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YHBA – Novel Resource

Dan Gutman

The Homework Machine

Simon & Schuster, Inc. – 2006

Dan Gutman is a prolific author, he loves baseball and wrote many books about baseball famous players. He wrote for adults for a while, he also wrote for different magazines. He got hundreds of rejection letters before he discovered that he really liked writing fiction for kid. He is married and has two children.

Author's website: [www.dangutman.com](http://www.dangutman.com)

Publisher's website: [www.harpercollins.com/authors/1677/Dan=Gutman/index.aspx](http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/1677/Dan=Gutman/index.aspx)  
[www2.scholastic.com/browse/contributor.jsp?id=1530](http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/contributor.jsp?id=1530)

He wrote several series: My Weird School Daze, My Weird School.

Nightmare at the Book Fair (2008); Getting Air (2007)

Million Dollar Putt (2006)

Abner & Me (2005)

The Get Rich Quick Club (2004)

Back In Time with Benjamin Franklin (2003)

Mr. Gutman's books have been honored by many states, Indiana has chosen several of his books for the Young Hoosier Awards. The Junior Library Guild has honored him for several books and in different years. The Reading Teachers have honored his books.

Mr. Gutman says never give up when you are writing and get lots of rejection letters. He discovered he was happier and much more successful when writing books for children. He is a baseball nut, so his first books were about baseball heroes.



ANNOTATION: One really smart 5<sup>th</sup> grader invents a homework machine. He lets it slip and several other students want to use it, too. The four students are completely different from each other and aren't even friends. In a strange way, they bond and of course, they get in trouble. It is written from each child and adults' point of view. Students can sympathize with the fifth graders. This was a wonderful book for the teacher and will be for the students. The book is clever and fun to read.

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GENRE: Fiction (Humorous)

POINT OF VIEW: First Person, with each character speaking for him/herself.

THEME: Honesty, friendship. Understanding different classmates.

CONFLICT: Who told on them? Would they get caught? Could they become friends?

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: Someone squeals on them and they have to figure what to do with the computer. So they toss it in the Grand Canyon. That is really how they get caught and hauled into the police station. These four very different children work out a friendship. The computer genius, the over-achieving girl, the weird girl, and the under-achieving boy find that they so have many things in common.

CHARACTERS: 5<sup>th</sup> grade students: Sam Dawkins, new boy, doesn't like school.—Brenton Damagaychi, computer genius—Judy Douglas, over-achiever and African-American, Kelsey Donnelly—underachiever, with a head of pink hair. Ages 10-11 Miss Rasmussen, New 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Their moms and the police chief also tell the story.

SETTING: Grand Canyon, Arizona – 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom of Miss Rasmussen in Grand Canyon School. Modern Times.

INTEREST LEVEL: 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grades      READING LEVEL: 4.8

**BOOKTALK:**

Do you like to do your homework? How much do you think you should do each night? Why do you think that the teachers assign it? Do your parents expect you to have homework? This class has a very bright young man who invents a homework machine, brilliant...

The students are fifth graders at Grand Canyon School in Arizona. The four students involved are very different, Brenton, boy genius; Judy, miss perfect; Kelsey, I'd rather be playing girl; Sam, underachiever and new student.

Why does the book start with them in the police station? They are being questioned by the chief, herself. Is it against the law, to get homework help from computer? What on earth could they have done?

This story is told by each of the characters and their teacher. Even their parents have comments to make. You will enjoy meeting them and wondering how on earth they are going to get out of the mess they are in.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### Pre-reading questions:

- Chapter 1. Who are the children talking to? Page 1
- Chapter 2. What does Judy consider rude? Page 25
- Chapter 3. Will he show the others how the machine works. Page 36
- Chapter 4. Will Snik eventually play chess with Brenton? Page 61
- Chapter 5. What will happen when Snik's father goes to war? Page 77-78
- Chapter 6. Why do you think the teacher is worrying about Brenton's popularity? Page 88
- Chapter 7. Will Ronnie be taken into the group, now that he is sitting next to Brenton? Page 103
- Chapter 8. Will the parents figure out why the computer has changed from Brenton's house to Snik's. Page 111
- Chapter 9. Will Brenton be able to destroy the program that does homework? Page 125
- Chapter 10. What will the kids do when they are in to the principal's office? Page 133

### During Reading questions:

- Chapter 1. What does Judy threaten to do if they keep her out of college? Page 5
- Chapter 2. Why did Brenton give in and show the machine to the others? Page 28
- Chapter 3. What does the group think of Kelsey's pink hair? Page 48
- Chapter 4. What fad does Brenton start all over the country? Page 65
- Chapter 5. How was Snik's attitude change when his dad went to war? Page 78
- Chapter 6. What does Judy's mom finally notice about Judy and homework? Page 95
- Chapter 7. What did the kids do, so it wouldn't look like they were cheating? Page 106
- Chapter 8. What did Miss Rassmussen do to see if the kids were doing homework? Page 114
- Chapter 9. What did the kids do to try to clear out the homework program? Pages 125
- Chapter 10. What finally get them in trouble? Page 134

