

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR CLEO PORTER AND THE BODY ELECTRIC JAKE BURT

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In a future forever changed by a pandemic, a girl survives in total isolation. A woman is dying. Cleo Porter has her medicine. And no way to deliver it. Like everyone else, twelve-year-old Cleo and her parents are sealed in an apartment without windows or doors. They never leave. They never get visitors. Their food is dropped off by drones. So they're safe. Safe from the disease that nearly wiped humans from the earth. Safe from everything.

The trade-off? They're alone. So, when they receive a package clearly meant for some-one else—a package containing a substance that is critical for a stranger's sur-vival—Cleo is stuck. As a surgeon in training, she knows the clock is ticking. But people don't leave their units. Not ever.

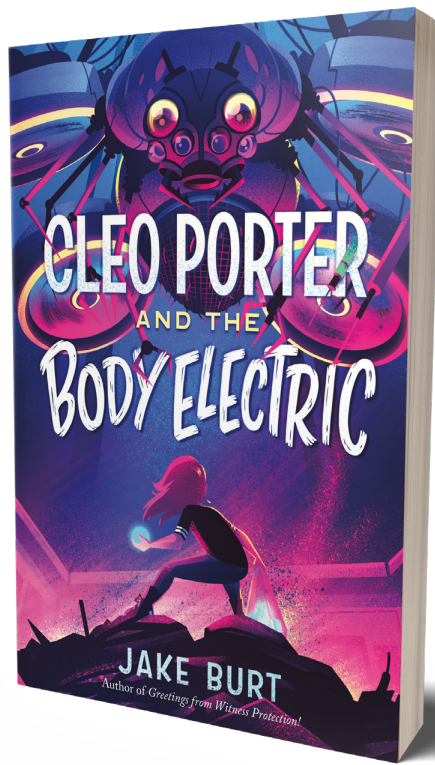
Until now.

## USING THIS BOOK IN YOUR CLASSROOM

This guide is designed to help you incorporate *Cleo Porter and the Body Electric* into a standards-based curriculum. It contains pre-reading activities, discussion questions, and post-reading activities. These activities and questions are aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy. The standards listed throughout the guide reflect the standards for grade five but the activities and questions can be adapted for grades four through seven.

This book can be used in many instructional contexts, including as a read-aloud, in small groups or book clubs, and for independent reading. Encourage students to keep their work in their reading notebooks or folders and bring them to reading conferences and group meetings to support their discussions.

This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. You know your students better than anyone else. Please adapt the activities and questions as needed to meet the needs of your students. We hope that you and your students enjoy this engaging and thought-provoking book!



## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to think about their favorite folk or fairy tale and have them share a brief summary of their tale with a partner, including any challenges the main character faced and how they dealt with these challenges. Then ask them to discuss how their stories are similar or different.
2. Have students think about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ask them to share how their lives changed, what they found difficult, and if there were any positive aspects to this time. Explain that this book takes place in a future that has been impacted by a fictional pandemic and that they may find some similarities or differences between their experiences and those of the main character.
3. Have students read (or listen to) chapter one of *Cleo Porter and the Body Electric*. Ask the following questions: What do we know about Cleo so far? What questions do you have? What do you think might happen in this book?

CCSS for ELA and Literacy: RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.5.9

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Cleo's life with her parents. How is it similar to your life? How is it different?
2. What was the cause of the Great Separation that led to people isolating themselves from others? Do you think this was a good solution? Explain your thinking.
3. Why is the delivery of the red package to Cleo's apartment surprising? Why is it so important to her that Miriam Wendemore-Adisa receives this package?
4. Why does Ms. VAIN tell Cleo the story of "Little Red Riding Hood"? What does Cleo think is the real moral of this story? How does it lead to her decision to deliver the medicine to Miriam herself?
5. How does Cleo prepare for her journey? What does she feel when the shutter closes after she leaves her apartment? Why does it make her feel this way?
6. Describe the challenges Cleo faces on her journey to Miriam's apartment. How does she meet each challenge? How does her medical knowledge help her along the way?
7. What series of events causes Cleo to end up in a compost heap outside her building? How does this represent the lowest point in her journey, both literally and figuratively?
8. Why is Cleo surprised to meet Angie and Paige? How did they each come to be living on the outside?
9. Describe Cleo's impressions of the outdoors. What does she mean when she says that the trees were "all connected and kinetic and alive ... *like people used to be*"?
10. Cleo tells Angie that she sounds like Ms. VAIN. How are Ms. VAIN and Angie alike?
11. What does Angie mean when she tells Cleo that her building isn't the sanctuary she thinks it is? How do Angie's words challenge all of Cleo's beliefs about her home?
12. What does Cleo do to earn Paige's trust? How does Paige help Cleo return to her building?

