

BOOK STATS

Grade Level Equivalent: 6–8

Ages: 10+

Lexile Measure: 1000L

Pages: 170

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Subject/Theme: Courage, Friendship, Family

Common Core State Standards	Reading	Writing	Listening & Speaking	Language
Grade 6	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RL.6.4, RL.6.7	W.6.1, W.6.7	SL.6.1, SL.6.4	L.6.4, L.6.5
Grade 7	RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.4, RL.7.7	W.7.1, W.7.7	SL.7.1, SL.7.4	L.7.4, L.7.5
Grade 8	RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RL.8.7	W.8.1, W.8.7	SL.8.1, SL.8.4	L.8.4, L.8.5

OVERVIEW

Book Summary

Freak the Mighty is not one person, but two—two eighth graders who join forces to face the personal demons and adversities in their lives. Kevin, also called Freak, has a severely handicapped body and a genius brain, while Max is learning-disabled and a giant for his age. Max carries Kevin around on his shoulders, giving him physical mobility; in turn, Kevin builds Max's confidence in his intelligence and self-worth. Together, they become *Freak the Mighty*.

The story is told through the voice of Max, who lives with his grandparents after his father, Kenny Kane, is imprisoned for killing his mother. Max's sense of shame about his father, and the fact that he looks just like him, is partly healed by his friendship with Kevin. However, when Kane is released from jail on Christmas Day, he abducts Max. After Kevin helps rescue Max, life seems to go back to normal until Kevin suffers a seizure and is rushed to the hospital. Max slowly realizes that his friend, who has told him that his body would be replaced by robotic parts, is dying from a terminal disease.

Before his death, Kevin gives Max a blank book to write down their adventures together. The book, as Kevin would say, is the truth, the whole truth, the unvanquished truth, about *Freak the Mighty*.

Teaching the Book

Courage comes in all sizes. This inspirational novel about two unexpected heroes—a tiny Einstein in leg braces and a timid, adolescent giant—teaches a tough but tender lesson about life. The book presents the theme of courage, the skill of analyzing conflicts, and the use of imaginative language. Activities will engage students in persuasive writing, researching science topics, and experimenting with figurative language.

Genre Focus: Courage

Comprehension Focus: Analyze Conflict

Language Focus: Figurative Language

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rodman Philbrick began writing short stories in 6th grade and finished a novel by 11th grade. Although his first novels were rejected, he went on to publish more than a dozen novels for adults before writing *Freak the Mighty*. This critically acclaimed, award-winning book established Philbrick as a new voice in young adult fiction. The book was made into the feature film *The Mighty* and was followed by a sequel, *Max the Mighty*.

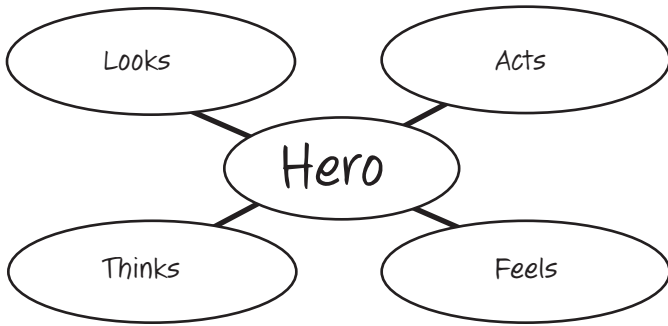
Philbrick has written several other novels for young adult readers, many with the themes of imagination, courage, and childhood conflicts. He has said: "I believe that we have the ability to change our lives using our imaginations. Imagination is a muscle—the more you use it, the stronger it gets."

For more information about Philbrick and *Freak the Mighty*, visit: <http://www.rodmanphilbrick.com/topten.html>.

Get Ready to Read

Pre-Reading Activities

Concept Map Engage students' interest in the book's theme of courage by asking them to discuss what makes someone a hero. Have them suggest some heroes they are familiar with from movies, books, or real life. Then draw the concept map below on chart paper or a whiteboard and ask students to fill it in with their ideas.



Keep a record of students' responses to return to after reading the book, asking them how their ideas about a hero and about courage have changed.

Preview and Predict Have students study the illustration on the cover of the book. Ask them to predict which characters are on the cover. Who in the picture might be a hero?



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Ask students to think about this question as they read and answer it when they have finished the book. Write the question on chart paper or have students write it in their reading journals.

Who is the hero of the book?

Vocabulary

Figurative Language The book ends with the dictionary that Freak gives Max for Christmas. It contains Freak's imaginative definitions for his favorite words, from A-to-Z. Many of the definitions are metaphors that have more truth and meaning than dictionary definitions ever could. Ask students to write down the definitions from Freak's dictionary found at the back of the book. Then compare them to definitions from the dictionary.

