

## A Curriculum Guide to

### ***Extra Credit***

By Andrew Clements

### **About the Book**

It isn't that Abby Carson can't do her schoolwork; it's just that she doesn't like doing it. And that means she's pretty much failing sixth grade. When a warning letter is sent home, Abby realizes that all her slacking off could cause her to be held back—for real! Unless she wants to repeat the sixth grade, she'll have to meet some specific conditions, including taking on an extra-credit project: find a pen pal in a foreign country. Abby's first letter arrives at a small school in Afghanistan, and Sadeed Bayat is chosen to be her pen pal . . . Well, kind of. He is the best writer, but he is also a boy, and in his village it is not appropriate for a boy to correspond with a girl. So his younger sister dictates and signs the letter. Until Sadeed decides what his sister is telling Abby isn't what he'd like Abby to know . . .

### **Prereading Activities**

The following activities contained in this section address the following Common Core State Standards: (L.4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (W.4 – 6. 4, 5) (W.6.1) (RL.5 – 6. 5) (RL.6.2) (SL.4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (WHST.6.6)

1. Look at the cover of *Extra Credit*. What can you infer or predict about this story? What are some of the clues that help you make this decision? As a class, list the clues that are used to make these predictions.
2. What is extra credit? Why would one want or need it? Why do you think the author chose this as the title of the book? After reading the story, do you still agree that this is the best title for the book?
3. This story takes place in the state of Illinois (United States) and the village of Bahar-Lan in Afghanistan. Use the CIA World Factbook, maps, atlases, and other reference resources to understand the geography of the two places, the cultures, current events, views about women, civil rights, etc. Make a chart listing what you find for each place. (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>).
4. The art of letter writing is being lost with the use of e-mail for communication. When are there times when it might be better to write a handwritten letter instead of an e-mail? How do you feel when you get a letter? Which would you rather have—a handwritten letter or an e-mail—and why? What role do you think letter writing will play in this story?

## Discussion Questions

The following discussion questions contained in this section address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (RF.4. 4) (W. 4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (L.4 – 6. 4,5,6) (SL.4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (RH.6. 6) (WHST.6. 6) (CCRA.R.1)

1. Figurative language refers to sayings that exaggerate, make comparisons, or do not mean what they actually say. Examples include idioms, similes, metaphors, hyperbole, etc. Andrew Clements uses figurative language throughout the book *Extra Credit*.

- a. Define the characteristics of each of the following types of figurative language:

idiom

metaphor

personification

simile

hyperbole

alliteration

- b. What is the author trying to show with the following examples of figurative language? Can you identify what each one is? (simile, idiom, metaphor, etc.)

- And now he fastened onto this one like a bulldog.
- And about the girl hanging on the wall like a spider.
- The whole letter seemed sort of flat and lifeless—like soda without fizz.
- He felt sure his face looked red as pomegranate juice.
- I should have kicked and fought like a leopard.
- It would be easier teaching a dog to drive a motorbike.
- Your head is full of rocks—I give up!
- The thought bounced around his mind for several minutes.
- As Abby finished reading Sadeed’s letter, her heart was racing.
- And why dangle red meat in front of an angry bear?

- c. Find other examples from the story, write the page number, and identify what type of figurative language it is.

2. Foreshadowing is when the author leaves clues or hints to things that come later in the story. What are some predictions you might have at the end of Chapter 2, when we have met both Abby and Sadeed, based on hints the author has left? Or at the end of Chapter 5 when Abby has made her choice? Or after Sadeed has decided to keep Abby’s letter at the end of Chapter 17?
3. The protagonist is the most important character of the story and is usually considered a “good guy.” The antagonist is the one in conflict with the main character or protagonist and is usually the “bad guy.” Who is the protagonist in this story? Who is the antagonist? Find examples from the story to support your answers.

