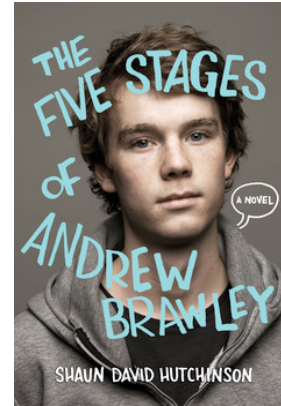


A Curriculum Guide to

The Five Stages of Andrew Brawley

By Shaun David Hutchinson



About the Book

Seventeen-year-old Andrew Brawley has not left Roanoke Hospital, where he last saw his family, since the night of their deaths. His bed, “a pile of lumpy, stained sheets,” is in a far corner of the hospital’s abandoned renovation area. He spends his days working in the cafeteria, joking with the ER nurses, visiting the cancer kids in Peds, drawing scenes of Patient F, and most importantly avoiding Death, who walks the hospital in her high heels. When Rusty, a teenager burned in a hate crime, comes into the ICU, Drew is reminded of “that night,” and it is this reminder that initially draws Drew to Rusty and propels Drew to grapple with his own desire to die or to live.

Discussion Questions

The discussion questions below align with the following English Language Arts Common Core Standards: (L.9–10.3, 4, 4d, 5, 5a, 6) (RL.9–10.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9) (SL.9–10.1, 3)

1. The novel is written in a first person narrative, except for the graphic novel portions of the story. Examine Drew’s voice. He is humorous, often making jokes in tense situations. Is he also sarcastic, intelligent, observant? What do we know about Drew from the style and manner in which he narrates this story?

2. Drew has an extensive vocabulary. Reread the first chapter. From your own knowledge and from context clues, define words and phrases that you don’t know the meaning of. Look at terminology such as “squirreled away,” “grisly,” “cordon,” “Italian grinder,” and “nonchalant.”

3. Use a dictionary or online pronunciation guide to listen to the correct pronunciation of the medical words/phrases: “asystole,” “ventricular fibrillation,” and “pulseless ventricular tachycardia.”

- 4a. Drew uses many figures of speech. Identify the following:
 - “the ICU is the Doldrums and I am adrift”
 - “Death”
 - “beeping and chirping”
 - “a Styrofoam cup breathing steam”
 - “reminds me of Marilyn Monroe”
 - “She’s skinnier than a spaghetti noodle”
 - “Her heels click-clack”
 - “that I know will drive her nuts”
 - “shaking his body like a matchstick house on a foundation of sand”

4b. Choose two of the quotes containing literary devices, and explain what they show about Drew's character.

5. Reread the graphic novel portion as one "comic book." Summarize Patient F's story. Explain the different stages Patient F goes through.

6. Patient F is Ben Fischer. Drew says that Rusty is similar to Patient F, but is this his projection? Describe how Drew uses Patient F to try to explain and emotionally heal Ben/himself.

7. "Emma turns the laptop toward me. 'Have you seen this video? This chick's a one-woman library of Joss Whedon characters.'" Look at passages like this one. Discuss the setting (time and place) of the novel.

8. Though the events in the hospital proceed in a chronological order, Drew's memories of the past are often narrated in flashbacks and his sense of time is often distorted. How long do you think he has been "hiding" in the hospital?

9. "And this goes on for hours. No, minutes. But when you live it, it'll feel like hours." What is the purpose of Drew's constant confusion with time?

10. Explain why Drew wants to perform CPR on the dead child.

11. Compare and contrast the drawing representations of Patient F with the written information that the author gives us about Drew/Ben's appearance. Analyze the differences in the representations and tell their significance.

12. It is not a coincidence that Arnold gives Drew *Frankenstein* to read to Rusty. *Frankenstein* is about being alienated and feeling like a monster. There are many allusions, like this one, in *The Five Stages of Andrew Brawley*. Discuss how the following relate to the book:

- Superheroes from comic books
- Roanoke
- Frankenstein
- Biblical allusions, especially rebirth and resurrection

13. Gather a group to read the resurrection scenes in the Bible and read some commentary on them. Then consider Drew's struggles with religion and God. What does having resurrection scenes in the novel suggest about the book's view of religion? Compare and contrast Father Mike's view of God with Drew's view. Continue the discussion with this question: "Death doesn't play by the rules." What does Drew mean by this statement? Find several examples that support this theme in the book.

14. Besides both being gay teenage boys, how are Rusty and Drew alike?

15. Explain why Drew believes that Michelle, the social worker, is Death. How is his reasoning fallacious?

16. Drew's family is going to the "Happiest Place on Earth" when the accident occurs. Find other examples of irony in the book.

17. Using evidence from the novel, explain why Rusty sets himself on fire. Why is he terrified of leaving the hospital?

18. Why does Drew take on a different name? Come up with several reasons.

19. Find instances of foreshadowing that lead up to the knowledge that Arnold's son has died.

20. What does Drew learn from Lexi and Trevor about control, especially his ability to control who lives and who dies?

Activities

The activities below align with the following English Language Arts Common Core Standards: (SL.9–10.4, 5) (W.9–10.3, 3b,7, 9) (RL.9–10.2, 3)

1. Drew says about his family, "Don't you see that I killed them? It was my fault. Everything is my fault." Using evidence from the book, form two teams: one agreeing with Drew's statement and one opposing it. Debate this issue. Have judges decide which team is more convincing.

2. Research "purgatory." Look at the religious definitions, as well as literary (such as the play *Waiting for Godot*) and psychological definitions. Be sure to check that the resources are valid and trustworthy. Draw or create illustrations of purgatory. Create illustrations of the hospital in which Rusty and Drew reside as a place of purgatory.

3. Research Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's famous five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Debate whether this model fits Drew's grieving process. Look at articles contending that Kübler-Ross's theory is inaccurate, such as <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/five-fallacies-of-grief/>. Write an essay using several valid sources of information arguing which theory fits Drew's stages of grief.

4. Rusty says, "I was just different from them. And that realization, living with the knowledge that I'm always going to be on the receiving end of some asshole's sick, twisted mission to destroy everything and everyone that's not like him . . . it was too much. I couldn't bear it anymore." Watch the video and others from "It Gets Better." <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/video/entry/A1TcD95kmGQ> Make a video that could be used on this site. Make another video that shows Rusty's, and Ben's "it gets better."

5. "Trevor's talking, and Lexi's laughing, and they're touching and smiling and beaming. They're like stars, glowing and orbiting and burning oh so brightly." Reread passages of dialogue in which Lexi and Trevor speak. Then, matching their manners of speaking, create and perform their conversation during their date.

6. Drew jumps off the parking garage roof in a moment of impulsivity. Many teen suicides occur on impulse. Read the article "Impulsivity and teen suicide: What does adolescence have to do

with suicide risk?” to learn more. URL: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/promoting-hope-preventing-suicide/201107/impulsivity-and-teen-suicide>.

Then create a graphic novel version of Drew considering the consequences of his actions before he jumps off the roof, or have him jump and “rewind” time. Or create a new character who has an impulse to kill him- or herself and show how someone stops this character and discusses the consequences of his/her fatal actions. What would Andrew or your character have missed if he/she had died? You can draw and write it freehand, or there are programs online that help create the graphic format.

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