

A Curriculum Guide to

***Super Max and The Mystery of Thornwood’s Revenge***

By Susan Vaught

**About the Book**

Twelve-year-old Max has always been a whiz with electronics (just take a look at her turbo-charged wheelchair). But when a hacker starts a slanderous Facebook page for her grandpa, Max isn’t sure she has the skills to take him down. As the messages grow increasingly sinister, Max fears that this is more than just a bad joke. Max has grown up in the shadow of Thornwood Manor, an abandoned mansion that is rumored to be haunted by its original owner, Hargrove Thornwood. It is said that his ghost may be biding his time until he can exact revenge on the town of Blue Creek. Why? Well, it’s complicated. To call him a jerk would be an understatement. When the hacking escalates, suddenly it looks like this could really be Thornwood’s Revenge. If it is, these messages are just the beginning—and the town could be in danger.

**Prereading Activity**

The following activity particularly addresses the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (R.L.4.2) (R.L.6.2) (S.L. 4-6.3)

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

<b><i>Before Reading</i></b>	<b><i>After Reading</i></b>	<b><i>Statements</i></b>
		All mysteries are worth solving.
		Adults always know the right way to approach and solve a problem.
		It is essential to always be completely honest with your friends.
		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.

**Discussion Questions**

**Writing and Research**

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Super Max and The Mystery of Thornwood’s Revenge* as reflective writing prompts or as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection. They particularly address the following English

Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (R.L.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (R.L.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9) (R.L.6.1, 2, 3) (S.L.6.1, 2, 3) (W.4- 6.4)

1. In the novel's preface, readers are told that Thornwood Manor is "one hundred and twenty-five years old, and it's excellently creepy." How does learning about the manor's dark history set the tone of the story?
2. In what ways does Hargrove Thornwood's declaration of doom for Blue Creek set the stage for the town's legacy and its people?
3. Max declares "Superheroes should never be grounded." What do you think she means by that statement? Do you agree?
4. Describe Max. What are three things you find the most interesting about her? Is she someone you could see yourself befriending? Why or why not?
5. Describe Toppo's relationship with Mayor Chandler. Given their professional duties and past history, do you believe that they have a typical relationship? Explain your position.
6. Does learning about Max's interest in technology and solving mysteries surprise you? What kind of skills has she developed to pursue these hobbies? How do they play a role in her life?
7. After learning about the fake Facebook page created to make Toppo and Mayor Chandler look bad, Toppo remarks, "Doesn't take a genius to see the whole thing's a bunch of hooley." Do you think his initial attitude is appropriate? Why is it important that Toppo take this social media issue seriously?
8. Discuss the idea of Thornwood's revenge. Do you think the culprit is savvy for hatching a plan that uses the town's fascination with and fear of this old legend?
9. Max thinks, "I didn't have any brothers or sisters, but if I could pick somebody to be an older brother, I'd definitely choose Ellis." What is it about Ellis that she feels so drawn to? In what ways are these two characters alike? Besides their hobbies and interests, how else does she feel connected to him? How does their relationship ultimately change by the end of the novel?
10. What makes Lavender a fitting friend for Max? Name some of their similarities and differences. Do you feel that one of them is a better friend to the other? If so, support your position using examples from the text.
11. Beyond successfully solving the mystery at Thornwood Manor, what are the biggest challenges Max and Lavender have to overcome?
12. Do you see Max's ability to think differently and interact with the world as an asset? Why or why not? Can you think of anyone in your life who also behaves in a similar way?

13. How does Max's relationship with her mom make things challenging for her grandfather? Do you agree with the way he deals with the situation? Do you believe her mother's return is what's best for Max? Why or why not?
14. Why does the hacker seem so set on getting Toppo removed from his job? Which of the hacker's crimes do you believe to be the most offensive?
15. Max tells her mom, "Toppo says being quiet in the face of injustice never helped anything." Do you agree with that statement? Why is it important to speak up about the things you believe to be wrong?
16. Ellis tells Max, "Blue Creek is no place for somebody with special needs. It's no place for somebody special, period." Why does Ellis's attitude enrage Max?
17. Why does Max wish for real superpowers? In what ways does she prove to others and herself that she has everything it takes to be a hero?
18. Using the phrase, "This is a story about . . ." supply five words to describe *Super Max and The Mystery of Thornwood's Revenge*. Explain your choices.

