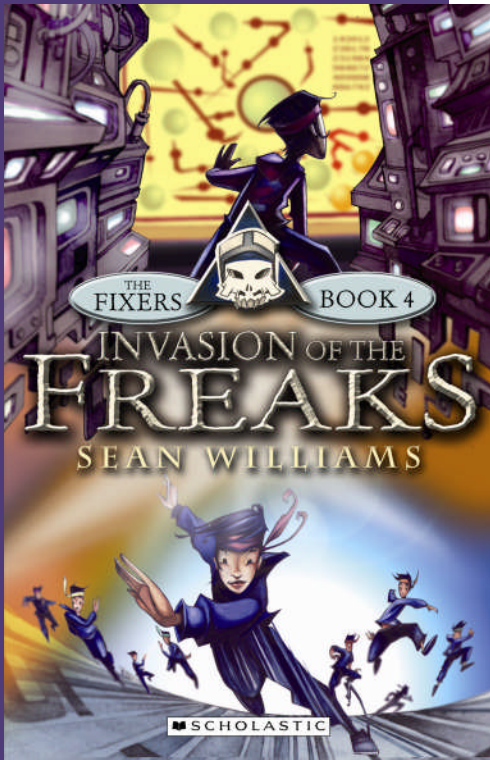


Teachers' Notes Invasion of the Freaks The Fixers Book 4

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OMNIBUS BOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

Previously (Books 1, 2 & 3 of The Fixers)

After discovering silver 'Fixers' in the street his family has moved to and pursuing a blue light that shines strangely through his new front door, Ollie finds himself in a real-life battle with an organic castle that wants to eat every village in its path. Having defeated the vicious beast and owning a sword given to him as a parting gift, Ollie attempts to get home through another wormhole masquerading as a ghostly blue door. After realising he has returned to the right place – home – at the wrong time, he exits again. This time he helps a large cat, Pixel, save children and their parents from pirate cyborgs. On successful completion of this mission, Ollie again tries to return home ... and finds once again a parallel universe in which he has a baby sister. In his continuing search for his real family, Ollie befriends a vampire named Xander and rescues him from the villagers of Shanks. He realises that he will have to find out what the Fixers are doing and put a stop to it if he is ever to find his proper home in the multiverse.

Book 4 of The Fixers

Ollie awakes in the back of one of the Fixer's trucks. He is a strangely uniform warehouse, filled with items designed to unify the multiverse by eradicating difference. The Fixers have created a flow of bland consumer goods that travel through time and space and only Ollie can stop it. Luckily, he meets twenty-four other versions of himself, and together with the help of Number 1, Niff and Emenda, as well as armies from the past present and future, he finally reverses the flow and finds his door home.

THE AUTHOR

Sean Williams has been writing full-time since 1999, ten years after he wrote his first short story. He has been nominated thirty times for the major Australian awards (Ditmar, Aurealis & McNamara) and has won ten times. Jack Dann has described him as 'One of the hottest writers in the country ... a major Australian talent', and added in the bio accompanying his opening story in the World Fantasy Award-winning anthology, *Dreaming Down-Under*, that he 'cooks a mean curry'. He lives in the centre of Adelaide, South Australia, where he was Chair of the SA Writer's Centre from 2001 to 2003. For a change of pace, he enjoys DJing any chance he can get.

Sean recently finished working on three series simultaneously: The Books of the Change (a solo fantasy trilogy generously supported by the Australia Council), the Orphans series (a post-Spike space opera co-written with Shane Dix, and the Force Heretic trilogy (set in the Star Wars: New Jedi Order universe and also co-written with Shane Dix).

Future series include the Books of the Cataclysm, a prequel/sequel series set in the same universe as the Books of the Change, and a diptych of science fiction novels (Geodesica) in collaboration with Shane Dix.

