



Barrington Stoke

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE



PETE JOHNSON

Awesome

PART 1 Synopsis & Themes

PART 2 Chapter-by-Chapter Exploration

PART 3 About Pete Johnson

PART I SYNOPSIS & THEMES

This guide is intended to provide a teacher or learning assistant with a suggested structure for guiding less able readers through **Awesome** by Pete Johnson (Reading Age 7).

A synopsis and overview of themes is followed by chapter-by-chapter suggestions for discussion points designed to develop reading comprehension strategies, including prediction and inference skills. Suggested activities are intended to further understanding of the text and/or provide opportunities for speaking, listening and writing work. There is also a brief author biography.

We hope you enjoy using these materials with your students.

Ben McBean expects to blend into the background at his new school. But he doesn't bet on the first person he meets thinking he's the star of the hit show *Awesome* – Ben Moore. Ben wants to fit in and he's keen for popular girl Jasmine to like him, so he decides to pretend to be famous recluse Moore. At first he lies by omission and limits those who know his 'secret', but soon the lies have begun in earnest, the whole school knows and there are girls hanging out on his front lawn asking for autographs. Then the real Ben Moore decides to break his long silence and give a live interview, and Ben McBean's secret is finally revealed. Ben must deal with the consequences of lying to his friends, and hope that Jasmine will still want to go out with him when she realises that he has lied and is not the famous *Awesome* star.

Awesome is light-hearted and accessible, with deeper themes of honesty, personal responsibility and self-confidence.

PART 2 CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER EXPLORATION

CHAPTER 1: THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE

Read the chapter title

What was the best day of the students' life?

Read P1

Why does Ben think it is harder to start in a new school in Spring?

Does the class agree with Ben?

Read P2

What is the first thing Ben has to do when he arrives at school?

Why does Ben say 'yawn'?

Read P4

The girl asks Ben if his other name begins with an 'M' and Ben is surprised. Does the group think the girl has made a lucky guess? What is another likely explanation? (*She thinks she knows who Ben is*).

Read P5

Look at the two times the word 'awesome' is used on this page. Once it is used as an adjective (a describing word). Once it is used as a proper noun (a name). How can you tell the difference?

Look over P4 and P5 again

Look for three words that are used in place of 'said'.

Classroom activities

ASK THE CLASS to think of a time when they were the new person in a situation. As a group, write down all the emotions that this produced (*fear, anxiety, excitement*, etc). Brainstorm what kinds of things would have helped to make them more comfortable to enter a new situation (*maybe having someone volunteer to introduce them to people, or deciding to be very friendly as the new student*). Make an effort as a group to practice these ideas with any new students in the class.

CHAPTER 2: A BIG SECRET

Read the chapter title

Has the class ever kept a big secret from their parents or friends? Did their parents or friends find out about it in the end?

Read P7

What might Ty be short for?

Read P8

Why does Ty say that Jasmine won't go out with any of the guys in school?

What happens in the dinner hall that surprises Ty?

Read P10 and P12

The word 'awesome' appears on P12 a few times. Is it used as an adjective (a describing word) this time, or as a proper noun (a name)?

Can the class work out why Jasmine called Ben 'Awesome' on P5?

Read P13, up to: "Ben Moore gave it all up, didn't he?" said Jasmine. "Two years ago. I wonder why?" She turned to me as if I'd know

Why does Jasmine think Ben would know?

Read the rest of P13 and P14

Now Ben has worked out what Jasmine thinks. Was the group right?

What would the group do in Ben's position? Would they tell Jasmine the truth, or would they play along?

Read P16 and P17

Has Ben lied on these two pages? If you don't actually say anything but you play along with something someone else thinks, is that different from lying?

Read P17

Has Ben lied now?

Read P20 and 22

Jasmine talks a lot on these pages. Does she talk too much?

In real life, people do not always speak in complete sentences. Look for a few sentences here that are not complete. Do these help to make the dialogue more natural?

Read the rest of P13 and P14

Does Ben know that what he is doing is wrong?

Why does he keep doing it anyway?

What does the class think of Ben?

Has the class ever pretended to be something or someone they're not? How did that turn out? What emotions prompted them to do this?

Classroom Activities

HAVE THE CLASS WRITE (in about 10 lines) about a time when they didn't fit in, and how that made them feel. Did they wish they were somehow different or could change something about themselves? Discuss ways in which people can learn to become more comfortable with their differences.

LOOK AT the sentence 'I thought Jasmine was going to faint with joy'. This is a common way of emphasising the emotion of joy in writing.

Can you complete these common ways of emphasising other emotions?

1. He was so angry I thought he would ex _____
2. I was so full of rage that I was sp _____
3. The kids were so afraid they were sh _____

CHAPTER 3: MY FAN CLUB

Read P23

First Ben let Jasmine believe he was Ben Moore. Then he told her he was Ben Moore. Now he is learning how to seem more like Ben Moore. Does the class have any experience of getting themselves deeper and deeper into a lie?

Read P24

Chloe says she will never tell anyone who Ben really is. Who must have already told people?

Chloe wants Ben's autograph. What is an autograph? Why do some people collect autographs?

Read P26 and P27, up to 'That was Chloe'.

What has Chloe done?

On P26, Chloe makes a promise to Ben. Does the class think it is likely that Chloe has kept that promise?

Read P28

Now that a group of people think Ben is a famous actor, does the class think he might start realising he's made a mistake?