Use **Resource #1: Vocabulary Cards** on page 7 and distribute copies to students.

book	brain	human
idea	midget	time machine
writing	zoo	

As You Read

Reading the Book

Modeled Reading Read aloud the first chapter of the book, asking the class to follow along. Point out that the story is told through a first-person narrator. Ask students to think about who the narrator is and describe him or her. What other characters have they learned about? Help students clarify the unusual names that are used for several of the characters and answer any other questions.

Independent Reading Assign students to read the book independently and encourage them to share questions and reactions with each other.

Comprehension Focus

Analyze Conflict In *Freak the Mighty*, the two main characters face many kinds of conflicts in the year of their friendship. Some of the conflicts have been with them all their lives; other conflicts are new and frightening. Support students in analyzing the conflicts the two characters face to better understand the characters and the theme of courage.

Use the graphic organizer on **Resource #2: Analyze Conflict** to model for students how to analyze the conflicts in the book and discuss what they reveal about the characters. Project the page on a whiteboard or pass out copies to students.

Model: One kind of conflict is called character vs. nature. Often, this is a conflict that pits a character against the wilderness. But for Max and Kevin, they have a different kind of conflict with nature. Max describes himself as a “falling-down goon” because he is so big. I’ll write, “Compared to other kids his age, Max is a giant.”

Guide students to find evidence from the book to fill in the rest of the organizer for the conflicts of character vs. society and character vs. self for both Max and Kevin. Then discuss with students if and how these conflicts are resolved in the book.

STORIA ENRICHMENTS

This Storia e-book has the following enrichment to enhance students’ comprehension of the book.

- Video

After You Read

Questions to Discuss

Lead students in a discussion of these focus story elements.

1. Courage When do you think Max shows the greatest courage in the book? When does Kevin show the greatest courage? Give reasons and evidence for your choices. (*Sample answers: Max shows the greatest courage when he stays calm when his father abducts him even though he is actually terrified. Kevin shows the greatest courage when he is dying because he doesn’t ask for pity.*)

2. Analyze Conflict How does their friendship help both Kevin and Max overcome conflicts? (*Sample answers: When they become Freak the Mighty, they make up for each other’s physical problems, they are no longer teased by other kids, and they make each other feel better about themselves because they have a friend.*)

3. Figurative Language How does the author compare different characters in the book to people

and things from King Arthur and the Round Table? (*Answers: Kevin is Sir Lancelot; Max is his steed; Gwen is Guinevere.*)

Questions to Share

Encourage students to share their responses with a partner or small group.

1. Text-to-Self What did you learn about courage that you had not thought about before? How has the book changed your ideas about people?

2. Text-to-World How do you think students in your school would treat Max and Kevin?

3. Text-to-Text Compare Kevin and Max to other characters you have read about or seen in movies or on television. Who is like Kevin? Who is like Max? Explain why you think so.

WORDS TO KNOW

Figurative Language

Read aloud *Freak’s* definitions for the vocabulary words. Ask students to hold up the vocabulary card that matches each description. Then ask students to explain what *Freak’s* definitions mean and whether or not they agree.

1. a seed you plant in your head (*idea*)
2. a word used by people with small minds (*midget*)
3. a muscle that improves with exercise (*brain*)
4. an improbable, imperfect creature (*human*)
5. a four-letter word for truth serum (*book*)
6. an eighth-grade English class (*zoo*)
7. talking on paper (*writing*)
8. your imagination (*time machine*)

Extension Activities

Reading/Writing Connection

Book Blog Challenge students to become book bloggers by responding to the following prompts about *Freak the Mighty*. Ask students to answer the questions and provide their opinion. Guide them to use evidence from the book to support their ideas.

If possible, have students blog online; if not, have students write on paper and pass it around, taking turns contributing. Have different students begin the blog for each prompt. Encourage other students to respond with their opinions, as well as, whether or not they agree or disagree with other blog comments.

1. Do you think Kevin really understands that he is going to die?
2. Do you believe that Max could write the book?
3. Who is your favorite character—Kevin or Max? Why?

Don't forget the



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Give each student an opportunity to answer the big question. Encourage students to support their answers with details and evidence from the text. Tell students there is more than one right answer.

Who is the hero of the book?

Content Area Connections

Science Bionic Body Parts Although Kevin's disease is too serious to be cured, many injured people today have bionic body parts that help them live normal lives. Encourage students interested in medicine and technology to research and report on the replacement parts available for the human body.

Arts Freak the Mighty Comic Strip Like the superheroes in comic strips, Kevin and Max have real-life adventures in which they slay different kinds of dragons. Suggest students complete an art project by taking a scene or chapter from *Freak the Mighty* and retell it in comic-strip form. Remind them to use visuals, thought balloons, speech balloons, and narration boxes.

Social Studies Days of Knights in Armor The novel is full of references to King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table and the days of chivalry. For students interested in the myth and history of these times, encourage them to read a version of the story of King Arthur or to research facts about knights, armor, and chivalry.

Language Arts Book to Movie Encourage interested students to watch the movie adaptation of *Freak the Mighty*, called *The Mighty* (PG-13). As they watch, encourage them to compare the movie version with the book version. Which version of the characters do they like best? How is the movie better? How is the book better?

