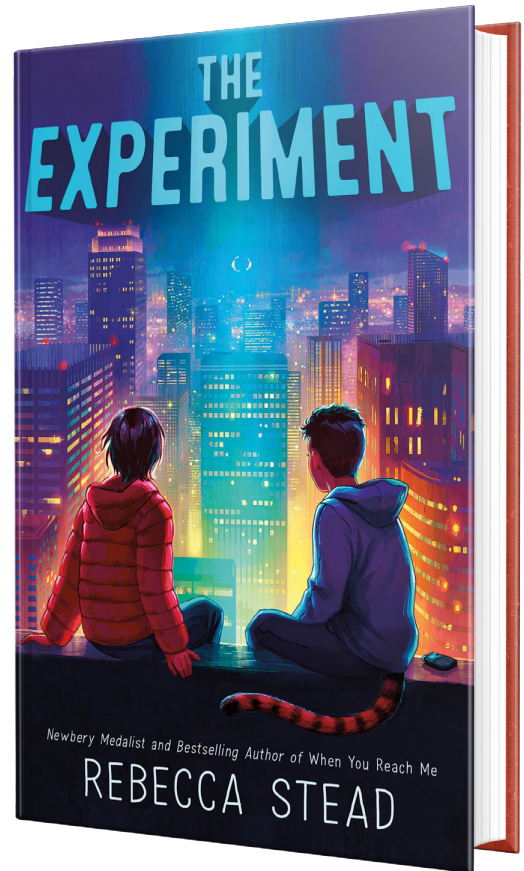


# A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR THE EXPERIMENT



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Nathan has lived his entire life with secrets he doesn't completely understand. He looks and acts like a typical sixth-grade human, but his parents have taught him that they are aliens from another planet. They, along with nine other families, are on Earth because they are part of an experiment. When something unusual happens to Nathan, he and his parents return to the mothership for help. Nathan senses that he is a failure, and believes his destiny is now in the hands of the leader of the group, Hester. In a turn of events, Nathan's family is sent back to their home in New York. Then Nathan is pulled back to the mothership. This time alone. What happens next provides answers to questions that neither he nor his family ever asked.



Ages 8–12 · 9781250374769 · eBook 9781250421463

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**REBECCA STEAD** is a *New York Times* best-selling author of middle-grade novels, including *When You Reach Me*, *Liar & Spy*, *The List of Things That Will Not Change*, *Bob*, and *The Lost Library*. In 2025, her debut picture book, *Anything*, was published for younger readers. Rebecca's books have been awarded the Newbery Medal, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction, and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. She lives in New York City, where she's always on the lookout for her next story idea.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Known for her keen sense of imagination, Rebecca Stead invites readers to explore her novels through intriguing and improbable plots, thought-provoking themes, and engaging and otherworldly characters. Stead says, "The wonderful thing about writing fiction is that you can be inspired by the real world without being limited by its facts."

This guide offers discussion questions and activities that call upon readers to use their own imagination as they explore the science-fiction genre. Readers are exposed to characters that straddle two different worlds and are left to ponder universal themes like who they want to be and whether it's too late to change. Classroom reading and language-arts teachers, school and library book-club leaders, literacy circles, and parents may find this guide especially helpful as they navigate the book with readers.

