should definitely give *The Homework Machine* a read.


Brenton a genius geek, Sam (Snik) the class clown, Kelsey, a slacker and an overachiever, Judy are brought together by their seating chart and begin using Brenton's invention to do their homework. The entire book is told from alternating points of view, as they give statements to the police. While you read, you will get to know all of them and their lives, and with topics such as the war in Iraq, the meaning of friendship and honesty, you'll get much more than a simple funny story.

And, if that doesn't tempt you to pick up the book, let me just mention there is a catapult, the Grand Canyon and funny, funny destruction waiting in the wings for the reader.


Discussion Questions

 Pre-reading

- Can you make some predictions about this book based on the cover and title?
- The dedication reads, "To kids who hate homework. . . but do it anyway." Why do you think Dan Gutman wrote this?

 **Chapter 1: September**

- "What does "cool" mean, anyway?" What do you think it mean to BE cool? (p.11)
- Compare *The Ten Commandments of Homework* that Miss R. gave the kids with the version Snik wrote. (pgs 17-19)

 **Chapter 2: October**

- What did you think when Brenton told the others about the homework machine? (p. 25)
- Do you think using the homework machine is the right thing to do? Why or why not?

- Would you be tempted to use the homework machine?

Chapter 3: November

- What do you think about the argument Snik's dad and Judy had about the War in Iraq? What are your thoughts about it? (p. 48)
- Judy died her hair pink? Why do you think she did that? (p. 50)

Chapter 4: December

- What is a fad? (p. 63)
- Why do you think kids participated in the fad about red socks? (p. 65)
- Can you think of something you would like to start as a fad?
- What is the deal with the mysterious emails? Who could they be from? (p. 76)

Chapter 5: January

- What does Brenton mean when he says, "War is not the answer. Chess is the answer." (p.78)
- Who do you think made the anonymous call to the police about the homework machine? (p. 88)

Chapter 6: February

- What do you think is going on in the story with the chess game that Brenton helped Snik with? Why is chess important to this story? (p. 93)
- Miss R moved the kids to separate parts of the room? Do you think she knows they are cheating? (p. 101)
- How could she find out for sure if they are cheating?

Chapter 7: March


- Who do you think put the notice in the newspaper about the homework machine? (p. 108)
- Who is Milner and what could he possibly want? (p. 110)

Chapter 8: April


- Were you surprised with Snik's father died in the war? How do you think Snik will react? Why did Kelsey get so upset? (p. 116)
- Were you surprised when Brenton confessed to reporting the machine to the police? Why do you think he did that? (p. 121)

 **Chapter 9: May**

- Now, they can't seem to destroy the files. Can you think of a way to destroy the computer?
- What did you think when they decided to use the catapult? (p. 131)

 **Chapter 10: Summer**

- Why did Snik decide that he “couldn't rat him out?” and blame Brenton? (p. 135)
- Why did they all try to take the blame? (p. 136)
- Reread Snik's entry on page 139, and then think the question about what it means to be cool again? What do you think now? Has this book helped you change your mind or think about it a little differently? (p. 139)

 **End of Reading**

- Why did Brenton say that “Do your homework” Was the idea he would like to get across to other kids?
- What do you think the theme, or “heart of the story” is for this book?
- Would you recommend this for other readers? Why or why not?

Language/Vocabulary

Page	Word	Definition
5	statement	Something a person tells the police and then it is written and signed. This story is told in a series of statements by the characters.
15	self-esteem	How a person feels about himself or herself.
16	cloakroom	Where students put jackets and bookbags. What we call the cubby area.
17	“antihomework”	Against having any homework.
20	stationed	Where someone in one of the Armed Services is placed to work for a period of time.
40	catapult	A machine used for hurling large items, like the computer into the Grand Canyon.
42	boulder	A really large rock.
50	marking period	A time period in school – what we call a trimester at our school.
73	hypothesis	Something that you believe is true but not yet proven. Brenton was testing his with his graph.
79	grim	Really serious in manner or speech.
90	shunned	To be completely ignored.
104	irrationally	Doing something that makes no sense at all.
106	distraught	Really, really upset. When Snik's dad's is killed, Kelsey is really upset.

