



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Life As We Knew It

Susan Beth Pfeffer

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

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Susan Beth Pfeffer

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50203-944-6

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, analysis, drawing conclusions, identifying attributes, decision making, predictions, inferences

Comprehension

Cause/effect, sequencing, main idea and details, summarizing

Literary Elements

Figurative language, character analysis, theme, point of view, foreshadowing, setting, conflict/resolution, plot development

Vocabulary

Glossary, vocabulary bingo, etymology of “moon” phrases, definitions, context clues, usage, analogies

Writing

Journal, letter, homeschool curriculum, diary, alternate ending, essay, summary, news article, poem

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, charades, skit, news broadcast, debate, interview, sports commentary, radio broadcast

Across the Curriculum

Science—Moon’s appearance, temperature graphing, flu treatment; Geography—mapping; History—1969 Moon landing, famous celestial bodies, rationing during WWII, historic large-scale natural disasters, Valley Forge encampment, 1918 flu epidemic; Art—pamphlet, “ration ticket,” menu, dreamcatcher, flyer, pencil drawing; Literature—*The Dead & the Gone* (Pfeffer), *This World We Live In* (Pfeffer), *Hatchet* (Paulsen); Health—emergency response measures, exercise program; Cooking—egg, onion, and potato recipes; Viewing—*Meteor* (1979)

Genre: realistic fiction, science fiction

Setting: modern-day Howell, Pennsylvania

Point of View: first person

Themes: survival, family, hope, sacrifice

Conflict: person vs. nature, person vs. person, person vs. self

Style: diary entries

Tone: somber, bleak, fatalistic

Date of First Publication: 2006

Summary

When a meteor strikes the moon, knocking it out of its orbit and closer to Earth, Miranda Evans and her family must survive without electricity or warmth and with very little food and water. As the year progresses, many of Miranda's friends and neighbors succumb to the harsh conditions. Miranda writes almost daily in her journal about the suffering she witnesses and endures, including starvation, illness, isolation, and the gradual but inevitable loss of hope. With little food left, Miranda decides to leave so there will be more food for her family. Once in town, Miranda discovers that City Hall is distributing free food. With sporadic returns of electricity and a weekly delivery of food, Miranda begins to believe in the possibility of survival.

About the Author

Susan Beth Pfeffer was born in 1948 in New York City. She decided she wanted to be a writer when she was six years old, and her first work was a love story between an Oreo cookie and a pair of scissors. Her first novel, *Just Morgan* (1970), was written during her final semester at New York University. Since then, Pfeffer has been a full-time writer of over 70 young-adult novels. Pfeffer got the idea for *Life As We Knew It* after watching *Meteor*, a movie about the race to save the world from an impending meteor strike. She wanted to see how children would cope with the possibility of the world coming to an end—a situation out of their control which would require survival skills. *Life As We Knew It* is the first novel in The Last Survivors series, followed by *The Dead & the Gone* (2008) and *This World We Live In* (2010).

Characters

Miranda Evans: practical 16-year-old girl; works hard to keep her family alive in the aftermath of the meteor strike

Laura Evans: Miranda's mother; divorced from Miranda's father; quick-tempered but loving; decides to keep her family in Pennsylvania following the meteor strike

Matt Evans: Miranda's 19-year-old brother; severely weakened and nearly disabled as a result of conditions following the meteor strike

Jonny Evans: Miranda's 13-year-old brother; given more food than others after the meteor strike, since it is assumed he has the best chance at survival

Mr. Evans: Miranda's father; travels to Colorado with his new wife after the meteor strike

Lisa Evans: Miranda's stepmother; pregnant with her first child

Mrs. Nesbitt: kind, practical, elderly woman; family friend and neighbor to the Evanses

Peter Elliott: local doctor; dates Miranda's mother but dies of the flu

Megan Wayne: one of Miranda's best friends; allows herself to starve to death in the name of religion

Mrs. Wayne: Megan's mother; commits suicide after Megan's death

Reverend Marshall: preacher at Megan's church; accepts food from his congregation as they go hungry

Sammi: one of Miranda's best friends; promiscuous; leaves town with a man named George

Becky: best friend to Miranda, Sammi, and Megan; dies before the novel begins

Dan: Miranda's first boyfriend; member of the school swim team

Brandon Erlich: Miranda's favorite figure skater; originally from Howell; coached by Mrs. Daley

Mrs. Daley: Miranda's and Brandon's ice-skating coach

George: 40-year-old man with whom Sammi leaves town

the Mortensens: the Evanses' neighbors

Dwayne: guard at the hospital

Mayor Ford: stationed at City Hall; giving away free food one year after the meteor strike

Tom Danworth: assists Mayor Ford in distributing food

Mrs. Sanchez: Miranda's high-school principal

Grandma: Miranda's paternal grandmother; lives in Las Vegas

Rachel: Miranda's chosen name for Lisa's baby

Horton: the Evanses' family cat



It is important to note that the religious and political views expressed in the novel do not necessarily reflect the views of the Novel Units® authors or editors. Novel Units® also makes no claims as to the validity of the science presented by Susan Beth Pfeffer.

Spring Chapters One–Three

Miranda Evans' life is much like any teenager's—she hangs out with her friends, argues with her mom, worries about school, and complains about homework. Miranda's world is changing, though. Her young stepmother is pregnant, and now her close group of friends is not getting along. Miranda worries about her friend Megan's extreme involvement with her church. Miranda records her thoughts and daily activities in her journal. When a meteor hits the moon, knocking it out of orbit (and closer to Earth), Miranda barely has time to react to the ensuing chaos. As the catastrophe wreaks havoc on the world, causing tsunamis and earthquakes as well as mass hysteria, Miranda and her family must deal with the loss of electricity and a shortage of food and basic supplies.