He won two Aurealis Awards in 1996, one of them for Best Horror Short Story ('Passing the Bone'). The other was for Best SF Novel (*Metal Fatigue*, reprinted by the UK's Swift Publishers in hardcover in 1999). His 1998 novel *The Resurrected Man* won the Ditmar Award for Long Fiction for that year. He was short-listed for the SA Great Literature Award in 1999, and received it in 2000.

He is also known as a collaborator. A non-fiction piece with Simon Brown, 'No Axis, No Boundary: the Search for a Definition of SF', was nominated for the William Atheling Jr Award. Together they also won the 1999 Best Horror Short Story Aurealis Award (for 'Atrax') and were reprinted in Gardner Dozois' *Year's Best SF 15* ('The Masque of Agamemnon').

THE ILLUSTRATOR

Nial O'Connor (aka Zeldz Magnoonis) is a Shanghai-based illustrator and comic artist who works on major ad campaigns (including Dove chocolate) as well as his own work. O'Connor was born in Ireland but moved to Australia when he was 7 years old.

BEFORE READING THE TEXT

Time Travel (Physics)

As a class, watch the following clip about time travel (links to science curriculum: Occam's Razor, Einstein's theory of relativity and wormholes.)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLF9_Mt5CNo&NR=1 It features a young narrator, and the clip includes scientist Michio Kaku and Einstein's theory of relativity (if YouTube is blocked in your school, ask your IT co-ordinator to temporarily unblock it for you, or give you setting for a proxy server). There are also clips of the popular film *Back to the Future*, which focuses on time travel. Watch *Back to the Future* and have students create a description of what they would expect to find here on Earth in a hundred years' time.

World-wide commerce

Explore the idea of a homogenous world. What would be the advantages and disadvantages? Draw a table on the whiteboard and collate ideas.

Look at a map showing how many Starbucks coffee outlets and McDonalds there are worldwide:

<http://www.princeton.edu/~ina/infographics/starbucks.html>

and KFC

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:KFC_world_map1.png

Coca -Cola – range of drinks they own and produce

<http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/brands/brandlist.html>

You can navigate from the above site to 'advertising' where the 'Hilltop' advertisement shows people from all over the world drinking coke together, because 'it's the real thing'.

Discuss other chains that have a worldwide presence and their impact on local communities.

Think about diversification and the impact a single pest can have on types of crops. What could happen if we all relied on the same types of food?

NB: Please check all websites for suitability on the date of proposed use.

READING THE TEXT

To get the most out of the novel, it is recommended that you read and discuss it as a class, setting individual and small group work to explore some themes and ideas.

Chapter 1: Home at Last?

For discussion:

1. Is Ollie brave or silly to follow the Fixers?

Activities

1. One of the Fixers says 'Home sweet home' when he returns to base, so for him, the warehouse is welcoming. Write down what makes your home special to you.
2. Discuss with a partner what it would be like if everyone's home was the same.

Chapter 2: Familiar Faces

For discussion:

1. How might you feel if you were suddenly confronted by many versions of yourself?

2. Why is Ollie less than impressed with being given the pink headband? What connotations does the colour have? Think about other colours and their hidden meanings.
3. Is it strange that Ollie doesn't laugh at a joke made by another version of himself? Discuss aspects of your personality you might be annoyed with if you had to meet yourself.

Activities

1. Explore what differences there are between Ollie and the others. In your own words, write down the cause of these differences.

Chapter 3: The Hacker Factor

For discussion:

1. What impression are we given of the Fixers? Do they sound interesting?
2. They say they have 'reached the ninetieth percentile'. What is a percentile? How close are they to achieving their goal?
3. What is the 'Flow'? Review your pre-reading discussions about world-wide commerce. How far is the 'flow' real in our world? How boring would a world with 'no surprises' be?
4. Blue notes that the Fixers have a weakness: 'they are all the same'. Why is this a weakness?
5. Blue has a widget called a 'ventriloquiser' that can put words in other people's mouths. If you had one right now in class, what words would you put in your teacher's mouth?

