

**Teacher Guide**

**Grades 5–6**

# **The Homework Machine**

**Dan Gutman**



**NEW WAYS TO TEACH READING,  
WRITING, & CRITICAL THINKING**



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# THE HOMEWORK MACHINE

by  
Dan Gutman

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
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### Note

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## Skills and Strategies

### Vocabulary

Word maps, using context,  
definitions, syllabication,  
synonyms/antonyms

### Comprehension

Inferences, supporting  
judgments, identifying  
attributes, drawing conclusions

### Writing

Report, biography, journal entry,  
news article, essay, poetry,  
advertisement, police statement

### Listening/Speaking

Class discussion, demonstration,  
oral presentation, interview,  
debate, dramatization

### Literary Elements

Genre, point of view, author's  
purpose, character analysis,  
theme, conflict/resolution

### Critical Thinking

Research, analysis, predictions,  
pros/cons

### Across the Curriculum

Math—graphing; Science—  
landmark inventions, catapult  
design, environmental concerns;  
Literature—realistic fiction  
novels; Art—illustrations,  
collage, book cover, T-shirt  
design; Geography—Grand  
Canyon, Arizona; History—  
notable historical figures,  
nationwide fads/trends;  
Health/Safety—Internet safety;  
Psychology—Kübler-Ross stages  
of grief, marketing/advertising  
tactics, social hierarchies,  
morality issues; Music—  
soundtrack



## Introduction–Chapter 1

Police Chief Rebecca Fish recalls memorable crimes that happened in or near the Grand Canyon. Sam Dawkins, Kelsey Donnelly, Judy Douglas, and Brenton Damagatchi discuss events leading up to the present, as well as their first impressions of each other upon entering Miss Rasmussen's fifth-grade classroom. Some of their parents give background information about each child's home life. Miss Rasmussen remembers her excitement and fears about being a first-year teacher, and Brenton confesses that he invented a homework machine and accidentally told Sam about it.

### Vocabulary

recent  
situation  
rumor  
permanent  
preferably  
occurred  
destined  
fourth  
individuals  
achieve  
typical  
assignments  
estimate  
fatal  
blunder

### Discussion Questions

1. What can you tell about the story from the Introduction?  
(Answers will vary. Suggestions: The story takes place near the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Police Chief Rebecca Fish is an experienced officer. Something unusual has happened recently, and the students who were involved all had to answer to the police.)
2. What can you tell about each character from his or her statement about what happened? (Sam says he is sorry but dismisses the event as something in the past that cannot be changed. It seems like he only wants to avoid punishment. Kelsey is reluctant to talk and is losing summer vacation time by having to come to the police station. She does not seem to think what the students did was a crime. Judy says she thinks what is happening is unfair to her because of her academic abilities. She seems mostly worried about having the incident reported on her permanent record, which will affect her academic future. Brenton thinks the whole incident is interesting and just a part of life. He seems mostly unaffected.)

3. What did Judy, Sam, and Kelsey think of Brenton at first? What does his say about each of them? (Judy thought he was dressed funny but considered him good looking. This shows that though Judy is intelligent, she also judges people by their appearance. Sam thought Brenton was “weird” and “different.” This shows the value Sam places on being cool and fitting in with everyone else, since he judges others by how much they differ from the norm. Kelsey thought Brenton was a “genius” in school but “real stupid” in other aspects of life. This shows how concerned Kelsey is with being popular and popular things, such as reality TV shows, as opposed to serious issues.)

4. Describe Brenton's attitude about being cool. In what way does Brenton think he “serves a purpose” (p. 11)? (Brenton thinks people are destined to be cool or not cool. He feels content just the way he is and has no desire to be more cool. Others think he is cool. Brenton thinks that if everyone were cool, they would all be the same. Then no one would be cooler than anyone else. Brenton believes his “purpose” is to be that non-cool person that everyone else looks up to.)
5. What are Brenton's mom's thoughts about her son? How does she support her opinion? (Brenton's mom thinks Brenton has always been very special. She remembers how he never cried as a baby, spoke very early, had no interest in television, playing with other children, played chess against himself, and taught himself to play the piano—even writing a concerto at the age of six.)
6. How did Judy initially feel about the other members of the D Squad? What does that tell you about Judy? (Judy did not like Sam because of his long hair. She thought he used his attitude to cover up his low self-esteem. Judy thought Kelsey did not care about anything and found it hard to relate to her. Judy had known Brenton since first grade and had always been in awe of his natural intelligence. Judy's observations show that she makes quick decisions about people and values intelligence.)

