

Grades 5 up

A Teacher's Guide to Surviving the Applewhites

By Stephanie S. Tolan

Dear Teacher:

It is with great pride that we bring you this Teacher's Guide to *Surviving the Applewhites*, a 2003 Newbery Honor Book. This terrific book is one your students are sure to enjoy. We think you will, too. We've included in this guide discussion questions and suggested activities we hope will inspire deep thinking about creativity, individuality, personal growth, and self-esteem—the very themes author Stephanie S. Tolan addresses in her writing.

Happy Reading!

HarperCollins Children's Books



"Tolan gives young readers a humorous, lighthearted look at self-identity and fitting in."

—*St. Louis Post Dispatch*

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- Newbery Honor Book
- *Book Links* Lasting Connection
- *Smithsonian Magazine* Notable Book for Children
- ALA Notable Children's Book
- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- ALA *Booklist* Editors' Choice
- New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age
- *School Library Journal* Best Book
- Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award Masterlist (Vermont)
- New York Public Library's "One Hundred Titles for Reading and Sharing"

About the Book

Nobody wants Jake Semple around. He's got a reputation as the "bad kid," and when he's kicked out of yet another school, he's given one last chance to start fresh at the Creative Academy, a homeschool run by the artistic (and eccentric) Applewhite clan. There the thirteen-year-old is teamed up with E.D., the Applewhites' practical-minded daughter, and they immediately clash. Jake sticks to his tough-guy act at first, but as time wears on he takes on a different role—in the family's off-the-cuff production of *The Sound of Music* an event that gives both E.D. and Jake a chance to shine.

Teaching Tip

As students read, have them jot down quick questions, quotes, and observations on Post-it notes. That way they can stick the notes directly on the page rather than writing in the book. Plus, by taking notes as they go along, students keep important points in the forefront of their minds. Later they can pull out the notes for easy reference, which makes them better prepared for class discussions.

Discussion Questions



- According to Jake, the students, teachers, and administrators at Traybridge Middle School labeled him a “bad kid.” Why do people label Jake as bad? What effect does this label have on Jake? Do you think he’s bad? Why does he take on the role of the bad kid? Give evidence from the story to support your thinking. What labels do people put on others in your school or community? How can labeling affect the individual?
- E.D. says she is the only noncreative member of the Applewhite family. How does E.D. feel about this? How does she define creativity? What are E.D.’s strengths and talents? What is she good at? What does she like to do? How does she feel when the reporter Jeremy Bernstein remarks on the family’s artistic talents? Why does she feel this way?
- Describe E.D. and Jake’s relationship. What, if anything, do the two have in common? How does their relationship develop over the course of the story?
- How is the Creative Academy the same as or different from a traditional school? Compare curriculum, grading system, class structure, social opportunities, etc. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a school like the Creative Academy? Would you do well at the Creative Academy? Why or why not? Describe the kind of student who would thrive at a school like the Creative Academy.
- What kind of program is Jake likely to set for himself if he continues at the academy? If you were a student at the Creative Academy, what kind of program would you set for yourself?

“Color-blind casting is the *right* thing to do.... Biology or not, your father’s morally bound to cast the best people regardless of color or ethnic background.” (p. 114)

—Jeremy Bernstein to the Applewhite family

- Randolph explains to the family that he practiced color-blind casting when assigning the roles in *The Sound of Music*. What is color-blind casting? What are Randolph’s reasons for casting the show this way? What questions do the other family members raise when Randolph tells them about his casting decisions? How do audience members and reviewers respond? What is your opinion about color-blind casting?

“Passion is necessary to all of life. All of life. Meditating, working, cooking, eating. Especially eating!” (p. 142)

—Govindaswami to Jake

“The most important thing you’re going to learn while you’re here is who you are and what you’re made of.” (p. 37)

—Zedediah Applewhite to Jake on his first day at the Creative Academy

- Does Jake learn who he is and what he’s made of during his time at the Creative Academy? Before coming to the Creative Academy, what did Jake do to show people who he was and what he stood for? Why doesn’t this work at the Creative Academy? Explain your thinking, using examples from the story.
- How does Govindaswami define passion? Why does he feel it is so critical? What is the opposite of the kind of passion Govindaswami describes? Relate this to your own experience: What effect does passion, or lack of passion, have on your schoolwork, extracurricular activities, or friendships?
- How does Jake feel when Randolph asks him to play the part of Rolf in his production of *The Sound of Music*? How does participating in the production change Jake? Have you ever had an experience that changes the way you think about yourself?
- Does Jake “survive” the Applewhites? Use evidence from the story to support your answer. Why didn’t he “survive” at other schools? Why did the Creative Academy work for Jake when all the other schools failed? How do you think Jake would fare if he went back to a traditional school?

“Once you know [what gives you joy], you will know what you want from an education and you’ll be able to set your own program.” (pp. 123–124)

—Zedediah Applewhite to Jake

Activities



Have students...

- Keep a journal written from the perspective of either E.D. or Jake. Focus on mood and feeling. Be sure to reference events as they are happening in the story. Students should begin each entry after reading an assigned number of chapters.
- Create their own curriculum, turning their interests, talents, and hobbies into a personalized course of study. Use E.D.'s butterfly curriculum as an example. What activities does she assign herself? What goals does she set? How does she grade her work? Include a project, research paper, and Teaching Opportunities.
- Compare and contrast each member of the Applewhite clan. Make a list of characters on a chart. Describe them. How are they the same? How are they different? What are their interests and talents? Make a list of the special talents or abilities possessed by each member of your class. Share your observations—and compliments—with the class.
- Design an advertisement or theater program for the Applewhite family production of *The Sound of Music*. Look for examples in your local newspaper or online. Include the name of the production and where it will take place. List the names of the actors and their roles. Give credit to the crew, including the director, stage manager, and set and costume designers. Include information about intermissions and refreshments. As an extension activity, explain the differences between wholesale and retail costs to students. Create a pretend refreshment business, and have students practice math skills to determine sales and profits for cookies, popcorn, soda, and other refreshments they might choose to sell.
- Select a scene from *The Sound of Music* or choose another play to read aloud as a class. Begin by discussing the plot summary, setting, and characters. Assign roles and do a dramatic reading, asking students to pay attention to each character's perspective. Encourage students to be creative and embellish their lines with different tones and mannerisms. Afterward, have students choose a character and write about a particular scene from that person's point of view.
- Draw a map of the Applewhite family property. Begin by listing the different buildings on the property (the main house, Wit's End, etc.). Use graph paper to plot each point on the map. Use colored pencils to color-code the buildings. Include a title as well as a key or legend.





About the Author

Stephanie S. Tolan is the author of numerous books for children and young adults, including *Ordinary Miracles*, *Welcome to the Ark*, and *Flight of the Raven*. She lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband and an array of animals. To learn more about the author—and read interview questions about her writing process—visit her website at www.stephanietolan.com.



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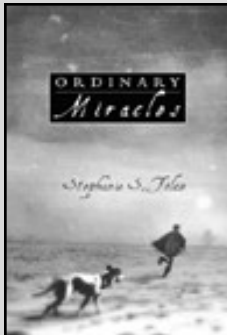
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