

A Curriculum Guide to

**Moon Base Alpha Series: *Space Case, Spaced Out, Waste of Space***

By Stuart Gibbs

**About *Waste of Space***

Moon Base Alpha was supposed to be an exciting place to live, but Dash didn't expect for it to be *this* exciting. After solving a murder and rescuing the moon base commander, he just wants to have a calm, quiet thirteenth birthday. But, of course, multi-billionaire and total pain Lars Sjoburg ruins it—by being poisoned. Now there's a potential murderer loose on Moon Base Alpha *again*. And Dash is charged with finding out who it could have been. Everyone has a motive, and time is running out in this third and final book in the *New York Times* bestselling series.

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

**Prereading Activity**

The discussion questions below particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (R.L. 4.2, 6.2) (S.L.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>
		Having a once in a lifetime experience is always worth the risk it may entail.
		When in danger, it is best to play it safe rather than take a risk.
		Adults always know better ways to approach problems than kids do.
		All mysteries are worth solving.

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.

**The Moon Base Alpha Series through Writing and Research**

The discussion questions below 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—5.4)

They may be utilized throughout the study of *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and *Waste of Space*, or as reflective writing prompts; alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. *Space Case* 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.” What can readers infer about Dash from this first introduction? Did you find those inferences to be accurate as you got to know him better throughout the course of the books?
2. 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? Why do most of the adults at the base want to dismiss him? What are the ramifications of a murderer on the Moon?
3. What was your earliest impression of Nina? What did you think of her refusal to take Dash seriously? Given her job at Moon Base Alpha, do you think she is within her right to attempt to silence him? Does what you learn about her in *Spaced Out* reshape your understanding of her?
4. Consider the novels’ titles; in what ways do they capture the themes of the book?
5. Describe Dash. What makes him a dynamic character? Is he the type of person you would want to befriend? Why or why not?
6. After Chang criticizes Lars Sjoberg for disrespecting the late Dr. Holtz, Lars tells him, “I’ll do whatever I want.” How does this declaration capture the overall attitude of the Sjobergs?
7. Because of his parents’ work at Moon Base Alpha, Dash gets to reside on the moon. Imagine what it would be like to live there, and what you might experience. What would be the greatest benefits? What would be the biggest challenges? Do you feel that Dash takes advantage of this unusual situation?
8. Daphne is revealed as a corporate spy for a tourism company that hopes to open a hotel on the moon; how does this news affect her relationship with the other residents? Though she confides to Dash and Kira that she doesn’t like her job, she says she’s agreed to do it because she gets “to go to the moon! To make history!” Do you think she’s justified in doing what she does?
9. Dash’s nemeses are the Sjoberg siblings. What is it about this family that makes them so particularly difficult to get along with? In your opinion, why do they act the way they do?
10. 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 enlists Dash to assist her investigation into Holtz’s death? Do you think it’s appropriate for her to do so?

11. In what way does Kira’s arrival on the Moon change things for Dash? In your opinion, does she have the potential to be a good friend to him? How does her relationship with her father provide her with the ability to help Dash?

12. In *Spaced Out*, Dash states, “Every single aspect of my life was strange and unusual to Zan Perfonic. She wanted to know the reasons to everything I did.” Why is this alien so intrigued by human choices and behaviors? Why does Zan insist that Dash keep her existence a secret? Do you think she’s right to ask Dash to do so?

13. Why does Zan find the movie *Star Wars* so entertaining? Do you think she’s right to be so critical?

14. 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 this way?

15. Evaluate how the adults in *Spaced Out* deal with the disappearance of Nina. In what ways are their reactions different from those of the kids who live on Moon Base Alpha?

16. Dash tells Zan, “When you first approached me about being your human contact, you said it was extremely important.” Predict why Zan finds their relationship to be so critical to her efforts.

17. Throughout the Moon Base Alpha series, what are the most impressive obstacles that Dash overcomes? Which of these hurdles and outcomes did you like best? Why?

18. In your opinion, why do Zan and Dash always talk about the Earth and humanity? Should her interest be a clue that bigger issues may be at play?

