

Freak the Mighty

by Rodman Philbrick

Kevin is as short as Max is tall, and crippled by polio, which leads to the nickname “Freak,” but with Kevin atop Max’s shoulder, they are transformed into “Freak the Mighty” and they are invincible.

THEMES

courage, accepting differences, friendship, responsibility, dealing with loss

Young Adult Unabridged Audio

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

mastodon, humanoid, bulkhead, propulsion, sobriquet, demeanor, postulated, quest, invincible, tenements, spastic, depleted, regurgitate, cretin, magnesium, converging, alternatives, megaphone, evasive, confrontation, albino, vegetate, archetype, psyche, artifact, yonder, incision, molecule, divulged, optimum, ruckus, abide, toxic, hypnotized, paralyzed, deprived, furrowed, redeem, illiterate, precaution, skittering, corduroy, corrosive, abduction, aberration, lofty, linear, seizure, manifestation, stabilized

B. Before beginning the story, discuss with the class the following questions:

1. Do you know anyone who is teased at school for being different? How does this make you feel? What would you suggest the person do about it? What can you do about it?
2. Do you have a close friend? What are some of the things you do together? In what ways do you feel your friend helps you? In what ways do you help your friend?
3. Have you ever had to deal with the death of a friend? How did it make you feel? What are some things you remember about this friend now?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with Chapters 1-8: What does Kevin say knights and robots have in common? Why is his mother worried about his friendship with Max? How does Max defend Kevin when Gram calls him “that poor boy”? Why are people reluctant to tell Max he looks like his father? How does going to the fireworks help Max and Kevin become close friends? How do they get away from Tony D.? How does this make them “Freak the Mighty?”
2. Advance to Chapters 9-17: Where does Kevin take Max on their quest? Does Max believe what Kevin tells him? Why or why not? What happens when Max and Kevin go to the Tenements to return the purse? How do the kids treat Max at school? What happens in English class to

change things? Why can’t Max speak up in class? Why can he read but not write? What is special about the present Kevin gives Max for Christmas? Why doesn’t Max call for help when his father appears in his room? How is what his father tells him different from what Max has been told? Which do you believe?

3. Complete the story with Chapters 18-25: What are Max’s father’s plans for their life together? What memory surfaces when Max sees his father trying to kill Loretta? How does Kevin save Max? What does Kevin ask Max to do with the book he gives him? What does Max hate most about being back at school? What finally motivates Max to write about their adventures?

B. For Discussion:

1. How are Max and Kevin “Freak the Mighty”?
2. Why does Kevin relate to the stories of King Arthur?
3. What does Kevin mean when he says “Books are like truth serum”? How does Max come to find this to be true?
4. Describe Max’s relationship with his grandparents. How do they show their love for him? Their understanding? Why might it be difficult for them to accept that he looks like his father?
5. Near the end of the story, Kevin tells Max, “You don’t need a time machine if you know how to remember.” What does he mean? How is Max able to use this thought as he struggles with the loss of Kevin? What else does Kevin believe about memories?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:

1. Have students write a scene from another character’s viewpoint, such as Kevin’s, Kevin’s mother’s, Grim’s, or Gram’s.
2. Have students make up a dictionary like Kevin’s with made-up words, made-up definitions, real words and definitions that they like. Encourage humor.

3. Have students write about their fathers, mothers, or grandparents.
4. In his dictionary, Kevin defines “haiku” by writing one. Talk with students about the principles of haiku and have them write one. Kevin also writes a “limerick” in his dictionary. Students might have fun writing limericks.
5. As they listen, have students write down some of the words Kevin uses, then look them up in the dictionary. What suggestions can they make for improving vocabulary? Why is it important to have a large vocabulary?

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that might be appropriate to some of the scenes. The theme from *Star Trek* would certainly fit any of the scenes with Kevin, or music by John Williams, such as the theme from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* or *Star Wars*.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could find pictures of knights in armor, show the bird Kevin makes, the triangle box, add a small dictionary, include pages from Kevin’s dictionary, pictures of a computer.
3. Have students plan a King Arthur day, including costumes, food, entertainment and games, and invite other classes to participate.
4. *Freak the Mighty* was made into a movie in 1998 called *The Mighty*. Show this film and have students compare it to the book. Which do they like better? Why?

C. Social Studies:

1. Max escapes from the world by “going inside his head.” Have students listen to this section again and then have them close their eyes and listen to soothing music while they try to go inside their own heads. Discuss the value of meditation.
2. Kevin calls television as “the opiate of the masses.” Have students find out where this phrase originated and what it refers to. Then have them research what educators and others have written about television and its effect on children. Hold a debate on whether or not television is harmful to children and teens.
3. Kevin didn’t let his disability hold him back. Have students learn about others who have excelled in spite of physical disabilities, like Helen Keller, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and scientist Stephen Hawking among others.

4. Kevin tells Max that dragons are a symbol of fear of the natural world. Have a group of students do some research on dragons and their place in medieval belief. Of particular interest is *Dragons: A Natural History* by Karl Shuker (Simon & Schuster, 1995).
5. Have students find out how the first dictionary was begun. What role did Webster play in it? How are words added to or dropped from dictionaries today?

D. Science and Math:

1. Kevin mentions the design limitations of the human body. Have students brainstorm about what could be improved in the design of the human body and draw a new, improved human being.
2. Have a group of students research robotics. How are robots used in industry, space, or other fields?
3. Kevin is able to identify what chemicals are used to make the sounds and colors in fireworks. Have students research this.
4. Max has trouble reading and they suspect he has dyslexia. Have students find out what causes this.

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