

Strange Creatures

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Book Summary

Tarek and Zimm are intergalactic explorers from the starship *Astra*. Fresh from an adventure with the Andrals, they begin to explore a strange planet in the Terron star system. Zimm is excited because this planet looks a lot like Earth.

Features of the Book

- Science fiction genre
- Sequel to *Escape!*
- The style of the illustrations
- The prologue and introduction to characters on page 3
- Different language structures used by the two main characters
- Sci-fi vocabulary – *shuttle, scanner, freeze-beam, sensors, Terron*

Purpose

Strange Creatures can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- discussing the features of the science fiction genre;
- using text and picture clues as aids to prediction;
- considering the consequences of characters' actions;
- looking at how the author has defined the main characters.

The Guided Reading Lesson

- Discussing the features of the science fiction genre
- Using text and picture clues as aids to prediction
- Considering the consequences of characters' actions

Introducing the text

Activate the students' prior knowledge and experience by discussing other examples of the science fiction genre, for example, comics, movies, and television programs. If the students have already read *Escape!*, you could ask:

- *What did the two main characters look like?*
- *What do you remember about the way they spoke?*

Look at the cover of the book together.

- *What things show you that this could be a science fiction story?* (the lettering, the clothes on the person, the strange plants and animals)
- *What do you think the title might mean?*
- *What strange creatures have you already read about or seen?*
- *In what way were they strange? Can you describe them?*
- *Do you recognize the person on this cover? (Zimm from *Escape!*)*
- *What might the setting for the story be?*

Read the text on the back cover to the group.

- *What do you think "scanned" means?*
- *Why do you think that was a rule?*
- *What do you think "... but it was too late!" tells you?*

Reading and discussing the text

Preview the prologue on page 3 and discuss its purpose with the group. Let the students discuss the features of the two characters and the spaceships.

- *What is the difference between a shuttle and a starship?*
- *How do you think Zimm is different from Tarek?*

Ask the students to read the first two chapters of the story, pages 4 to 12.

- *As you read, think about the way the author and illustrator have described and drawn the environment of the planet.*

When everyone has finished reading, ask the students for their ideas about the planet's environment.

- *Can you show me the part of the story or the picture that makes you think that?*

Ask the students to read to the end of the book independently. Suggest the following purpose-setting questions. Write them on the board for the students to refer to.

- *In the next chapter, Zimm breaks a starship rule. How does this change the story?*
- *What are some of the things she has to do to solve the problem?*

Encourage the students to think of the consequences of Zimm's innocent action. To stimulate further prediction, you could also ask:

- *What are the creatures going to do?*
- *How do you think the story will end?*

Record everyone's predictions for discussion when the reading is complete.

Discuss the students' answers to the purpose-setting questions and also the author's portrayal of the strange characters. Ask the students:

- *Why do you think the author didn't say who or what they were?*
- *Why did they help Zimm and Tarek? How do you know?*

Ask them to use examples from the text to support their inferences.

Revisiting the Text

The suggested activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson if appropriate or could be taken as a mini-lesson at a later time.

S Considering the consequences of characters' actions

Talk about classroom rules and why we have them.

- *What would happen if there were no rules about how we act in class?*
- *What rules would you have if you were a crew member of the starship Astra? Why would you have them?*

Talk about the consequences of Zimm's actions – what happened and how she handled the situation.

- *Do you think she did the right things?*
- *What would you have done differently?*
- *Did Zimm learn anything from her adventure on the planet?*

Ask the students to find evidence in the text that Zimm will act differently next time (page 32).

S Looking at how the author has defined the main characters

Look at several examples of direct speech from the main characters.

- *What do you notice about the way Tarek speaks? How is it different from the way Zimm speaks? (Zimm uses contractions, Tarek does not.)*

The author has given Tarek speech that makes him sound logical rather than emotional. Give the students examples of direct speech from each character and have them "translate" it, putting contractions in Tarek's speech or taking them out of Zimm's speech.

- *Zimm says, "It's too late. We've lost control." How would Tarek say this?*

 The author and illustrator have written about and drawn the two main characters in different ways. The students can use the blackline master on page 78 to list and explore the physical and behavioral characteristics of Zimm and Tarek, referring to the text to check their statements.