



## **Destination Human**

K.L. Denman

Reading level: 3.1

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### **Book Summary**

Chloe thinks of herself as a normal teenage girl—if there is any such thing—until a formless alien being inhabits her body. The being is named Welkin and claims to be a “Universal.” Welkin has entered Chloe’s body as part of a Universal school project. Chloe agrees to let this weirdo observe her life for three days as long as Welkin doesn’t interfere. Welkin tries to respect the non-interference portion of the agreement, but Welkin’s stream of alien commentary as Chloe deals with boys, her coach and math homework has a comic, enlightening impact on Chloe’s life.

### **Author Biography**

**K. L. Denman** was born in Calgary, Alberta, and spent her childhood in a house one street away from the open prairie. When her family moved to Delta, British Columbia, and she got to know life on the West Coast of Canada: tides, clam digging, rain gear, green grass year-round and enormous trees. She always loved writing and when her teen children and their friends provided inspiration and re-kindled memories of this challenging passage, writing for teens became an irresistible venture.

Today she lives on a small farm on British Columbia’s Sunshine Coast with her family: people, two dogs, three cats, two horses and an elderly mule. When she’s not writing or caring for critters, she’s reading, growing vegetables, taking pictures, or volunteering with therapeutic riding.

Students who enjoy *Destination Human* will want to read her other books from the Orca Currents series: *Rebel’s Tag*, *Perfect Revenge*, *Mirror Image* and *Stuff We All Get*.

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## Connecting to the Text

### Character Study

1. In *Destination Human*, Welkin, a non-physical being that exists in an alternate dimension, receives an assignment to go into the past and inhabit a “juvenile human” for three days. Following this, Welkin must prepare a report on “the nature of life in that form.” Welkin balks, asking, “Isn’t downloading a description of an experience just as good as experiencing one?” (ch.1). Ask students to reflect on Welkin’s question using the following prompts:

- ◆ Why did Welkin resist the assignment and prefer to visit the Thought Archives?
- ◆ Imagine you are Welkin writing the final report. What do you think Welkin learned through the assignment? Do you think Welkin could have learned these things through the Thought Archives?
- ◆ If you could download an experience rather than living it, would you choose to? Are there some experiences where downloading would work for you or would not?

2. In chapter 1, Welkin describes Welkin’s teacher, class and assignments. Ask students to consider their own feelings about school. In what ways are their experiences similar and dissimilar to Welkin’s?

**Prompts:** Welkin worries about having to repeat a class; some classes are more difficult than others; Professor Float “drones on” and Welkin doesn’t always pay attention; Welkin is given projects and must write reports.

3. In chapter 10, Welkin and Chloe talk about emotions. Welkin tells her, “Universals have debated the value of emotions for as long as we’ve existed. Some say we should discard them, since they are not logical. Others say emotions enrich the experience of life.” Challenge students to consider some of the emotions Chloe expressed in the novel. What understanding did Welkin get through observing Chloe?

**Prompts:** Chloe feels happy and confident when she looks good; Chloe has a crush on Noah; Chloe hates Welkin when Welkin tells her she is going to die.

### Theme

A key theme in the novel is the contrast between primitive/non-primitive and superior/inferior beings. Welkin refers to humans as primitive because they “rely on their physical senses to perceive everything.” In contrast, Welkin is a non-physical being who can read thoughts and travel through dimensions. Welkin says, “I am the superior intelligence here” (ch. 2). Use the following topics for group discussions or debates:

- Professor Float says humans are similar to the Universals’ ancestors. Humans from earlier periods in history are sometimes described as primitive, and Chloe shows Welkin images of early humans (ch. 9). How might evolution play a part in determining whether beings are primitive or not?

- Non-literate human cultures are sometimes described as primitive. Is there one skill or ability that is the mark of a non-primitive human culture? Welkin thinks so: In chapter 4, Welkin says, “I am an evolved being. Therefore, I don’t require a body to exist”; and in chapter 9, Welkin calls humans primitive because they fight.
- When we hear or use the words “primitive” and “superior,” is there an inherent value judgment? Chloe says of Welkin, “You’re different. But are you better?” (ch. 9). She also notes that humans help each other, where Welkin isn’t sure if Universals do.