19. Dash is often reprimanded for being a troublemaker; yet, with Kira’s assistance, he’s also the person who helps to solve the murder of Dr. Holtz and the mystery of Nina’s disappearance, and is entrusted with figuring out who poisoned Lars. What can readers infer about his motivations? Do you see his relationship with Kira facilitating any of his actions?

20. After debating the idea of searching Nina’s room, Kira tells Dash, “Everyone has personal stuff. Nina just kept hers secret.” Is Kira’s assessment accurate? Why does Dash feel like this wouldn’t be the case with Nina? What can readers understand about Kira given her desire to examine Nina’s stuff regardless of how they have to go about accessing it?

21. In what ways does space junk cause serious concern for the Moon Base Alpha residents? Is this junk indicative of a larger problem with space trash?

22. How does the virtual gaming world allow Roddy to diverge from the life he leads in the real world? What are the benefits of this? Do you think there are some disadvantages, too?

23. Consider the unusual cast of secondary characters in the Moon Base Alpha books. Who did you like the most? The least? For what reason? Who did you feel was most similar to you due to his or her personality or experiences?

24. What's the significance of the "Charlie" text that Nina receives? Why are the space rocks important? What does this weakness indicate about Nina's character? What else can readers learn from her actions and choices?

25. At the beginning of *Waste of Space*, Dash states, "For my thirteenth birthday, my father gave me the greatest present I could have ever hoped for: He took me outside to play catch." With this statement, readers are reminded of the difficulties of life on the moon and the incredible sacrifices made by the residents of Moon Base Alpha. From what you've discovered while reading the series, what do you think have been the most challenging aspects for residents? Do you believe the children have had a more difficult experience than the adults?

26. Noting that Dash appears distracted while out playing ball, Dash's father asks, "Were you looking at the Earth?" Have you ever been homesick? If so, how did you deal with your situation?

27. *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and *Waste of Space* are all told in first person. How might the story change if another character besides Dash were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?

28. Lars Sjoberg falls mysteriously ill in *Waste of Space*. How does learning that Lars has been poisoned complicate matters for the moon residents?

29. *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and *Waste of Space* are sprinkled with excerpts from the faux book, *The Official Residents' Guide to Moon Base Alpha*. What did you think of this guidebook? Did you find the information highlighted to be particularly useful to the residents on MBA?

30. Dash thinks, "There was a great deal at stake in my contact with Zan. Quite likely, the fate of Earth hung in the balance." Why is it so problematic for Zan to see humans in a negative light? What can Dash do to help?

31. Given what you know about Lars Sjoberg, who do you believe has the biggest motive for attempted murder? How did you react upon learning the truth?

32. Consider Dash's reactions to learning Dr. Balnikov and Dr. Chang are a couple. In what ways does he believe this relationship is treated unfairly? Do you agree?

33. Using the phrase "These stories are about . . ." supply five words to describe *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and then *Waste of Space*. Explain your choices.

34. Consider Dash’s reaction to learning that Moon Base Alpha needs to be abandoned due to a mechanical malfunction. Given that this has been a once in a lifetime opportunity, do you think he’s right to feel this way?
35. How do Zach, Kira, and Violet fight back against the Sjoberg bullies? Do you think it’s right for them to handle the bullying in this way?
36. While trying to make sense of human actions like picking noses or saying “cheese” when a picture is taken, Dash tells Zan, “Well. There are things about us I just can’t explain. I’m only a kid. I don’t know the reasons humans do half the things we do.” Why is this significant? Do you sometimes struggle to understand why people around you act the way they do? What are some examples?
37. Readers gain more insights about the Sjoberg family throughout the course of the Moon Base Alpha series. What makes them such despicable people? Nina tells the Sjobergs, “NASA has already released details of the crimes you have committed to the press.” Does understanding the entire planet will soon know the truth about their crimes impact their behavior? What can readers infer about their characters from this reaction?
38. Dash asks Zan, “If you can’t talk to me, can you at least still keep an eye on me? Visit Earth now and then?” Why is it so important to him to retain contact and continue a relationship with Zan? What has she meant to him during his time at Moon Base Alpha?
39. Before they depart the Moon, Kira tells Dash, “Thanks for being my friend up here. It’s been wild.” How would you describe their relationship? Do you think they’ll remain close once back on Earth?
40. In your opinion, what has been the most enjoyable part of reading the Moon Base Alpha series?

