

A Curriculum Guide to

Moon Base Alpha, Book 1: *Space Case*

By Stuart Gibbs

**About The Book**

Like his fellow lunarnauts—otherwise known as Moonies—living on Moon Base Alpha, twelve-year-old Dashiell Gibson is famous the world over for being one of the first humans to live on the moon.

And he’s bored out of his mind. Kids aren’t allowed on the lunar surface, meaning they’re trapped inside the tiny moon base with next to nothing to occupy their time—and the only other kid Dash’s age spends all his time hooked into virtual reality games.

Then Moon Base Alpha’s top scientist turns up dead. Dash senses there’s foul play afoot, but no one believes him. Everyone agrees Dr. Holtz went out onto the lunar surface without his helmet properly affixed, simple as that. But Dr. Holtz was on the verge of an important new discovery, Dash finds out, and it’s a secret that could change everything for the Moonies—a secret someone just might kill to keep . . .

**CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING**

**Prereading Activity**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.2) (RL.6.2) (SL.4–6.1, 2, 3)

As a prereading activity, have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

<i>Before Reading</i>	<i>After Reading</i>	<i>Statements</i>
		All mysteries are worth solving.
		Adults always know better ways to approach problems than kids do.
		When in danger, it is best to play it safe rather than take a risk.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “0” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

## *Space Case* through Writing and Research

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Space Case* as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection. The questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9) (RL.6.1, 2, 3) (SL.6.1, 2, 3) (W.4–6.4)

1. In *Space Case*, the novel opens with Dashiell stating, “Let’s get something straight, right off the bat: Everything the movies have ever taught you about space travel is garbage.” From this first introduction of Dash, what can readers infer about him? Did you find those inferences about him to be accurate as you get to know him better throughout the course of *Space Case*?
2. Consider the novel’s title: In what ways does it capture the themes of the book?
3. In *Space Case*, Dash realizes that Dr. Holtz’s death was calculated and no accident, and that his killer is one of the residents on Moon Base Alpha. Why is Dash’s insight so important? For what reason do most of the adults at the base want to dismiss him? What are the ramifications of there being a murderer on the Moon?
4. Describe Dash. What makes him a dynamic character? Is he the type of person you would want to befriend? Why or why not?
5. Because of his parents’ work at Moon Base Alpha, Dash gets to reside on the moon. Imagine what it would be like living there. What would be the greatest benefits to such an experience? What would be the biggest challenges? Do you feel that Dash takes advantage of this unusual situation?
6. What was your earliest impression of Nina? What did you think of her refusing to take Dash seriously? Given her job at Moon Base Alpha, do you think she is within her right to attempt to silence him?
7. In *Space Case*, Dash’s nemeses are the Sjoberg siblings. What is it about this family that makes them so particularly difficult? In your opinion, why do they act the way they do?
8. In what ways does Kira’s arrival to the Moon change things for Dash? In your opinion, does she have the potential to be a good friend to him? In what ways does her relationship with her father provide her with the ability to help Dash?
9. In your opinion, what is the appropriate way to deal with a bully like Patton? In what ways does Dash get the better of him? Do you think Dash is right to retaliate the way he does?
10. In *Space Case*, what are the most impressive obstacles Dash overcomes? Which of these hurdles did you like best? Why?
11. How does the news that Daphne is a corporate spy for a tourism company affect her relationship with the other residents? Though she shares that she doesn’t like her job, she tells

Dash and Kira she's agreed to the job because she gets "to go to the moon! To make history!" Do you think she's justified in doing what she does?

12. Though Dash is often reprimanded for being a troublemaker, with the help of Kira he is also the person who helps solve the murder of Dr. Holtz. What can readers infer about his motivations?

13. After she lands on Moon Base Alpha, Zan Perfonic tells Dash, "I just arrived on the rocket—and I think you're right about Dr. Holtz. He *was* murdered . . . but I need your help to prove it." Why do you think Zan chooses to enlist Dash to assist her in investigating Holtz's death? Do you think it's appropriate for her to do so? Why or why not?

14. Consider the unusual cast of secondary characters: Who did you like the most? The least? For what reason? Of all of the characters, who did you feel was most similar to you due to his/her personality or experiences?

15. After Chang criticizes Lars Sjoberg about his disrespect toward the late Dr. Holtz, Lars tells him, "I'll do whatever I want." How does this declaration capture the overall attitude of the Sjobergs?

16. *Space Case* is told in first person: How would the story be different if another character (besides Dash) were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?

17. *Space Case* is sprinkled with excerpts from the faux book, *The Official Residents' Guide to Moon Base Alpha*. What did you think of this guide book? Did you find the information highlighted to be particularly useful to the residents on MBA?

