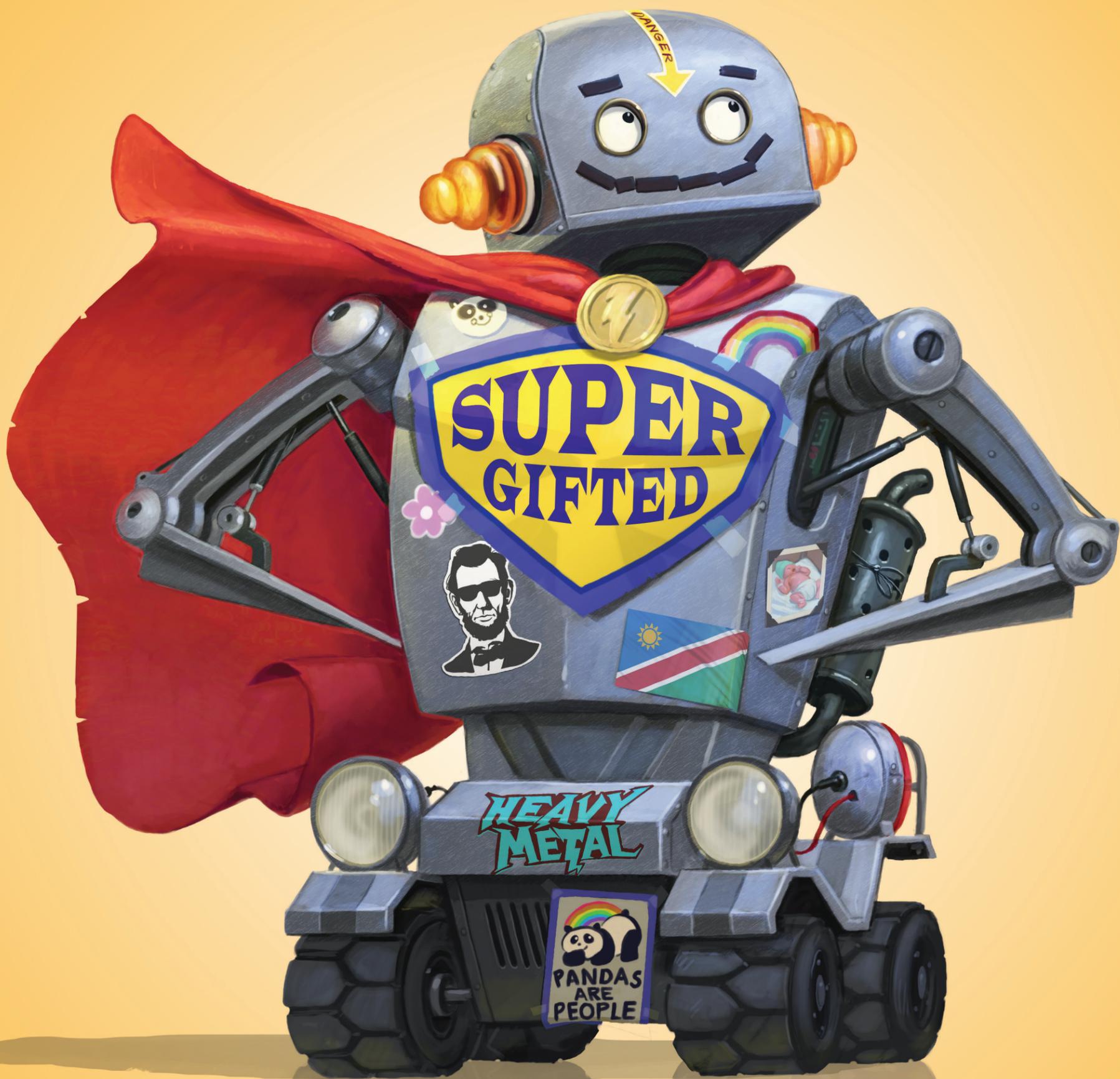


# THERE'S A LITTLE GENIUS IN EVERY KID



# UNGIFTED

## ABOUT THE BOOK

No stranger to trouble, Donovan Curtis is the kind of kid who acts before he thinks. It's precisely this lack of impulse control that leads to the moment when a giant bronze globe smashes through the Hardcastle Middle School gym and lands Donovan in the superintendent's office. Due to a paperwork mix-up however, instead of being punished, Donovan is admitted to the Academy for Scholastic Distinction, a special school for gifted students. Relieved to escape the wrath of the superintendent, Donovan's new problem is fooling people whose IQs are above genius level. While his lack of achievement in math and social studies quickly becomes apparent, it takes an ongoing human experiment involving his sister, a rowdy middle school dance, and a YouTube-worthy robotics meet to illuminate his true gifts.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Each chapter in *Ungifted* opens with the name of a character and his or her IQ. Why do you think the author chose to highlight each person's IQ? Is intelligence always the most important part of a person? As you read through the book, note and discuss ways that "gifted" and "normal" kids are described. Do you detect any stereotypes?
2. Consider the two schools in the book; the Academy for Scholastic Distinction and Hardcastle Middle School. In what ways are they similar or different? Consider the physical space, school cultures, lunchroom offerings, and students.
3. Donovan remarks that "half of being gifted was just the fact that everybody expected you to be smart" (p. 48). Discuss the ways that expectations define characters in the book. How do expectations shape your life?
4. Chloe hypothesizes that "Brothers and Sisters forge family bonds through a complex byplay of accusations and insults" (p. 97). What evidence do you see in the text to support this hypothesis? Can you think of evidence from other texts or your own life?
5. Discuss Noah's reasons for wanting to leave the Academy for Scholastic Distinction and his observations on life as a gifted kid in the chapter titled "Unfailing" (pgs. 100–109). Did it surprise you that he was so unhappy being so smart? What might this reveal about our perceptions of the lives of others?
6. On page 122, Chloe says, "the minute [Donovan] walked into Oz's homeroom that day, I knew things were about to change." What are some of the impacts Donovan has on the Academy for Scholastic Distinction and its students?
7. Katie is initially resistant to the idea of helping Mr. Osborne's class complete the human growth and development requirement by being their "pregnant lab rat" (p. 178). How does she feel by the end of the book? What does this experience reveal about the impact of having a team versus going through an experience alone?
8. After Donovan returns to Hardcastle Middle School, he feels like he doesn't quite fit in anymore. When the Daniels try to cheer him up with pranks, he observes: "I just wasn't that guy anymore" (p. 232). In what ways has Donovan changed over the course of the book? What do you think caused these changes?
9. Using the chapter "Unexpected" (pgs. 256–264), discuss Donovan's decision to crash the other team's robot at the robotics meet. What do the Daniels and the members of the robotics team think? What do you think? Was it right?
10. Why was Noah so happy to be wrong about the sex of Katie's baby (p. 270)? How did his error change the way he looked at what was possible in his life? How could you apply his thinking to understand failure in a new way?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**MY PLACE IN HISTORY.** Donovan traces his family history and discovers distant relatives who fought in the Civil War and survived the *Titanic*. Invite students to explore events that occurred during the lifetimes of their family members as they create a family tree timeline. Working together as a class, create a timeline of significant events from the past 100–150 years. Next give each student a copy of the class timeline and have them plot the lifespans of several generations.