Indiana Academic Standards met by novel content (Intermediate -- 3-6)

- LA3.3.1 Recognize different common genres (types) of literature, such as poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction.
- LA3.3.3 Determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author or illustrator portrays them.
- LA3.3.4 Determine the theme or author's message in fiction and nonfiction text.
- LA3.3.6 Identify the speaker or narrator in a selection.
- LA3.3.8 Identify the problem and solutions in a story.
- Sci3.1.1 Recognize and explain that when a scientific investigation is repeated, a similar result is expected.
- Sci3.1.2 Participate in different types of guided scientific investigations, such as observing objects and events and collecting specimens for analysis.
- Sci3.1.3 Keep and report records of investigations and observations* using tools, such as journals, charts, graphs, and computers.
- Sci3.1.4 Discuss the results of investigations and consider the explanations of others.
- Sci3.1.5 Demonstrate the ability to work cooperatively while respecting the ideas of others and communicating one's own conclusions about findings.
- Sci3.1.6 Give examples of how tools, such as automobiles, computers, and electric motors, have affected the way we live.
- Sci3.1.7 Recognize that and explain how an invention can be used in different ways, such as a radio being used to get information and for entertainment.
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- LA4.3.2 Identify the main events of the plot, including their causes and the effects of each event on future actions, and the major theme from the story action.
- LA4.3.3 Use knowledge of the situation, setting, and a character's traits, motivations, and feelings to determine the causes for that character's actions.
- LA4.3.6 Determine the theme.

- LA4.3.7 Identify the narrator in a selection and tell whether the narrator or speaker is involved in the story.
- Sci4.1.6 Explain that even a good design may fail even though steps are taken ahead of time to reduce the likelihood of failure.
- Sci4.1.7 Discuss and give examples of how technology, such as computers and medicines, has improved the lives of many people, although the benefits are not equally available to all.
- Sci4.1.8 Recognize and explain that any invention may lead to other inventions.
- Sci4.4.7 Describe that human beings have made tools and machines, such as x-rays, microscopes, and computers, to sense and do things that they could not otherwise sense or do at all, or as quickly, or as well.

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- LA5.3.2 Identify the main problem or conflict of the plot and explain how it is resolved.
- LA5.3.3 Contrast the actions, motives, and appearances of characters in a work of fiction and discuss the importance of the contrasts to the plot or theme.
- LA5.3.4 Understand that theme refers to the central idea or meaning of a selection and recognize themes, whether they are implied or stated directly.
- LA5.3.8 Identify the speaker or narrator in a selection and tell whether the speaker or narrator is a character involved in the story.
- Sci5.1.5 Explain that technology extends the ability of people to make positive and/or negative changes in the world.

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- LA6.3.1 Identify different types (genres) of fiction and describe the major characteristics of each form.
- LA6.3.2 Analyze the effect of the qualities of the character on the plot and the resolution of the conflict.
- LA6.3.3 Analyze the influence of the setting on the problem and its resolution.
- LA6.3.5 Identify the speaker and recognize the difference between first-person and third-person narration.

- LA6.3.6 Identify and analyze features of themes conveyed through characters, actions, and images.
- LA6.3.9 Identify the main problem or conflict of the plot and explain how it is resolved.
- LA6.3.8 Critique the believability of characters and the degree to which a plot is believable or realistic.
- SS6.1.1 Describe the rise; the political, technological and cultural achievements; and the decline of ancient civilizations in Europe and Mesoamerica*. (7 Wonders of the World)
- Sci6.1.6 Explain that computers have become invaluable in science because they speed up and extend people’s ability to collect, store, compile, and analyze data; prepare research reports; and share data and ideas with investigators all over the world.
- Sci6.1.8 Describe instances showing that technology cannot always provide successful solutions for problems or fulfill every human need.
- Sci6.1.9 Explain how technologies can influence all living things.

Anticipation/Reaction Guide

Response Before Reading	<i>The Homework Machine</i>	Response After Reading
	Kids divide themselves into groups and their friends come from this group.	
	Habits are impossible to break.	
	Sometimes you have to do something wrong in order to do the right thing.	
	You can usually tell about people when you first meet them. First impressions are important.	
	Honesty is the best policy in all circumstances.	

Read-Aloud Passages

Passage 1 (pgs 36-38) – This is the passage immediately after Brenton demonstrated the Homework Machine to the other kids, and includes their reactions. They are all amazed and decide to begin using it for their own homework. This is the beginning of them become a group.





Passage 2 (pgs 128-129) – The discussion about how to destroy the Homework Machine. This sequence is hilarious. They eventually decide to use a catapult to throw it into the Grand Canyon

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- LA6.3.8 Critique the believability of characters and the degree to which a plot is believable or realistic.