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

The discussion questions below 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, 7, 9) (W.4—6.4)

1. Over the course of the Moon Base Alpha series, readers meet Zan, an intelligent extraterrestrial life-form who not only helps Dash better understand himself and humankind, but also offers a more comprehensive view of the roles of human beings and other life-forms in the greater galaxy. Though movies and television often portray a vision of what extraterrestrial life could look like, scientists are currently studying the universe and its features to learn more. Have students research the work done by NASA and other scientific organizations, with a special focus on what they have discovered about the potential for intelligent life in our galaxy and beyond.

2. Though Moon Base Alpha has had its fair share of mishaps, it has also been able to recruit scientists 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 students create a visual presentation that illustrates their findings.

3. Throughout the Moon Base Alpha series, readers learn that there are constant and significant challenges to living on the moon. From space junk to moon toilets, day-to-day life can be challenging and even dangerous. Have students choose a daily activity and research how this activity would be impacted in space; they can create presentations that share their research findings.

4. Locate descriptions of life on Moon Base Alpha in all three novels. Place students in pairs and have them role-play as news reporters interviewing one of the residents of MBA about their experiences. To enrich the activity, record the report and allow students to use props and costumes.

5. Over the past fifty years, space exploration has been a national priority; however, due to other needs, funding for the program is waning. Some people believe this is no longer a necessary or justifiable expense. Have students research how the space program is funded, as well as its current goals and objectives. After examining their collective data, have students determine whether they feel that support of the program is warranted, and write a persuasive paper which shares their position. Alternatively, students can prepare a speech designed to convince others of their view and present it to their classmates.

6. Throughout the course of the novels, readers know Dash's point of view based on the events of *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and *Waste of Space*. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters from the *Moon Base Alpha* books 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.)

7. Many of the characters in *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and *Waste of Space* are not all that they appear to be. Consider the importance of appearances and the need for secrets: What might be a rationale for this behavior? What are the ramifications and consequences of such a choice? Select one character from the novel and write a short analysis of his or her choice to keep secrets and maintain certain appearances.

8. In small groups, have students select a favorite scene from *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, or *Waste of Space*, 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 scenes. Students should 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. As an alternate option, students can assume the roles of two characters, each using the character's personality and voice, and interact with one another by creating an extension of a scene from one of the novels.

9. Consider the setting for *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, and *Waste of Space*. 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 that 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.

10. Ask students to describe one of the problems a character faced in the Moon Base Alpha series and write advice to him or 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.

11. Have students imagine that they are dining with three characters from *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, or *Waste of Space*. Have them create fortune cookie statements for each character, describing which character received the fortune and why it is fitting.

12. Ask students to create a conversation between one of the characters in *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, or *Waste of Space* and some intangible concept such as justice, love, goodness, greed, or his or her conscience. Have them script the conversation for dialogue, making sure they use appropriate punctuation.

13. Ask students to examine the ethical nature of a character's actions and choices in *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, or *Waste of Space*. Have them set up a report card using a chart that includes the following categories: respect, responsibility, cooperation, caring, integrity, self-control, honesty, and effort. Include a teacher's comments section as well. In each category, have students give the character the letter grade that they believe he or she deserves based on actions and choices made in the book. In the comments section, use two specific pieces of evidence from the novel to explain and support the grade.

14. Select a favorite character from *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, or *Waste of Space* 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 and author's name and the character's name, picture, and description. The right sleeve must list the character's strength(s), 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.

15. Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect for one of the characters in *Space Case*, *Spaced Out*, or *Waste of Space*; while these gifts can be tangible or intangible, they

should be things that he or she would really want or need. Be sure to include an explanation for each gift and why it is appropriate for the character.

*This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, an assistant professor at Sam Houston State University. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.*

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