### *The Writer’s Craft*

1. Throughout *Destination Human* are examples of Welkin taking things literally. Welkin doesn’t understand innuendo or metaphor and so makes observations that are often comical. Ask students to look for examples of this in the novel. Do you think K. L. Denman uses this to endear Welkin to the readers and provide humor? Examples to get students started:
  - ♦ Chloe’s rules state that she can’t talk to Welkin when other people are around: “They’ll think I’m nuts” (ch. 4).
  - ♦ When Chloe sees Noah, she says, “He’s so hot” (ch. 6).
2. Because Universals have no gender, we can’t use typical pronouns to describe Welkin or the group of Universals. Ask students to write three sentences describing the relationship between Welkin and Chloe—without using pronouns. Does it feel awkward or unusual?

### *Building Vocabulary*

The following words are used in the novel in the context of Welkin’s experience observing human life.

assignment	dimensions	journey	sentient
co-exist	evolved	life energy	superior
different	host	primitive	understand

Ask students to write sentences using at least five of the words listed above while demonstrating their understanding of the word’s meaning in the context of the novel. For example:

- Welkin’s *assignment* was to study a human *host* for three weeks. This becomes a wild *journey* for Welkin and Chloe.
- Welkin tells Chloe that Universals are *superior* to humans because they don’t need a body. Chloe believes Universals are *different* but not *superior*.

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Language Arts*

1. Professor Float and Welkin make various observations about “juvenile humans” in early chapters. As a writing exercise, ask students to respond to one or more of the observations from chapter 1, using examples from their own experience. Do you agree or disagree with Professor Float and Welkin’s assessments?
  - ♦ *[They have] a tremendous focus on their bodies. Thoughts about appearance, food and mating [are] very important.*
  - ♦ *Thought after thought is focused on their physical life.*
  - ♦ *As far as I can tell, the humans are virtually the same.*
2. Ask students to imagine they are a human guide giving an orientation to your classroom to a Universal. Use the following as topics for individual or team projects.
  - ♦ Describe how you use each of your five senses in your school setting. Write two or three sentences for each sense, remembering that Universals have very limited understanding of physical sensations. They don’t have bodies so you’ll need to be very descriptive!
  - ♦ Universals don’t have gender, so they don’t understand the differences between boys and girls. Write a powerful paragraph describing a “typical” boy and girl in your class. After reading your paragraph, could a Universal easily spot the differences between boys and girls?

**Option:** You may wish to have students describe school teams, clubs, cliques or teachers/students instead.

### *Creative Writing*

Welkin says that it is “extremely rare for humans to hear the thoughts of other beings” (ch. 2). As a creative writing exercise, ask students to imagine they can read the thoughts of a person they see often but don’t know. Write a fun, descriptive paragraph about some thoughts this person has. Encourage inventive and zany ideas. For example:

- Dwayne, the bus driver, is pretending he’s in a video game. He gets 10 points every time he parks the bus right beside the bus stop sign, but he loses one point each time a passenger doesn’t smile or say “Hi” or “Thanks.”
- The Hall Monitor outside the Foods classroom is thinking about sneaking in and stealing the fresh tortillas and salsa from last class—the ones for the School Board Trustees Luncheon today. He’s imagining being invisible and leaving a secret note.
- My homeroom teacher has a Universal with him today and they communicate through their thoughts. Nobody knows, not even his students. He’s trying to ignore the Universal but it’s really hard because the Universal is very young and is asking a “Why?” to every one of his answers.

**Connecting to the World***Topics for Discussion and Discovery*

1. In chapter 2, Welkin says, “I focus hard on absolutely nothing. It’s a technique Universals learn so that they can cloak their minds from other Universals.” Ask students to research—and try out—meditation, yoga or visualization and share their experiences through oral reports and demonstrations.  
**Prompts:** How might these techniques help us deal with stress, deadlines, feeling overwhelmed, angry or frustrated? Try one of the techniques daily for a week. Did it help you feel more relaxed, calm and focused?
2. When Welkin tells Chloe she is going to die, Welkin says, “But it’s only a body... I’m not killing *you*, Chloe. Only this body will die...Your life energy will simply move on. Perhaps to another body or—” (ch. 11). You may wish to use this dialogue to discuss the concept of reincarnation (if appropriate for your students). Ask students to consider that Welkin came into being at the time the pyramids were built. If Welkin were human, how many generations (or lives) could Welkin have lived? What might Welkin have seen or lived through?

**Web Resources**

[http://teenshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/emotions/meditation.html](http://teenshealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/meditation.html)