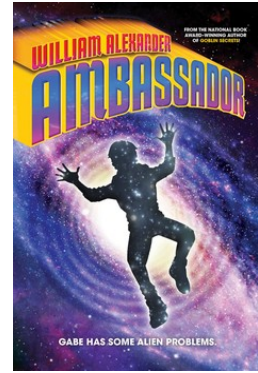


A Curriculum Guide to

Ambassador

By William Alexander



About the Book

Gabe Fuentes is in for the ride of his life when he becomes Earth’s ambassador to the galaxy in this otherworldly adventure from the National Book Award–winning author of *Goblin Secrets*.

Gabe is reading under the covers one summer night when he is interrupted by a creature who looks like a purple sock puppet. The sock puppet introduces itself as the Envoy and asks if Gabe wants to be Earth’s ambassador to the galaxy. What sane eleven-year-old could refuse?

Some ingenious tinkering with the washing machine sends Gabe’s “entangled” self to the center of the galaxy. There he finds that Earth is in the path of a destructive alien force—and Gabe himself is the target of an assassination plot. Exactly who wants him out of the way? And why?

Back home, Gabe discovers that his undocumented parents are in danger of being deported. Can Gabe survive long enough to solve two sets of “alien” problems? He runs for his life, through Minneapolis and outer space, in this fast-paced adventure.

Prereading Activities

The following questions contained in this section address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 7, 10) (RL.5–6.1, 2, 7, 9, 10) (RI.4–6.1) (L.4–6.4, 6)

1. “How can I identify whether a story is science fiction?” As a Prereading activity, have students make a chart detailing the differences between science fiction and fantasy. Have students define each genre and give examples from things they have read or seen in movies, TV, or the news.

Science Fiction: a genre of fictional stories based on scientific concepts and not restricted to reality. Some aspects of science fiction are realistic, but what makes science fiction unique are the science-based scenarios and elements.

Fantasy: contains fictionalized scenarios based completely on the fantastical, imaginary, or impossible.

Elements of Science Fiction and Fantasy chart

Science Fiction	Fantasy
Ex: robots, technology, science experiments, new societies, time travel	Ex: animals act like people, “once upon a time,” real people in fantastic places, things with magical powers

As students begin to read *Ambassador*, have them keep track of the science fiction elements and the fantasy elements and have them cite evidence from the story to support their details.

2. Ask students to look at the cover of *Ambassador*. Have them predict what might happen in the story and explain what *Ambassador* means.

3. The terms *alien*, *illegal immigrant*, *illegal alien*, and *undocumented worker* are often used in confusing and conflicting ways. Have students define *aliens* and find the origin of the word. What types of aliens are there? What happens to a person’s idea of *alien* when you include the word *illegal* in front of it? Have students make a Venn diagram for use during reading that compares and contrasts the two different types of aliens in the story. Have students brainstorm other words for *alien* and *ambassador*.
<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/venn.pdf>

Discussion Questions

The questions contained in this section address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–6.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10) (RI.4.1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) (RI.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) (RI.6.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10) (W.4–5.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) (W.6.1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) (SL.4–5.1, 2, 4, 5) (SL.6.1, 4, 5) (L.4–6.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

1. There are several themes in the story *Ambassador*. What are those themes? How does the title capture the themes of the book?

2. Describe Gabe. Why do you think he was chosen as an ambassador? What characteristics does he have that make him a good choice? Is he the type of person you would want to have as a friend?

3. What are the pros and cons of Gabe becoming the alien ambassador for the United States? How does Gabe react when the Envoy explains his responsibilities to him? What are his doubts? What information helps him with his decision?

4. Because Gabe is chosen as an ambassador, he gets to travel to the Embassy. Describe the Embassy and draw a map of what the area might look like. Use descriptions from the story to draw your picture.