BIG ACTIVITY

From the Dictionary of . . . Assign students to create entries for their own dictionary, modeled after Freak's dictionary. Remind them that Freak often uses metaphors that describes a word by making an unusual comparison to something else. Prompt their thinking by suggesting words they might define such as those related to sports, food, and music. Make copies of the printable **Big Activity: From the Dictionary of . . .** on page 5 and distribute to students. Read the directions and answer any questions to clarify the activity.

Name: _____ Date: _____

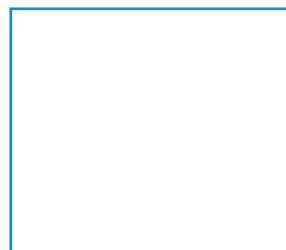
BIG ACTIVITY: From the Dictionary of ...

Create your version of Freak's Dictionary with definitions for some of your favorite words. Don't forget to use your imagination. Add an illustration for one or two of the words.

_____'s Dictionary
[your name]

[word]

Definition: _____

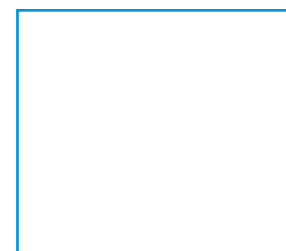


[word]

Definition: _____

[word]

Definition: _____



[word]

Definition: _____

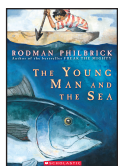
[word]

Definition: _____

READ MORE AND LEARN MORE

Use these books and other resources to expand your students' study of the book or theme.

Author Connections



The Young Man and the Sea

Rodman Philbrick

Ages: 9–12

Grades: 4–7

Lexile Measure®: 800L

Pages: 208

After Skiff's mother dies, his fisherman father seems to have given up on life. To solve their money problems, Skiff takes matters into his own hands and heads out to sea, alone, to catch a mighty bluefin tuna. The wide-open adventure, heart-pounding suspense, and satisfying coming-of-age plot make this a page-turning classic.

Available as an Storia e-book



The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg

Rodman Philbrick

Ages: 11–13

Grades: 5–7

Lexile Measure®: 950L

Pages: 240

In a story filled with adventure, humor, and danger, Rodman Philbrick recreates the turbulent times of the Civil War. This engaging, historical fiction novel portrays the 1860s through the observant eyes of Homer P. Figg, a backwoods boy who is both courageous and funny—and always willing to stretch the truth if he needs to.

Available as a Storia e-book

Theme Connections



Sound Bender

Lin Oliver

Ages: 10–14

Grades: 5–8

Lexile Measure®: TK

Pages: 272

Leo Lomax is about to turn 13—and everything in his world is changing. His parents are missing and presumed dead. He and his brother are leaving home to live with their strange, antiques-dealing uncle. Then Leo receives a long-lost letter from his father telling him that he's a sound bender—someone who can hear the past by touching an object. And there's one object in his uncle's antiques warehouse that's speaking very loudly—directing Leo halfway around the world to stop a military plot endangering many. Does Leo have the courage to face an unknown enemy?

Available as a Storia e-book



The Royal Diaries: Queen Isabel of Spain, 1466

Carolyn Meyer

Ages: 10–13

Grades: 5–8

Lexile Measure®: 860L

Pages: 208

The 15th-century kingdom of Castilla is a land divided. The current king of Castilla, Enrique, is at odds with his younger brother, Alfonso, and caught in the middle of her two warring brothers is Princess Isabel. Isabel is faced with a decision: declare loyalty to the king or rise against him. This fast-moving tale of corruption and royal courage gives readers a detailed look at one of the most important female rulers in history.

Available as an enriched Storia e-book



Glory Be

Augusta Scattergood

Ages: 10–13

Grades: 5–7

Lexile Measure®: 680L

Pages: 208

This powerfully written piece of historical fiction tells the story of one young girl's brave decision to take a stand against racism—and the terrible and wonderful consequences of her actions. **Available as a Storia e-book**



Ten True Tales: World War II Heroes

Alan Zullo

Ages: 11–14

Grades: 6–9

Lexile Measure®: 850L

Pages: 160

Guided Reading Level: Z

During World War II, everyday citizens fought to protect and preserve the values that made America great. Many of them found incredible courage they didn't know they had—in firefighting in the bombed-out fields of France, in dogfights over the flak-filled skies of Belgium, and in hand-to-hand combat on the bloody beaches of Okinawa.

Available as a Storia e-book

To find PDF versions of the Storia teacher guides and links to purchase the related books, visit:

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/ereading-resources/>

book

brain

human

idea

midget

time machine

writing

zoo

Name: _____ Date: _____

RESOURCE #2: Analyze Conflict

What conflicts do Max and Freak face? Give examples of conflicts for each character. Then describe how each conflict is resolved in the book.

Type of Conflict	Max	Freak
Character vs. Nature		
Character vs. Society		
Character vs. Self		