“If you like *The Homework Machine*, you’ll love...” (Read-Alikes)







Books with computers featuring in story:

-  *Danny Dunn and the Homework Machine*, Jay Williams and Raymond Abraskin
-  *The Homework Machine*, Poem by Shel Silverstein found in *A Light in the Attic*
-  *Feed*, by M.T. Anderson
-  *The Computer That Ate My Brother*, Dean Marney

Other books by Dan Gutman:

-  *The Get Rich Quick Club*
-  *Back In Time with Benjamin Franklin*
-  *Back in Time with Thomas Edison*
-  *Virtually Perfect*
-  *The Kid Who Ran for President*
-  *The Kid Who Became President*

Books told in multiple perspectives or through messages, IMs or blog entries:

-  *TTYL*, Lauren Myracle
-  *Heart on My Sleeve*, Ellen Wittlinger
-  *Bat Six*, Virginia Euwer Wolff
-  *Morning Girl*, Michael Dorris
-  *Little Alters Everywhere*, Rebecca Wells
-  *Seedfolks*, Paul Fleischman

Across the Curriculum Connections

THEME: The War in Iraq (After the topic of the war comes up in reading, have a discussion about the different perspectives people have and have kids read a little for background knowledge)

Time for Kids: <http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/iraq>

Scholastic News: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/war-iraq/>

THEME: Multiple Perspectives (Read *Voices in the Park* before beginning novel and discussing how things can be viewed from different perspectives. The poetry would be used for a Writing Workshop project concurrently with the novel.)

Read *Voices in the Park*, by Marc Brown and discuss the importance of looking at things from various perspectives.

Poems in Two Voices – Possible Writer’s Workshop Piece

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/99/fear/poem2.html>

Graduation Poem in Two Voices

http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson391/two-voice.pdf

Poem for two voices assignment from Read – Write – Think

<http://www.babinlearn.com/pdf%20files/Poetry/Poetry%20for%20Two%20or%20More%20Voices.pdf>

Poem for Two voices assignment

THEME: Social Groups/Cliques (Use at end of book – Show movie and have a discussion of create a Venn Diagram which compares the plots/themes from book and movie)

View *High School Musical* and discuss the similarities of kids from different cliques becoming friends and how that can be difficult and yet meaningful.

Book Activities

Activity 1 – Poems in Two Voices (Writing Workshop)

Students will work in pairs to create Poems written for two voices. Some lines are alternating, while others are said in unison. They are tied together by a theme and help

students develop an understanding of viewpoint and multiple perspectives of a specific issue.

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/99/fear/poem2.html>

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<http://www.babinlearn.com/pdf%20files/Poetry/Poetry%20for%20Two%20or%20More%20Voices.pdf> -- Another example of an assignment

Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices, Paul Fleischman

I am Phoenix: Poems for Two Voices, Paul Fleischman

Big Talk: Poems for Four Voices, Paul Fleischman

Standards

- 3.4.6 Review, evaluate, and revise writing for meaning and clarity.
- 3.4.7 Proofread one’s own writing, as well as that of others, using an editing checklist or list of rules.
- 3.4.8 Revise writing for others to read, improving the focus and progression of ideas.
- 4.4.1 Discuss ideas for writing. Find ideas for writing in conversations with others and in books, magazines, newspapers, school textbooks, or on the Internet. Keep a list or notebook of ideas.
- 4.4.2 Select a focus, an organizational structure, and a point of view based upon purpose, audience, length, and format requirements for a piece of writing.
- 4.4.4 Use logical organizational structures for providing information in writing, such as chronological order, cause and effect, similarity and difference, and posing and answering a question.
- 4.4.5 Quote or paraphrase information sources, citing them appropriately.
- 4.4.9 Use a computer to draft, revise, and publish writing, demonstrating basic keyboarding skills and familiarity with common computer terminology.
- 4.4.10 Review, evaluate, and revise writing for meaning and clarity.

- 4.4.11 Proofread one's own writing, as well as that of others, using an editing checklist or set of rules, with specific examples of corrections of frequent errors.
- 4.4.12 Revise writing by combining and moving sentences and paragraphs to improve the focus and progression of ideas.
- 5.4.8 Review, evaluate, and revise writing for meaning and clarity.
- 5.4.9 Proofread one's own writing, as well as that of others, using an editing checklist or set of rules, with specific examples of corrections of specific errors.
- 5.4.10 Edit and revise writing to improve meaning and focus through adding, deleting, combining, clarifying, and rearranging words and sentences.
- 6.4.8 Review, evaluate, and revise writing for meaning and clarity.
- 6.4.9 Edit and proofread one's own writing, as well as that of others, using an editing checklist or set of rules, with specific examples of corrections of frequent errors.

Activity 2 -- Drama

Students will be in their Learning Clubs (4-6 kids) and will each take a scene from the book and present it as a Reader's Theater type of play.

The class will choose the six scenes or sections that they view as the most important and each group will take one. They will have a couple of days to practice and we will have presentations in the order of the events in the book.

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<http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/war-iraq/>
Scholastic News – Iraq War

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