18. Using the phrase, "These stories are about . . .," supply five words to describe *Space Case*. Explain your choices.

19. As the novel closes, Dash has solved an important mystery. Predict how he will have to come to the aid of the residents of Moon Base Alpha in the next installment/adventure of Dash Gibson.

### **Extended Writing and Research Prompts**

The following activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3) (RL.5.1, 2, 4) (RL.6.1, 2) (W.4–6.4)

1. Though Moon Base Alpha has its fair share of mishaps, it has also been able to recruit scientists, like Dash's parents, from around the world to work for this groundbreaking project. Using library resources and the Internet, have students research plans for residences in space. Be sure to learn the following:

- Who will be considered for the mission?
- What is the mission's plan?

- How is it supported and by whom?
- What planets are being targeted for residence?
- What are the biggest challenges of this endeavor?

After gathering this information, have them create a visual presentation that illustrates their findings.

2. Throughout *Space Case*, the challenges of living life on the Moon are highlighted. Using the novels as inspiration, use textual descriptions of living on Moon Base Alpha. Place students in pairs and have them role-play as news reporters interviewing one of the residents of MBA. To enrich the activity, record the “report” and allow students to use props and costumes for their news report.

3. Over the past fifty years, space exploration has been a national priority, but due to other needs, funding for the program has waned, and some people believe it’s no longer a necessary or justifiable expense. Have students research how the space program is funded and its current goals and objectives. After examining their collected data, have students determine if they feel support of the program is warranted and write a persuasive paper that shares their position. Alternatively, students can prepare a speech designed to convince others of their view and present it to their classmates.

4. Throughout the course of the novel, readers are offered great insight about Dash’s point of view based on the events of *Space Case*. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters from *Space Case* and draft a diary entry detailing what you experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why). Remember to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, etc.).

5. Many of the characters in *Space Case* are not as they appear. Consider the importance of appearances and the need for disguising one’s self—what might be a rationale to do so? What are the ramifications and consequences of such a choice? Select one character from the novel and write a short analysis of his/her choice to use a disguise.

### **Space Case through Literary Elements Analysis**

Use the following activities to allow students to show their understanding of various literary elements in *Space Case*. The activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9) (RL.6.1, 2, 7, 9)

**Setting:** Consider the setting for *Space Case*: Why is the Moon as a location so important? Using the descriptions provided in each of the books, illustrate the four places within Moon Base Alpha you believe to be most important to the story. In addition to the illustrations, include a short explanation of the significance of each, and why you believe it is important.

**Advice Column:** Ask students to describe one of the problems faced by a character in *Space Case* and write advice to him/her. Students may choose to be serious or humorous. Use the letter

format common to newspaper advice columns, where the person with the problem writes for advice and the advisor writes back. Often the person seeking advice “disguises” his or her name with a descriptive name associated with the problem.

**Fortune Cookies:** Have students imagine they are dining with three characters from *Space Case*. Have them create fortune cookie statements for each character, making sure they tell you which character received the fortune and why it is fitting.

**Gift Giving:** Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect to give to one of the characters in *Space Case*; while these gifts can be tangible or intangible, they should be things that he/she would really want or need. Students should write an explanation, detailing how they chose each gift for the appropriate characters.

**If These Walls Could Talk:** Ask students to create a conversation between one of the characters in *Space Case* and some intangible thing (justice, love, goodness, greed, etc.) or his/her conscience. Have them script the conversation for dialogue, making sure they use appropriate punctuation.

**Character Report Card:** Ask students to examine the ethical nature of a character’s actions and choices in *Space Case*. Have them set up a “report card” using a chart and include the following categories: respect, responsibility, cooperation, caring, integrity, self-control, honesty, and effort. In addition, include a teacher’s comments section. In each category, give the character a letter grade that you believe he/she deserves based on actions and choices made in the book. In “comments,” use two specific pieces of evidence from the novel to explain/support the grade.

**Character Analysis T-shirt:** Select a favorite character from *Space Case* and create a character analysis T-shirt. Identify the literary elements used by the author to describe the character, and then create a visual representation of the character traits. The front of the shirt must include the book title, author’s name, and the character’s name, pictures and description. The right sleeve must list the character’s strengths and the left sleeve should list the character’s weaknesses. List internal and external conflicts, figurative language, and the story’s climax on the back of the T-shirt.

**Visualize the Scene:** In small groups, have students select a favorite scene from *Space Case* and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic novel for that scene. Using a digital comic strip creator (<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/> or <http://infinitecomic.com/> for example), have students begin by using the strips to create storyboards for their scene. Have students select original art, images, and graphics. Alternatively, students could assume the roles of two of the characters with each one’s personality and voice, and have them interact with one another by creating an extension of a scene from one of the novels. As part of the evaluation component, consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering.

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