4. The mountains in Afghanistan and the rock wall Abby climbs are symbols in this story. What do you think these symbols mean and why did the author use these specific symbols? Compare and contrast these two types of symbols, what they mean and their importance to this story. If you had to choose something to represent an obstacle that you face, what would you choose and why?
5. Brothers and sisters have special relationships. What are some things you know about these types of relationships? What role does our culture and point of view (where we are in the family) play in these types of relationships? What are some things that make your relationships with your brothers and sisters good and some things that make them difficult? As you begin to read *Extra Credit* what are the differences you notice between brothers and sisters in Afghanistan and brothers and sisters in the US? What contributes to those differences? Are these differences good or bad? Why or why not? Support your answer with examples from the story.
6. The book *Frog and Toad Are Friends* by Arnold Lobel is mentioned in the story. What role does this book play between Abby and Sadeed? Why does the author include it in the story? Which character in the story is more like Frog and which is more like Toad? Use examples from the story to support your answers. Which character are you most like—Frog or Toad? Explain why and give examples from your own life to support your answer.
7. Abby and Sadeed come from very different parts of the world. Make a chart that shows the differences in the types of homes, possessions, and land, and the relationships between parents and siblings, and teachers and schools.
8. Abby sends Sadeed some dirt from Illinois and Sadeed sends Abby a rock from the mountains of Afghanistan. What is the significance of this? What are Abby and Sadeed trying to show? What would you choose to represent your home, state, or country? Bring in items to share and group them according to what they might represent.
9. Andrew Clements writes many stories about school kids—their hopes, dreams, troubles, and talents. Make connections and compare and contrast the book *Extra Credit* with some of Clements's other school stories: *The Landry News*, *The School Story*, *The Janitor's Boy*, *A Week in the Woods*, *No Talking*, *Lost and Found*, *Frindle*, etc. How are the plots, main ideas, characters, and settings the same? How are they different? Why do you think Andrew Clements is so popular and appealing for readers?

## **Activities**

The following activities contained in this section address the following Common Core State Standards: (WHST.6. 6) (RL. 4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (RF.4. 4) (W. 4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (L. 4 – 6. 4, 5, 6) (CCRA.R.1)

1. Using a program such as Google Earth, compare the two settings in *Extra Credit*—Afghanistan and Illinois. Use map types such as physical, political, elevation, and

population to understand the differences between the two locations. Be able to identify geographical features such as desert, mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes, and oceans.

2. Have students choose international pen pals. Discuss the pluses of being and having a pen pal. Have them choose a country they want to learn more about and discuss the kind of questions they might ask that would make their letters interesting. Have students also decide if they want to e-mail their pen pals or handwrite their letters. What are the pros and cons of each type of communication? Create a bulletin board display that shows a world map and where all the letters come from. Have students post letters to and from their pen pals. Use the following organizations to get started, and be sure to get parents' permission:

- a. [http://www.worldwide.edu/travel\\_planner/pen\\_pals.html](http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/pen_pals.html)
- b. [http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/menu\\_penpals.php](http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/menu_penpals.php)
- c. <http://kidworldcitizen.org/2011/11/11/pen-pal-programs/>
- d. [http://k6educators.about.com/od/languageart1/a/pen\\_pals.htm](http://k6educators.about.com/od/languageart1/a/pen_pals.htm)

3. In one of Sadeed's letters, he mentions kite fighting and that it had been banned by the Taliban. Discuss what it might be like to live in a country where boys and girls could not go to school together, play games, listen to music, watch TV, and in some instances learn to read and write. What are some basic freedoms everyone should be entitled to? Why should they have them? Make a chart listing those basic freedoms and why they should be allowed.

4. Abby says the following about her pen pal project:

*"I don't think I learned that much. I learned that the kids there are mostly like us, with the same kinds of feelings and everything. . . . Because everybody talks all the time about how people are pretty much the same. And I think that's true."*

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Do you think that you can learn from a pen pal project? What lesson does the author want us to remember?

5. If you had the opportunity to interview Abby and Sadeed for a newspaper or magazine article, what questions would you ask of each of them? Think of three questions for Abby and try to answer them the way Abby would, and three questions for Sadeed, with answers the way Sadeed would respond.
6. If you could spend a day with either Abby or Sadeed, whom would you choose and why? What are some activities you would want to do, some things you would want them to know about yourself and your family, and what it is like to live where you do.
7. The ending of *Extra Credit* can be a surprise to many readers. Do you agree or disagree with the way the author ended the story? If you had to write to Andrew Clements telling him your thoughts on the ending, what would you write to him and why? Write another way that the story might end and share it with your peers.

## **Extra Credit Word Bank: Tier 2 Vocabulary**

([http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_A.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf) pg. 33)

bazaar	dictate
crevice	co-op
summit	translating
periodic table	parcels
bailouts	stout
charpoy	vendors
taunted	skewer
chitchat	haggling
coax	warren
kneading	trousers
councilors	courteous
headman	rappelling
village	kebab
camouflage	rethink
improper	lifeless
beautiful	dangerous
honorable	conceited
superb	self-reliance

*This updated guide was written in 2014 by Sharon Haupt, District Librarian, San Luis Coastal Unified School District, San Luis Obispo, CA.*

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