Activities:

1. Ollie realises his mum is right when she says 'everything will be the same'. Write about a time when your mum, dad or guardian was right – even if you didn't want them to be!

Chapter 4: Fixing the Fixers

For discussion:

1. It is ironic that Ollie's lack of knowledge about the tunnels simultaneously gets him lost, but keeps him safe from the Fixers. Explore what irony is and come up with some examples as a class.
2. How does Ollie's realisation that all of the Ollies are Extraterrestrial Organisms help them? Talk about how gaining different perspectives can help with problems.

Activities:

1. Ollie describes how everything suddenly becomes clear to him. He says it was 'like being on the red carpet at the academy awards'. How effective is this simile? Come up with a simile of your own to convey what having an idea is like.

Chapter 5: Pink to the Rescue

For discussion:

1. Are the Fixers intelligent, thinking people? What clues are given early in this chapter that presents the opposite view?
2. Ollie worries his 'other me' that is driving the truck may have an accident. Then he realises he won't, because he is a version of Ollie. Discuss times you felt you could do something better than anyone else.

Activities:

1. Explain how important technology is in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Bucking the Flow

For discussion:

1. The Fixers sleep in 'dormitories' and have 'toilet blocks'. How does this confirm or challenge our perception of them?
2. How does Ollie communicate his thoughts to the other Ollies when they are trapped? How does he know they will understand?
3. What dangers might there be in reversing the Flow?
4. Ollie says at the end of this chapter the 'cavalry had arrived'. What is cavalry?

Activities:

1. Draw your impression of the warehouses and accommodation the Fixers use. You could model your drawing on real estate agents' floor plans on house advertisements.
2. Using the Internet, find out what RSI is. Who gets it? Do young people suffer from it? Why?
3. There is an instance of personification (giving non-human things human capabilities, thoughts and emotions) when Ollie says 'the world turned around me, trying to make me black out'. Come up with a sentence for each of the following that personifies them:
 - A car
 - The sea
 - A chair

Chapter 7: Attack of the Eos

For discussion:

1. The 'tyres, hooves and jetpacks' used by the cavalry represent different eras in transport. Discuss how we might be travelling in a hundred years' time.
2. Why do the Fixers automatically assume the EOs want to take over?

Epilogue

For discussion:

1. What is the job of an 'epilogue'? Why is it necessary here? (Bear in mind this is the final novel of a series.)
2. Are the events in the novel/s really supposed to have happened (within the world of fiction)? What reason does Ollie give as evidence that they did? Discuss the concept of reliable and unreliable narrators and whether we deem things to be true just because they are written down. This is good opportunity to talk about reliable and unreliable sources of information on the Internet too.
3. How have Ollie's views changed after his forays into other worlds?

AFTER READING THE TEXT (ASSIGNMENTS)

Creative:

1. Create a society that will exist five hundred years in the future here on Earth. Write a report that provides details about the following: accommodation; food; values and traditions; language/s; religion/s; transport; employment; education and health.
2. Re-write the epilogue of the novel so that there is an unexpected twist.
3. Create a poster for the film of the novel, and explain which actors are starring and why.
4. Create a model of a useful gadget with instructions about its capabilities and methods of use.
5. Assume the role of one of the characters in the novel. Participate in a 'chat show' where you will need to reveal more aspects of the character's personality.

Analytical:

1. 'Ollie is a hero'. Discuss.
2. How far can it be said that Blue is the real leader of the Ollies?
3. How important is the setting in communicating the ideas of the novel?

4. In saving his world, Ollie could have created a bigger disaster. Argue for or against this statement.
5. There's nowhere like home. How true is this for Ollie?

FURTHER READING

THE BROKEN LAND Sean Williams

The Changeling,

The Dust Devils

The Scarecrow

STAR WARS: NEW JEDI ORDER: FORCE HERETIC Sean Williams with Shane Dix

Remnant

Refugee

Reunion

WEBSITE

www.seanwilliams.com