### **Literary Elements Analysis**

The activities below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (R.L. 4-6.1, 2, 3) (S.L. 4.-6.1, 2, 3) (W4.4-6.4)

1. Consider the following themes of *Super Max and The Mystery of Thornwood's Revenge*: friendship, loyalty, courage, and perseverance. Select one of these themes and find examples from the book that help to support it. Create a sample Life Lesson Chart using the model at: [http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson\\_images/lesson826/chart.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson826/chart.pdf).
2. Consider the variety of settings in the book: Why are each of these places important to Max? Using the descriptions provided in the novel, illustrate the three places you believe to be most important to her story. Include a written paragraph explaining the significance of each and why you believe they are important.
3. Following the written prompts below, create an "I AM" Poem or Biopoem to help you demonstrate your knowledge of one of the characters. Use the poem prompts to create an original slideshow using PowerPoint, Prezi, iMovie, or another presentation platform of your choice.

### **"I AM" POEM**

#### **FIRST STANZA:**

- I am (name the character)
- I wonder (something the character is actually curious about)
- I hear (an imaginary sound the character might hear)
- I see (an imaginary sight the character might see)
- I want (something the character truly desires)

#### **SECOND STANZA:**

- I pretend (something the character actually pretends to do)

I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)  
I touch (an imaginary touch)  
I worry (something that really bothers the character)  
I cry (something that makes the character very sad)  
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

**THIRD STANZA:**

I understand (something the character knows is true)  
I say (something that the character believes in)  
I dream (something the character might actually dream about)  
I try (something the character really makes an effort about)  
I hope (something the character actually hopes for)  
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

**BIOPOEM:**

Line 1: First name  
Line 2: Three traits that describe the character  
Line 3: Relative of \_\_\_\_\_  
Line 4: Lover of \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 5: Who feels \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 6: Who needs \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 7: Who fears \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 8: Who gives \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 9: Who would like to see \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 10: Resident of \_\_\_\_\_  
Line 11: Last name

4. The language that an author uses in his or her work is essential to communicating the intended meaning. Select four quotes from *Super Max and The Mystery of Thornwood's Revenge* that seem to signify key ideas the author hopes readers will take from the text. These might be quotes spoken by characters or from the narration, and page numbers should be included with the quotes. Develop a chart with the following four columns:

- Quote
- Page Number
- Relevance to the Novel
- Intended Meaning for Readers

The intended meaning should have relevance not only to the characters within the text, but also to the readers' lives.

5. One of the author's strengths is her ability to offer richly descriptive scenes. In small groups, have students select a favorite scene from the book and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic novel for that scene. Using a digital comic strip creator (for example, <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/> or <http://infinitecomic.com/>), begin by using the strips to create storyboards for your scene. Select original art, images, and graphics. As part of the evaluation component, consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering.

## Extended Writing and Research Connections

1. Upon seeing a portrait of Vivienne Thornwood, Max asked Mayor Chandler why Vivienne stayed with her husband until he killed her. Mayor Chandler tells her, “Women in the past didn’t have many choices, and sometimes they didn’t have a say in who their parents chose for them to wed.” Learn more about the history of women’s roles, paying special attention to their duties in marriage and their other rights during the Thornwoods’ era. Be sure to focus on women’s education, the average age of marriage, and the reasons for marriage. After gathering this information, share what you’ve learned with your peers.

2. Much of the mystery in *Super Max and the Mystery of Thornwood’s Revenge* is rooted in the lore and legend surrounding the Thornwood Mansion. In many areas, mysterious legends about houses, people, and communities are common. Using resources from the library and the Internet, select and research a legend, mysterious event, or a specific folklore of choice making sure to address the following:

- a. Describe your particular legend or lore, and what it consists of.
- b. Who believes it?
- c. Is it unique to a specific region or believed more widely?
- d. Does it benefit the community in any way?

Share what you discover with your classmates.

3. The book focuses on Max and her relationships with her family, friends, and associates. Consider your most special relationships. What makes these individuals so important to you? Compose a personal journal entry where you share your thoughts, and be sure to answer the following questions:

- a. Who are the individuals who mean the most to you?
- b. Why is that particular relationship so special?
- c. What’s the greatest sacrifice you’ve made for the people you love?
- d. In what ways have the changes you’ve experienced in your life affected those to whom you are closest?

Volunteers can share their writing with the class.

4. Throughout the course of the novel, readers are offered great insights into Max’s experiences. Assume the role of Max or a secondary character, and draft a diary entry detailing what you’ve experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five W’s (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.)

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