5. Ambassadors usually bring gifts with them when they visit foreign places. These gifts represent their home country. Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect to give to a character in *Ambassador*. The gifts should be things that the characters really want or need. Students should write an explanation telling how they chose the gifts for each character.
6. Gabe has to face his fears as he ventures into the unknown. What prompted Gabe to take this risk? How does Gabe's family survive without him, and how does Gabe try to solve "alien" issues? What actions show us how Gabe feels?
7. Have students describe a problem that Gabe faces and have them write advice to him. Students may choose something humorous or serious from the story. Use the format that is commonly used in advice columns in the newspaper where the person with the problem writes for advice and the advisor writes back. Remind students that often the person looking for advice disguises his or her name with an imaginative name related to the problem.
8. It has been said, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." What impression does Gabe make on the Envoy, Omegan, and other characters that he encounters? What beliefs does Gabe have that influence the choices he makes while he is Ambassador? What expectations has the Envoy put on Gabe, and what expectations has Gabe put on himself? Cite examples from the story to support your examples.
9. Create a Venn diagram that shows the ways you are similar to and different from Gabe. Use a template that can be found here: <http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/venn.pdf>
10. How does Frankie and Gabe's conversation about Batman and Zorro foreshadow events that come later in the story? What clues are in the conversation that might help us understand these events and the choices Gabe makes?
11. Gabe's parents and sister are illegal immigrants from Guadalajara (a different type of "alien"). Ask students to use a map to visualize and draw the family's travels as they emigrated from Mexico to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Include a journal or diary entry written from Gabe's point of view of what the journey might have been like. Compare this journey to the journey Gabe takes to the Embassy. How are they alike and how are they different?
12. Gabe's father has a practical nature and has devised many escape plans for different scenarios. Describe why Gabe's dad might have had so many different types of plans, the role they played in Gabe becoming the Ambassador, and how the plan helped Gabe survive. Give examples from the story to support your examples.
13. What kinds of plans does your family have in case of an emergency? Create a plan your family might use in case of fire, earthquake, tornado, hurricane, blackout, snowstorm, etc.
14. When the Envoy finds Gabe, he goes into the basement and tinkers with the washing machine. This creates a travel machine that "entangles" Gabe and sends him to another world. Explain how this might

work: What does it mean to be entangled, what does entangled travel look and feel like, and how does Gabe cope with his feelings and confusion?

15. Who is Omegan of the Outlast? Why is he feared? Find examples of who he is in Chapter 12. Is he a friend or enemy of Gabe and the ambassadors?

16. In Chapter 19, Gabe decides to play a game. What is the purpose of this game? Could there be a different way to solve the issue of who is trying to assassinate Gabe? How does Gabe's understanding of playground rules and personal space come into play in this encounter? What are the rules of the game?

17. Many of the characters in *Ambassador* are not as they appear. Consider the importance of appearances and the need for disguising one's self: Why would one want to do so? What are the consequences of such a choice? Choose a character from the story and explain why they disguised themselves the way they did.

18. Interview a main character from *Ambassador*. Create six to eight questions to ask this character in the book and also write the character's response to each question.

19. Using context clues and surrounding information, explain what the following expressions mean in the story. Give details and examples of what the speaker is talking about, the reason for their saying this, and anything else that you think this expression might mean:

- a) "There is no such quality as safe. Instead there is trust."
- b) "Variation and mutations of perception and meaning are unavoidable in translation"
- c) "History hadn't ended. It wasn't over. It just overlapped with now."
- d) "It would break her heart and then kick the broken pieces around afterward."
- e) "I am a conduit of information, not a source."
- f) "Whatever else occurs," the Envoy said, slowly and still soothing, "you should trust in translation. Life anywhere and everywhere has very much in common."
- g) He took in a long deep breath. Then he let the breath out and realized that he no longer knew what the word *home* meant, exactly.

20. Did you like the ending of the book? How would you have liked it to end? Write a new ending.

21. The ending of the story leaves no doubt that there is going to be a sequel. Write a letter to the author with suggestions for a sequel in the voice of one of the characters. Make predictions about what might happen in the sequel based on what the characters have done in *Ambassador*.

22. Imagine that you are William Alexander, the author of *Ambassador*. Write a letter to a movie producer and convince them to make your book into a movie. Include examples from the story to support your reasons. Make suggestions for filming locations and actors/actresses to play certain roles. Be sure to give examples that support your choices.

23. If you had the opportunity to redesign the cover of this book, what would you do and why? Be sure to include pictures and text or a combination of both that you feel better suggests the content. Like the

cover of this book, be sure to include information on the back of the book, the front and back flaps, and anything else that you feel might grab a reader's attention.