### Post-reading Questions.

- Chapter 1. How were these four students grouped together? Page 12
- Chapter 2. Would you use the machine if one of your friends had one? Page 38
- Chapter 3. Why was Brenton's mom surprised at his friends? Page 56
- Chapter 4. How did Snik's dad explain the game of chess to him? Page 68
- Chapter 5. What is happening between these kids and their other friends? Page 82
- Chapter 6. What is Kelsey thinking when that Milner guy contacts her? Page 102
- Chapter 7. Why is Ronnie Teotwawki in the police station, too? Page 108
- Chapter 8. What was the clue that Sam and Kelsey had to start to get some answers wrong? Page 114
- Chapter 9. What was Judy's idea to get rid of the evidence? Page 126
- Chapter 10. How can you tell that these four very different kids have become friends? Page 135.

## LANGUAGE:

Humiliating, page 5, to be really embarrassed.

Trivial, page 9, a really small, unimportant fact

Concerto, page 14, a piece of classical music written for piano.

Reinforce, page 21, to make something stronger.

Blunder, page 24, a very serious mistake

Grasp, page 34, to understand, or to hold on to

Catapult, page 40, a machine invented by the Romans to throw things hard and fast.

Obnoxious, p.47, to be unacceptable, such as behavior, smells.

Franchise, p72, to sell your idea to other people and make lots of money.

Hypothesis, page73, a statement to be tested. (used in Science a lot)

Artificial, p97, looks like the real thing, but isn't,

Effective, p145, will work without too much effort.

## INDIANA STANDARDS:

3.2.1 Locating Information in the text

3.2.6 Locate problems and solutions

3.3.3 Determine what the characters are like from their actions, thoughts.

4.2.2. Analyze text that is in sequential order

4.3.1. Identify main problem or conflict and explain how it is resolved.

4.3.2. Identify main events of the plot

4.3.3. Determine causes of character's actions

4.3.6 Determine the theme

5.2.2. Analyze text that is in sequential order

5.2.4. Draw inferences, conclusions, about text

5.2.5. Distinguish among facts, and opinions in text.

5.3.1. Identify the main problem or conflict and explain how it is resolved.

5.3.3. 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.

## ANTICIPATION STATEMENTS: True or False

1. Cheating to get a good grade is ok.
2. The police would take kids to the police station for cheating on their homework.
3. It is a kid's responsibility to get their assignments even if they are absent.
4. Holidays are artificial celebrations for selling things.
5. Homework is proof of teacher incompetence.
6. American kids are fat because of their homework.
7. When kids get A's, it is because they always cheat.

## READ-ALoud PASSAGES

1. Chapter 1 – page 17 and 18 The teacher’s ten commandments of homework.
2. Chapter 1 - pages 18, 19, and 20 Sam Dawkins’s list.

## IF YOU LIKE ... YOU’LL LOVE

Nightmare at the Book Fair (2008)

Getting Air (2007)

Million Dollar Putt (2006)

The Get Rich Quick Club (2004)

### **By other Authors**

Frindle, Andrew Clements

Nothing But the Truth, Avi

7 X 9 = Trouble, Mills

Molly McGinty has a Really Good Day, Paulsen

## ACROSS THE CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

1. Life Skills, write your own set of homework rules.

Standards:3.5.5. Write for a different purpose

4.7.11 Write for making presentations

5.5.6 Write for different purposes

2. Computer, find some sites that would help you with tonight’s homework.

Guidelines: Our textbook sites: McGraw Hill – [www.science.mmhschool.com](http://www.science.mmhschool.com)

- [www.math.mmhschool.com](http://www.math.mmhschool.com)

[www.harcourt.com](http://www.harcourt.com)

Look up one more site, use google as your search engine. Tell me the connection to your assignment.

## RESOURCES:

1. School handbook; pages that deal with cheating.
2. Textbooks sites: [www.science.mmhschool.com](http://www.science.mmhschool.com)  
[www.math.mmhschool.com](http://www.math.mmhschool.com)  
[www.harcourt.com](http://www.harcourt.com)

## BOOK ACTIVITIES

1. Individual - Research the history of computers and the internet.
2. Threesome – Write a story with the three of you telling it piece by piece.  
Similar to Mr. Gutman’s style. Make it about recess today.  
Use his book to help you tell your story.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Authors: [www.dangutman.com](http://www.dangutman.com)

[www.harpercollins.com/authors/1677/Dan\\_Gutman/index.aspx](http://www.harpercollins.com/authors/1677/Dan_Gutman/index.aspx).

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