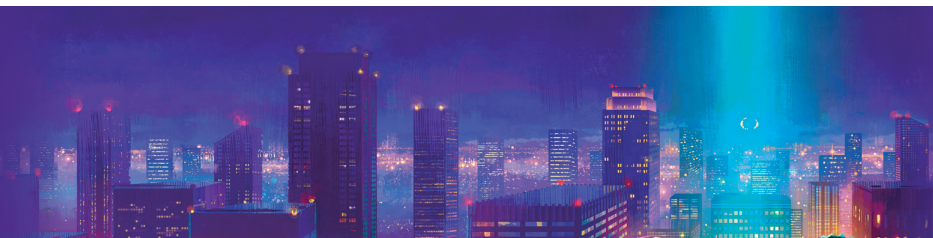


# PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Take a close look at the cover art. Consider the title of the book and write a one-page paper that suggests a possible experiment. Which boy is the primary subject? Share the papers in class.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Contrast Nathan's and Victor's families. Explain why Nathan says Victor's family is "normal, messy, and perfect" (page 63). What is Victor's opinion of Nathan's parents? Nathan's parents are very strict and overprotective. Why do they agree to let him spend time at Victor's?
2. What happened to Nathan in Florida that alarmed his parents? Why did they have to report it? To whom did they make the report? Why do they now have to return to the mothership, known as the Wagon?
3. The D.Ps come to take Nathan and his parents to the Wagon. According to Izzy, a fellow alien, D.Ps are "kind of bitter" and have "an authority complex" (page 27). Cite evidence that Izzy is correct. At what point does Nathan learn the true identity of the D.Ps?
4. Why does it take courage for Nathan to tell Victor about the tail growing on his back and his family's background? Discuss Victor's reaction. Explain why Nathan takes Victor along when he returns to the Wagon. Why does he abandon Victor at the mall?
5. Izzy names Nathan's tail Tuck. How is this an appropriate name? Chart Tuck's growth. Explain why the tail takes on the appearance of Hobbes's tail. What does Nathan learn about Tuck when he visits the Wagon the second and final time?
6. How does Victor sense that Nathan has a crush on Izzy? What is Nathan's response to Victor's observation? Discuss Nathan's reaction when he learns that Izzy and Leo are a couple. Describe Nathan and Izzy's friendship after he liberates those being held in Section Six of the Wagon.
7. Nathan has been told his entire life that his family is an experiment. Explain why he feels that he failed. His mother tells him that they are going to the Wagon to get him help. What does his mother expect to happen? Why does Hester send them back to New York?
8. Why is Nathan shocked when he sees Hester for the first time? What did he expect? Discuss what he learns about Hester when he returns to the Wagon? Why does Nathan's mother defend Hester until the end when Nathan comes home with news?
9. Describe Section Six. Why does Izzy call it a "hole in a doughnut"? What is Izzy's theory about whether the people on the Wagon, and in the experiment, are really aliens? Izzy believed in the experiment until she couldn't anymore. What made her stop believing? How does she influence Nathan's opinion? Discuss his parents' response when he shares Izzy's theory.
10. Why does Nathan return to the Wagon alone? His mother sees him go via camera. Discuss why she feels it is the right thing to do to let him go.
11. How are Nathan's parents and the other nine families brainwashed by Hester? What does Nathan learn about his parents' identity?
12. What is the significance of the video games in Nathan's mom's closet? Describe the egg that Nathan finds in a shoebox. What is its purpose? Explain the role of Nathan's cat, Toto, and Izzy's cat, Mr. Cute.
13. Explain what Hester means when she says, "I will never ever, ever, understand why they chose you" (page 211). Who is "they"? Discuss what she means by, "You don't see because you don't know how to look" (page 211). Debate what Nathan "sees" when he returns to the Wagon.
14. Identify the central theme of the book. Explain why the novel is called a coming-of-age story.



# ACTIVITIES

## CONNECT WITH CHARACTER

Nathan and Victor are obsessed with the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes. Research the characteristics of Calvin and Hobbes. Write a short paper that explains why Nathan is like Hobbes and Victor is more like Calvin. Cite specific scenes in the book to support your thoughts.

## MARKET A PRODUCT

Nathan must brush his teeth with pink toothpaste. Design a box that contains this toothpaste. Include a name for the toothpaste, the purpose of the product, directions for use, and a warning about possible side effects for using too much or too little. Include an appropriate logo or image on the box.

## UNDERSTAND RULES

There are many rules associated with being Kast. Consider the rules Nathan must follow and the rules on the Wagon. Then write and illustrate a Kast Rule Book. Create an appropriate cover for the book.

## EXPLORE LITERARY TERMS

Nathan has a homework assignment to write sentences using literary terms beginning with the letter a. Review the definition of the following terms: allegory, alliteration, allusion, amplification, analogy, anecdote, anthropomorphism, aphorism, and archetype. Take inspiration from the book and write sentences using each literary term.

## ANALYSIS OF STORY

Stead says, “A good story should contain elements that the surprise the reader.” Write a short paper that discusses the elements of surprise in *The Experiment*.

## EXPAND KNOWLEDGE OF GENRE

Review the difference between science fiction and fantasy. Sponsor a class debate that argues the genre of the book. Consider whether the book, like *A Wrinkle in Time*, might be classified as science fantasy. Make specific references to the book to support ideas.

# VOCABULARY

The vocabulary isn’t difficult, but readers should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from context. Such words may include: intrusive (page 52), methodology (page 80), entity (page 100), interference (page 108), antidote (page 134), altruism (page 144), exhilarating (page 161), sauntered (page 174), implode (page 197), reproachful (page 199), impenetrable (page 206), lethargic (page 223), recalibrating (page 227), opalescent (page 243), and recede (page 263).

★ **“Anyone who enjoys Stead’s writing, along with sci-fi lovers and even superhero fans will easily devour this latest offering, staying up late under the covers with flashlight in hand to read just one more chapter.”—*Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books***

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, a freelance writer and retired school librarian.