Extended Writing and Research Activities

The questions contained in this section address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–6.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10) (RI.4.1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) (RI.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) (RI.6.1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10) (W.4–5.1 – 8) (W.6.1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) (SL.4–5.1, 2, 4, 5) (SL.6.1, 4, 5) (L.4–6.1 – 6) (RST.6.1, 4, 7, 8)

1. Using library resources and the Internet, investigate the laws for immigrants to the United States and the laws that govern work permits for immigrants. What new laws have gone into effect to support illegal immigrants? (Dream Act, driver's licenses, etc.) Working in pairs, have students make a brochure explaining the laws and the steps a person would need to take in order to work in the United States legally.
2. Gabe had to flee his home and hide at Frankie's house. Gabe finds out that Frankie's house was a stop on the Underground Railroad during the nineteenth century. What was the Underground Railroad, what role did it play then and what role does this hiding place play now? Compare and contrast the reasons that the Underground Railroad existed in the nineteenth century, and the reasons the hiding place was used during Gabe's escape. What is the hiding place for Kaen and her race toward the end of the story? Compare and contrast these two hiding places in regards to time, space, and purpose. Be sure to provide a list of sources.
3. When Gabe and the Envoy are on the Moon, they see many dead triceratopses. Gabe realizes they are from Earth. Using library resources and the Internet, research the theory of dinosaur extinction and what might have contributed to their extinction. Become an investigative reporter and write an article for your newspaper about this new discovery (Gabe finding the dinosaurs on the moon) and the possibility of this being true or not. Use research and science to defend your choice and be sure to cite your sources.
4. If you were to invent a travel machine—whether it is time or some other dimension—what would it look like and how would it work? Create a drawing, or 3-D model of what your machine might look like. Use a site like “Build a Robot—Lego Mindstorms” at <http://www.lego.com/en-us/mindstorms/build-a-robot> or “Lego Digital Designer” <http://ldd.lego.com/en-us/subpages/mindstorms> to help you with your travel machine.
5. Choose a scene from the story and create a comic strip or graphic novel for this scene. Use a site such as <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/> or <http://infinitecomic.com/> to create a storyboard for the scene. Students could also role-play and assume the roles of two of the characters with each one's personality and voice. Have students interact with one another by creating an extension of a scene from the story. Students can use a “flip camera” or other easy-to-use video camera to record each of these scenes
6. Using science terms, explain the feelings that Gabe experiences as he travels in the alien vehicle, such as gravity, friction, atmosphere, stars (how do stars look in space as opposed to what we see on Earth), weightlessness, etc. Be sure to provide a list of your sources.

Ambassador Word Bank: Tier Two Vocabulary

Science fiction authors often use scientific or unknown words in a text to make the reader figure out the meaning of these words. A good reader pays careful attention to the words used in a science fiction text to gain a better understanding of the book. It is up to the reader to use context clues to figure out the meaning of unknown words in a science fiction text. If you still can't figure out the definition of the word by using the context clues, then look up the definition in the dictionary. Can you figure out the definition of each of the words below?

Part 1—Selected

Spherical
Spindly
Wrathful
Sacrificial
Indignant
Parry
Stoic
Haunch
Spanglish
Scry
Olmec
Dismissive
Subvocalized
Mammalian
Phlegmy
Proxy
Plenipotentiary
Cognition
Appendage
Entangled
Inauspicious
Ominous
Recoherence
Calibrated

Part 2—Entangled

Protocol

Dissipated
Initiate
Illusory
Imploded
Neotenus

Part 3—Attacked

Incinerate
Geosynchronous
Preemptive
Chancery
Deportation
Protocol
Mollified
Condescension
Diversity
Proximate
Dissipated
Nomadic
Carapaces
Culpable
Sentient
Scathing
Writhed
Bioluminescent
Inert
Entropic
Abrazos

Splayed
Predecessor
Astroengineering

Part 4—Entrusted

Pummeling
Hemisphere
Exiled
Miffed
Finite
Dissipated
Cosmonauts
Skeptical
Cobbled
Obsidian
Genocidal
Untranslatable
Piratical
Bravado
Placid
Culpable
Arboreal
Dithering
Censured
Conspiring
Incredulous

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