13. What surprising information does Miriam share with Cleo when she finally arrives at her apartment? How does Cleo react to this revelation? Do you think Miriam and Cleo’s parents were justified in what they did? Why or why not?
14. Do you feel Cleo has been changed by her experiences? Support your opinion with evidence from the story.
15. What character traits does Cleo possess? Provide specific details from the text to support each trait and explain how each trait helps Cleo on her quest.

CCSS for ELA and Literacy: RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.5.3, SL.5.1, L.5.5

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

### CLEO’S QUEST

Explain to students that there are many stories in literature (including folk and fairy tales) in which the hero or heroine goes on a quest or journey to accomplish something. Quest stories often follow a similar pattern.

1. An event occurs that spurs the hero or heroine to leave home and go on an adventure to an unknown place.
2. The hero or heroine encounters enemies and trials on their journey and must overcome all obstacles in order to be successful. There is often a mentor or others who guide and help them.
3. The hero or heroine then returns home having successfully accomplished the task. They have gained wisdom and are transformed by the adventure.

Discuss with students how *Cleo Porter and the Body Electric* fits the criteria for a quest tale. Have them divide a blank piece of paper into three parts, then do an illustration that exemplifies each part of the quest and write a description of what is happening beneath each picture. Provide time for students to share these with the class and display them in the classroom.

CCSS for ELA and Literacy: RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.5.5, W.5.9a

## INSIDE OR OUTSIDE

Discuss with students how the fictional influenza D pandemic impacted the lives of the people in the story, reflecting on how most people chose to isolate themselves in huge buildings, while others like Angie chose to remain on the outside. Have students write an essay comparing and contrasting what it was like to live on the inside and the outside, using specific details from the text. They should include positive as well as negative aspects of each setting. Have them end with a paragraph stating where they would choose to live and explain why, using their analyses and their own experiences with COVID-19 to support their opinions. Have students share their essays with the class.

CCSS for ELA and Literacy: RL.5.1, RL.5.3, W.5.1, W.5.9a

# CITY MOUSE AND COUNTRY MOUSE

When Ms. VAIN asks Cleo how she would like to learn something, she usually chooses to learn through a story. Have a discussion with students about the power of stories and why we love them so much. Explain that folk and fairy tales are old stories that have been passed down through cultures both orally and in writing. These stories often contain a message or moral, as "City Mouse and Country Mouse" does. Angie compares Cleo and Paige to these characters. Collect different versions of this story and have students work in pairs to read the different versions. Have them use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two versions, including the moral or implied message in each. They can use their diagrams to write a brief summary of their findings and explain if they would agree that Angie's comparison accurately describes Cleo and Paige.

CCSS for ELA and Literacy: RL.5.9, W.5.1, W.5.9a

# CLEO, SURGEON IN TRAINING

Remind students that Cleo uses the analogy of the human body to explain how her building works and to help her solve problems during her journey. She compares the drones to blood cells in veins, the network to the brain, the units they live in to the bones, and the compost to the digestive system. Divide students into four groups and assign each group one of these topics: blood cells, brain, bones, and digestive system. Have each group research their topic and write a brief paper about it. Encourage them to include diagrams. Then each group can present their findings to the class and explain how their topic can be compared to the part of the building that Cleo mentions.

CCSS for ELA and Literacy: RL.5.9, W.5.7, SL.5.4

# NEXT CHAPTER

Have students write the next chapter, one that takes place ten years after the book ends. They should describe what the world is like and what Cleo is doing. Have them think about these questions: Will the world be the same or different? Have Cleo's experiences on her quest influenced her future, and if so, how? What characters will still play a part in her life? Allow students to read their chapters to the class and display them in the classroom library with the book.

CCSS for ELA and Literacy: W.5.3, W.5.4

This guide was written by Barbara McLaughlin, MEd, MA, literacy consultant and former senior program director for Elementary English Language Arts in the Boston Public Schools.



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