**IT'S ALL IN THE SETUP.** For Donovan, it seems like a catastrophe is never far away, like the day when he decides to smack a bronze sculpture of Atlas holding the world that happens to be perched on a hill overlooking the school gym (pgs. 6–9). Divide students into pairs and have each student write the setup for a disaster just waiting to happen and then have their partner finish the story.



# SUPERGIFTED

## ABOUT THE BOOK



Donovan Curtis returns to Hardcastle Middle School after an accidental placement at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction, and his awkward genius friend Noah Youkilis is switching schools, too. While Noah can solve math problems in his head and write programs too complex for the school computers, navigating everyday life at a regular middle school is the greatest challenge he has tackled yet. Before long, Noah and Donovan find themselves entangled in a feud with cheerleading captain Megan Mercury and school sports star Hash "Hashtag" Taggart. When a freak accident makes Donovan a hero, he can't take credit for his good deed since Hashtag is involved. Stepping in on behalf of his friend, Noah takes on the role of the heroic "Superkid" and becomes an overnight celebrity. Can even the smartest kid keep the truth from coming out and not let fame go to his head as he becomes the most popular person in town?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Noah had long dreamed of attending the local public school instead of the gifted program at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction. Compare Noah's experiences at Hardcastle Middle School in chapter 2 (pgs. 20–29) with Donovan's description in chapter 1 (pgs. 1–19). What might explain the differing accounts?
2. In chapter 7 (pgs. 79–80), Donovan prevents a propane tanker truck from colliding into the Mercury family's house and yet he doesn't want to be associated with his good deed. Discuss Donovan's motivations for this choice.
3. When Brad returns home from a deployment in Afghanistan, he tries to apply his military training to his civilian life. In what ways is this successful? In what ways is it not?
4. While Noah can solve math problems in his head and write code too advanced for the school computers to handle, there are other areas where he struggles (pgs. 2–3). Donovan may struggle with his homework, but can easily understand the school's social scene. Discuss the strengths of each character. What are your strengths?
5. Terms like dork, shrimp, klutz, jock, gifted, ungifted, and normal are used to describe characters in *Supergifted*. Do you think people fit neatly into categories like these? What examples can you find in the text of characters behaving in ways that might be unexpected for someone their "type"?
6. On page 168, Noah defends his adoption of the superkid identity by saying, "What difference does it make if I'm not the actual person who saved the house? People think I am. They don't have to be right; they just have to believe it." Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?
7. How has Noah changed since becoming the famous superkid? How do other characters respond to these changes? What impact does his popularity have on his friendship with Donovan?
8. In the final chapters of *Supergifted*, both Noah and Donovan see themselves in a new light after Donovan receives a medal and Noah receives a letter saying he qualifies for remedial classes. Why are these items so important to each character? What do you think might happen next in their lives?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**LATIN LIVES.** Many students at the Academy for Scholastic Distinction are familiar with Latin, something that Noah doesn't think is true when it comes to the students of Hardcastle Middle School. Invite students to discover how much Latin they already know as the class researches common Latin words and phrases, and then explores state and university mottos before selecting a class motto.

**YOU SHOULD BE ON YOUTUBE.** "YouTube may have been life, but *our experience of YouTube* was equivalent to life's greatest hits" explains Noah as he reflects on his many hours of watching YouTube videos (p. 97). Challenge students to create a storyboard for a video of a moment from their life that was particularly exciting, entertaining, funny, or unusual.



Photo by Owen Kassimir

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GORDON KORMAN published his first book at age fourteen and since then has written more than ninety middle grade and teen novels. Favorites include the *New York Times* bestselling *Ungifted* and the *Masterminds* series, as well as the teen novel *Pop*. Gordon lives with his family on Long Island, New York. You can visit him online at [www.gordonkorman.com](http://www.gordonkorman.com).