

Reading Group Guide for
Stuntboy, in the Meantime
By Jason Reynolds
Illustrated by Raúl the Third

About the Book

Portico Reeves has a secret identity that only his best friend Zola knows about. As Stuntboy, he is the superhero who keeps all the other superheroes, and his fellow residents of Skylight Gardens (aka the Castle), safe. Lately, that means protecting Zola from their archnemesis, Herbert Singletary the Worst, learning to tame his own anxiety attacks (the Frets), and trying to keep his mother and father's fighting (which always reminds him of an episode of Super Space Warriors) from turning into an Explosion of Great Magnitude.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Portico love about living in Skylight Gardens? What does the fact that he calls it "The Castle" suggest about how he feels about his home? What do you love most about the place where you live?
2. Look up the definition of *community*. Which part of the definition do you think describes the community that is created by the residents of Skylight Gardens? Give examples of specific ways that they demonstrate that they care and look out for each other.
3. Explain the types of situations that cause Portico to get a case of the Frets. Look closely at the way Jason Reynolds describes how Portico feels when he is anxious: Which parts of his body are affected when he has the Frets? How does your body feel when you are anxious, worried, or afraid? What helps Portico feel better when he gets the Frets? What helps you when you are anxious?
4. Describe Zola and Portico's friendship. In your opinion, what makes them such good friends? How do they demonstrate that they care about each other? Choose a moment in the book when you think their friendship is particularly strong, and explain why you chose it. What do you think is the most important characteristic to look for in a friend?
5. Explain the difference between a hero and a superhero. Who are some of Portico's heroes? Who do you know that you consider a hero? Explain why you think they are heroic. If you could choose, would you rather be a superhero or a regular hero?
6. Which superhero does Portico decide he wants to be? What does he choose as his superpower? What do his choices tell you in regard to what Portico cares about?
7. Why is Portico initially excited when his parents tell him they are getting two apartments? Why do you think he does not realize his parents are separating?
8. When Portico's mother tells him to go see what Zola is up to "in the meantime," he thinks she says, "the mean time." Why is "the mean time" a good name for what is happening in Portico's apartment? Using words that sound alike to suggest a different meaning is called a *play on words* or a *pun*. Look for other times when Jason Reynolds uses a play on words.

9. An *allegory* is a story that has more than one meaning, and in this book, the Super Space Warrior episodes can be read as an allegory for the conflict between Portico's parents. Look up the meaning of the names "Mater" and "Pater." How is this a clue to the allegorical meaning of Super Space Warriors? What words do the name of the show's villains, the Irators, sound like when you say it out loud? How might Mater and Pater's duty to protect the sun relate to Portico and his parents? If each show ended with someone telling what the moral of the story is, what do you think the moral of each of the Super Space Warriors episodes would be? How do the illustrations reinforce the allegorical connection between Mater and Pater and Mr. and Mrs. Reeves?

10. Why do you think Herbert Singletary was looking sad the first time Portico met him? Why do you think Herbert responded to Portico's kindness by pushing him and calling him names when Portico was being nice to him?

11. What does a building superintendent do? Why do Zola and Portico conclude that the superintendent of Skylight Gardens is a superhero?

12. Why does Portico get into a physical fight with Herbert Singletary at the block party? What does his father say about whether or not it was okay for Portico to fight Herbert? What does his mother say? Who do you agree with?

13. What do Portico and Zola learn about Herbert's family and what is behind the half door? When Zola tells her mother that Herbert hides in the room behind the half door, Mrs. Brawner says, "We're all hiding from something." Sometimes people hide from their true feelings. What feelings do you think Herbert is hiding by being mean? What feelings do you think Portico's parents are hiding from when they act out in anger toward each other?

14. What event leads to Herbert becoming friends with Zola and Portico? Why do you think Portico is finally able to feel sad about his parents' separation? How do his friends let him know that they will be there for him? Why do you think he decides not to run in and stop his parents from fighting this time?

15. When Portico's parents fight over him, how does it make him feel? What does it mean to say that someone feels "torn" or "torn apart"? Have you ever felt this way? What helps Portico feel better? What helped you?

16. In the last section of the book, "The Final Word and Two Frights," what does Portico realize about himself? What does he realize about all the things that were piling up and making him afraid?

17. This book ends with the words, "To be continued." What do you hope happens next?

Extension Activities

1. Portico and his best friend, Zola, imagine themselves and the other people who live in Skylight Gardens as superheroes, complete with special powers. If you could choose a secret superhero identity for yourself, who would you be? What would be your secret power? What would be your mission? Would you work alone (like Wonder Woman), with a partner (like Batman and Robin), or with a team (like the Avengers)? Create a comic strip about one of your superhero's adventures.

2. *Stuntboy, in the Meantime* is structured as a series of episodes, each beginning with the Stuntboy theme song. Write complete lyrics for the theme song and make a recording of your song. You can use the tune of a song you already know or create your own music to go with your lyrics.

3. Zola teaches Portico about meditation and yoga, two practices that help people cultivate mindfulness and reduce anxiety. Research the benefits of practicing mindfulness, and work with a group to teach your class a breathing or other mindfulness exercise. Talk about how your body feels after you complete the exercise. How do you think you would feel if you practiced a mindfulness moment before you took a test or participated in a competition? How would you feel if you started and/or ended the day with a breathing exercise?

4. What can you tell about the way the plot of each Super Space Warriors episode is structured? How do they begin and end? What causes the conflicts in the episodes? Once you have analyzed the formula for Super Space Warriors, create a new episode that uses the same structure.

5. Try reading some of *Stuntboy, in the Meantime* out loud. What do you notice about the way the text sounds? Jason Reynolds uses figurative language when he writes, which you may recognize from reading poetry. Look for examples of internal rhyme, alliteration, similes, and metaphors. Divide your class into teams and search for other examples of poetic language in the book to see who can identify the most examples.

6. The residents of Skylight Gardens have created a community where everyone knows and cares about one another. When a school creates this type of community, we call it “school spirit,” and some schools even have a student government organization and/or a spirit club to help build community. Think about the things that create community for the residents of Skylight Gardens, and develop a plan inspired by the book to create more school spirit.

7. Zola’s mother says, “Life is just a TV show, and we’re all characters in it.” If your life was a TV show, what kind of show would you want it to be? In the style of *Stuntboy, in the Meantime*, write and illustrate a story that imagines one of your experiences as an episode of your own TV show.

8. *Stuntboy, in the Meantime* features numerous charts that provide instructions for how to do different things. What are your areas of expertise? Create a graphic chart that teaches others how to do something new and share it with your class.

9. Many of the items that Portico’s parents fight over have a symbolic value (in other words, they are connected to a memory or idea that makes them important to the owner). Discuss why each item that they fight over is important to both of them. Think about an object you own that has a symbolic value to you and write an essay that describes the object using sensory details and explains why it is important to you.

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