Do you think the group of girls will keep their promise not to tell Ben's secret?

Read P30 and P31

Ben is surprised that Ty has found out about him being the famous actor from the show Awesome. Is the class surprised that Ty has found out?

Read the bottom of P31 and the top of P32

What was Ty's reaction to finding out about Ben being a top star? Why does the class think he reacted this way? (*Is he jealous? Is he upset that Ben didn't tell him?*)

Read P32

Ben is starting to get agitated with all the people in school asking him questions about being a TV star. Why does the class think he feels this way?

Read P34 and P35

After Ben asks Jasmine out on a date, Jasmine says she will accept, but not because she thinks Ben is a famous person. Does the class believe her? Why or why not?

Read P36

Ben tells his mum that all the girls wanting his autograph just like him because he's popular. Does the class think his mum believes him? Would you believe him?

Read P37 and P38

Ben says he "was living the dream – even if it was someone else's dream. I'd just borrowed it off Ben Moore for a while." What does the class think about this statement? Does Ben think he'll be able to keep up his fake identity forever?

Why is Ben and Jasmine's date cancelled? What would have happened if Ben had gone out on a date with Jasmine while the real Ben Moore was giving the live interview?

Do you think Ben is starting to find it difficult to keep up with his lies?

Activities

DISCUSS THE PHRASE 'living the dream'. What would 'the dream' be for the different members of the group? Do they think anyone ever really gets to 'live the dream'? Are there downsides to having lots of money, or being very famous? Bring in celebrity magazines and decide whether the writers are always kind to the celebrities.

CHAPTER 4: THE WORST DISASTER EVER

Read the chapter title

What does the class think is going to happen in this chapter? What is going to be the 'worst disaster ever'?

What are some of the students' 'worst disasters' ever?

Read P39 to P40

What excuse does Ben give Jasmine about why he decided to 'break his silence'?

What would you say if you were in his situation?

Read P41

Why do you think Jasmine wants to be with Ben while he gives his interview? (*Maybe because she wants to be famous like him, or he makes her more popular at school, or to make other girls jealous that she's dating a star, etc.*)

What does the class think of Jasmine? Do they like her?

Read P42

What surprise does Ben find waiting outside his house when he wakes up on Saturday morning?

How is Ben starting to feel about pretending to be Ben Moore? What clues in the text alert you to these feelings?

Read P43 and P44

Ben finally admits what he's done to his mum. How do you think it makes him feel to tell the truth at last?

Ben decides to tell Jasmine the truth in person, because only a coward would do it by text. How would the class tell Jasmine?

Activities

WRITE short letters to Jasmine from Ben, explaining what he has done and why.

CHAPTER 5: MESSING EVERYTHING UP

Read P46 and P47

When Jasmine asks Ben “why did you do it?” Ben thinks she means something different than she really does. What is she referring to?

How would the group feel if they suddenly found out that someone they thought they knew had been lying to them? Would they react in the same way as Jasmine?

Read P48

Ben says he didn’t “lie” about being Ben Moore - he just “pretended”. What is the difference between pretending and lying?

Does the class think Ben was lying or pretending?

Read P49

Chloe says that Jasmine only agreed to go out with Ben when she thought he was “someone”. Ben says that he is someone – he’s Ben MacBean. Chloe is implying that you’re only really “someone” when you’re popular or famous. Does the group agree with this?

What happens when Ben asks Jasmine if she still wants to go out on a date with him? If the class were in Jasmine’s place, would they still agree to see Ben? Why or why not?

Read P50 to P52

What does Jasmine do when Ben leaves her house?

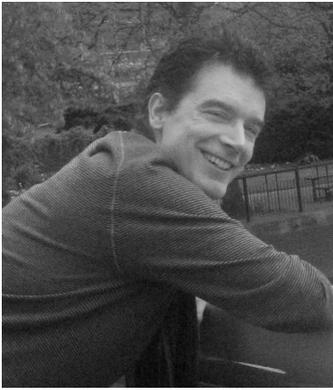
Is the class surprised that Jasmine still agrees to go out with Ben? Did the class think that Jasmine only liked Ben cause she thought he was famous?

What does the class think of Jasmine now?

Activities

PUT CARDS MARKED WITH with different people in a bowl (*famous actor, circus clown, teacher, zoo keeper, etc*). Ask students to pick cards and ask other members of the group to ask them questions about their life. See how long each student can keep up pretending to be someone else. Discuss how difficult it is to pretend to be someone you’re not and why someone would go through the trouble to pretend in the first place.

PART 4 ABOUT PETE JOHNSON



Pete Johnson was born in Winchester. He studied English at Birmingham University and then he became an English and Drama teacher. He began his career as a writer by entering writing competitions. Sometimes he won, and this gave him the confidence to become a full-time writer.

Pete has now written over forty books, which have been translated into more than twenty languages. His first novel for teenagers, *Secrets from the School Underground*, was an instant hit. Since then Pete has gone on to become one of the UK's top comedy writers for children, and has won numerous awards for his work. He has also

written **Diary of an (Un)Teenager**, **Return of the (Un)Teenager** and **Runaway Teacher** for Barrington Stoke.

Pete often writes about bullying, feeling different, family relationships and the journey from childhood to young adulthood. When Pete was growing up, he often felt awkward or ill at ease, and would spend a lot of his time in the library. Pete's understanding of the emotions of children and young people is reflected in his recognisable characters and often funny stories. He lives in St Albans, Hertfordshire.