Vocabulary

eclipse
waxed
waned
cynicism
hoax
pessimistic
benign
tsunamis
catastrophic
kilter
ransack
divvied

Discussion Questions

1. Why does it bother Miranda that her friends Megan and Sammi have changed? (*Miranda has noticed lately that Megan is more involved with her church. However, Miranda believes Megan is more infatuated with Reverend Marshall than with spirituality. Miranda is also upset that Megan has “ditched” her on several occasions for activities with her church’s youth group. Sammi is getting more involved with boys, which seems to make Miranda jealous, since she does not have a boyfriend. Sammi’s promiscuity also causes Megan to disapprove of her friend’s behavior and preach to her about it. The changes in each girl drive the wedge coming between them even deeper. Miranda’s resentment likely also stems from the fact that she is staying the same while her two friends are changing.*)
2. Why does Miranda say she will “be sick of the moon” (p. 11) by the time the meteor finally hits? (*Each of her teachers has assigned an essay or project that is due that Friday—two days after*

the meteor is supposed to hit the moon. Miranda feels like her teachers are using the meteor as an excuse to give students extra work. Also, newscasters and other students in Miranda’s school are talking about the meteor hitting the moon. Miranda feels like people are exaggerating the event’s importance, and she will be glad when it’s over.)

3. What topic does Miranda choose for each of her three school assignments? How does Miranda’s choice of topics demonstrate her ability to think critically? (*After conducting some research and talking with her mom, Miranda decides to do her French paper on the meteor’s collision with the moon, her English paper on how fiction can be more exciting than reality, and her history paper on how people in the 1960s were cynical about the information the government gave them during the Vietnam War. Her choices are creative and fit her abilities in each subject.*)
4. How does Matt’s phone call at the end of Chapter One foreshadow impending disaster? (*Up to this point, everyone has been upbeat, but Matt’s call is a premonition that all may not be well. Miranda has not given much credence to the frightening theories about the effects of the meteor’s collision with the moon. However, Matt, who seems logical and level-headed, seems to think that the meteor striking the moon could lead to widespread panic.*)
5. Why are people treating the moon event as an excuse to have a party? How is this ironic? (*People see the event as unique and want to share the phenomenon with their friends. They believe they will witness something that will go down in history, and they want to experience this historical event so they can tell about it in the future. However, people fail to consider the far-reaching consequences the meteor impact will have on the moon, and therefore, Earth. It is ironic that people are celebrating something that may well hurt them.*)

6. How does the moon's position and appearance change after the impact? What effects does this have on Earth? *(The moon seems closer to Earth, larger, and off-center. News reports say that the moon was knocked out of orbit. Since the moon controls Earth's tides, this catastrophic event causes the tides to change and swell, creating tsunamis and earthquakes. Soon, cities on coastlines and many islands have been completely submerged. People quickly begin to panic.)*
7. What does Miranda mean when she says, "Civilization had ended" (p. 21)? *(Answers will vary. The statement can be seen as a hyperbole playing off of civilization's heavy reliance on technology. Though civilization, or social organization, has not yet ended, the inability to use electronics makes Miranda and her neighbors feel relegated to an "uncivilized" past. Miranda's comment may also be seen as foreshadowing, as this point in the novel marks the beginning of the deterioration of a certain way of life.)*
8. Why is Miranda glad to go to school the day after the meteor hits? *(Going to school makes Miranda feel better. By following her usual routine, she is able to feel safe and as if everything will soon return to the way it was. She wants to regain a sense of normalcy, and attending school helps her do that.)*
9. What does Miranda's calm behavior during the storm at school indicate about her character? How do you think she will react if the situation worsens? *(Answers will vary. The fact that Miranda is not panicking like her classmates might be evidence that she is more mature and knows screaming and crying won't help anything. On the other hand, Miranda might simply be in shock about what is happening. At this point in the story, Miranda's character has not yet been developed fully, so students may have differing opinions. It seems likely that Miranda will cope well with the situation and will be able to help her family work through the tough time.)*
10. Why do you think Miranda's mom divides shopping tasks the way she does? Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not? *(Miranda's mom wants the family and Mrs. Nesbitt to be able to gather as many supplies as possible in the most efficient way they can. Answers will vary, but most students will likely comment that Miranda's mom's plan is very strategic and fairly well-thought-out for a last-minute grocery trip. She assigns each person an important department to visit and specifies what they should get there. She instructs them about what to do at the checkout counter and also what to do when they get back to the car. Then she directs them back into the store several more times to grab any remaining items.)*
11. High-tech gadgets are a big part of Miranda's life at the beginning of the novel. How has this changed by the end of Chapter Three? *(At the beginning of the novel, Miranda uses the Internet, sends instant messages and e-mail, watches TV, and talks on a cell phone. However, by the end of Chapter Three, her family is buying oil lamps, using candles and matches, and listening to a battery-powered transistor radio. Miranda must adapt quickly to a world in which electronics are no longer available and her family must learn to make do with what they can get.)*
12. **Prediction:** How and when will Matt get home?

Supplementary Activities

1. Language: Research phrases that contain the word "moon," and explain their origins and/or meanings (e.g., "shoot for the moon," "over the moon," etc.).
2. History: Research the 1969 Moon landing, and then prepare a short skit reenacting the events that took place.
3. Science: Research famous celestial bodies (e.g., Halley's Comet), and create a time line of their appearance in Earth's atmosphere.

Story Map