7. What are Kelsey's, Sam's, and Judy's attitudes about homework? Do these attitudes seem like those of an average fifth-grade student? (*Kelsey hates homework. She only does it because failing in school will be worse. Sam says he is against homework because his brain needs to rest after being in school all day. He describes homework as a punishment. Judy admits she likes homework because it reinforces learning. She likes to make it a social event with her friends. Answers will vary.*)
8. Do you think Miss Rasmussen's "Ten Commandments of Homework" are helpful? Why do you think she gave the class this worksheet? (*Answers will vary, but most students will probably agree that the commandments offer good advice. Miss Rasmussen gave the class this assignment to kick off the school year and prepare students for their work that year.*)
9. Which of "Snikwad's Ten Commandments of Homework" might have been hurtful to Miss Rasmussen? Why? (*Commandment Six says "Homework is proof of teacher incompetence" [p. 19]. Sam is basically saying that any teacher that gives homework [like Miss Rasmussen] is not a very good teacher.*)
10. What do "Snikwad's Ten Commandments of Homework" tell you about Sam? Why did he receive a decent grade on the assignment anyway? (*Sam is intelligent, but he uses his intelligence to rebel and try to act cool. Miss Rasmussen gave Sam a good grade anyway because, at the very least, Sam's assignment was creative and well-researched.*)
11. **Prediction:** How will Brenton's homework become work?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Character Analysis: Begin a Character Analysis chart on page 3 of this guide for Sam, Judy, Kelsey, and Brenton. Continue adding to the chart as you read more about each character.
2. Map Skills/Research: Locate the real Grand Canyon Elementary School on a map. Research the school to find out whether the Grand Canyon School in the book was based on this school. Write a one-page report stating your opinion, and support it with your research.
3. Art: Make a collage to illustrate what you think is cool. Use words, magazine clippings, photos, etc. Share your finished collage with the class.

## Post-reading Extension Activities

### Writing

1. Interview three teachers about their first year of teaching. Compile the information you receive into a one-page synopsis titled, "Lessons for a First-Year Teacher."
2. Research the life of one of the following acknowledged geniuses: Marie Curie, Mozart, Albert Einstein, Marilyn vos Savant, or Thomas Edison. Write a three-paragraph biography on your subject, including information about why this person is considered a genius.
3. Choose one character from the D Squad, and use that character's name to write an acrostic poem about him or her.

### Speaking

4. Find three famous quotations about friendship, and share them with your class (e.g., "Friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies." —Aristotle). As a class, evaluate the quotations and make a list of the "Top Ten Quotes About Friendship."  
Stage a classroom debate about the pros and cons of homework.
5. Write a letter to the author of *The Homework Machine* expressing your opinion about the book.
6. Design a cover for *The Homework Machine* that illustrates your favorite part of the book.
7. Design a T-shirt for the "Do Your Homework" campaign. Bring to class jokingly mentions. Use any medium you choose to display the final product in your classroom.
8. Pretend that "The Belch" was an actual product being marketed to kids. Using the Advertisement graphic on page 25 of the novel, create a colorful, attractive advertisement for the product. Be sure to include text that describes the product's unique features.

### Drama

9. In groups of four, write and stage a different solution for disposing of Belch.

### Music

10. Select ten important scenes from *The Homework Machine*, and choose a song that corresponds with each scene. Create your own soundtrack for the book, and explain the connection between the songs and scenes you chose.

## What Do You See Coming?

**Directions:** Before you begin reading, look at the following parts of the book. Based on each part of the book listed, make a prediction. Write your predictions in the boxes provided.

1. Cover	2. Dedication	3. Introduction	4. Back Cover
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>



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### ***THE BEECH***