

A Curriculum Guide to

Moon Base Alpha Series: *Space Case* and *Spaced Out*

By Stuart Gibbs

About *Space Case*

Like his fellow lunarnauts—otherwise known as Moonies—living on Moon Base Alpha, twelve-year-old Dashiell Gibson is famous the world over for being one of the first humans to live on the moon.

And he's bored out of his mind. Kids aren't allowed on the lunar surface, meaning they're trapped inside the tiny moon base with next to nothing to occupy their time—and the only other kid Dash's age spends all his time hooked into virtual reality games.

Then Moon Base Alpha's top scientist turns up dead. Dash senses there's foul play afoot, but no one believes him. Everyone agrees Dr. Holtz went onto the lunar surface without his helmet properly affixed, simple as that. But Dr. Holtz was on the verge of an important new discovery, Dash finds out, and it's a secret that could change everything for the Moonies—a secret someone just might kill to keep . . .

About *Spaced Out*

There's nowhere to hide on the world's first moon base. After all, it's only the size of a soccer field. So when Nina Stack, the commander of Moon Base Alpha, mysteriously vanishes, the Moonies are at a total loss.

Though he may be just twelve years old, Dashiell Gibson is the best detective they've got. But this confusing mystery pushes him to his limits. Especially since he has his own huge secret to protect. With the fate of the entire human race hanging in the balance, will Dash be able to solve the mystery of the missing Moonie?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING

Prereading Activity

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.2) (RL.6.2) (SL.4–6.1, 2, 3)

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

<i>Before Reading</i>	<i>After Reading</i>	<i>Statements</i>
		All mysteries are worth solving.
		Adults always know better ways to approach problems than kids.
		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.

***Space Case and Spaced Out* through Writing and Research**

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Space Case* and/or *Spaced Out* as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection. The questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9) (RL.6.1, 2, 3) (SL.6.1, 2, 3) (W.4–6.4)

1. In *Space Case*, the novel 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.” From this first introduction of Dash, what can readers infer about him? Did you find those inferences about him to be accurate as you get to know him better throughout the course of *Space Case*?
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? For what reason do most of the adults at the base want to dismiss him? What are the ramifications of there being a murderer on the Moon?
3. What was your earliest impression of Nina? What did you think of her refusing to take Dash seriously? Given her job at Moon Base Alpha, do you think she is within her right to attempt to silence him? Why or why not? How does what you learn about her in *Spaced Out* reshape what you think you know about her personality?
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 about his disrespect toward 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 living there. What would be the greatest benefits to such an experience? What would be the biggest challenges? Do you feel that Dash takes advantage of this unusual situation?

8. How does learning that Daphne is a corporate spy for a tourism company who hopes to open a hotel on the moon affect her relationship with the other residents? Though she confesses that she doesn't like her job, she tells Dash and Kira she's agreed to the job because she gets "to go to the moon! To make history!" Do you think she's justified in doing what she does?

9. In *Space Case* and *Spaced Out*, Dash's nemeses are the Sjoberg siblings. What is it about this family that makes them so particularly difficult? 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 chooses to enlist Dash to assist her in investigating Holtz's death? Do you think it's appropriate for her to do so? Why or why not?

11. In what ways 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? In what ways 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 for everything I did." Why does this alien seem 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. In your opinion, 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 the way he does?

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 so critical.

17. In *Space Case* and *Spaced Out*, what are the most impressive obstacles Dash overcomes? Which of these hurdles amazed you the most?

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

19. Though Dash is often reprimanded for being a troublemaker, with the help of Kira, he is also the person who helps solve the murder of Dr. Holtz and the mystery of Nina's disappearance. What can readers infer about his motivations? Do you see his relationship with Kira facilitating this?
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 or why not? What is it about Nina that makes Dash feel like that wouldn't be the case? What additional understanding of Kira can readers glean from her insistence in examining 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? In what ways is this junk indicative of a larger problem with space trash?
22. How does the virtual gaming world allow Roddy to be someone different from whom he is in real life? What are the benefits of this? Do you think there are some disadvantages, too?
23. Consider the unusual cast of secondary characters: Who did you like the most? The least? For what reason? Of all of the characters, who did you feel was most similar to you due to his/her personality or experiences?
24. What's the significance of the "Charlie" text Nina receives? In what ways are the space rocks important? What does this weakness on the part of Nina indicate about her character? What else can readers learn from her actions and ultimate reactions about her choices?
25. *Space Case* and *Spaced Out* are told in first person. How would the story be different if another character (besides Dash) were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse?
26. *Space Case* and *Spaced Out* are sprinkled with excerpts from the faux book, *The Official Residents' Guide to Moon Base Alpha*. What did you think of this guide book? Did you find the information highlighted to be particularly useful to the residents on MBA?
27. Supply five words to describe *Space Case* and *Spaced Out* using the phrase, "These stories are about . . ." Explain your choices.
28. Through the course of both Moon Base Alpha books, readers get more insight about the Sjoberg family. What makes them such despicable characters? At the end of *Spaced Out*, Nina tells them, "NASA has already released details of the crimes you have committed to the press." Why is it important that the Sjobergs' true character be revealed to the people of Earth?
29. As in *Space Case*, when *Spaced Out* closes, Dash has solved an important mystery. Predict how he will have to come to the aid of the residents of Moon Base Alpha in the next installment/adventure of Dash Gibson.

Extended Writing and Research Prompts

The following activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9) (RL.6.1, 2, 7, 9) (W.4–6.4)

1. 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, the day-to-day living can be challenging and sometimes even dangerous. Have students research how personal hygiene and interests are compromised when living in space. They then should create a presentation that shares their research findings.

2. Though Moon Base Alpha has its fair share of mishaps, it has also been able to recruit scientists, like Dash's parents, 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 them create a visual presentation that illustrates their findings.

3. Using the novels as inspiration, place students in pairs and have them role-play as news reporters interviewing one of the residents of Moon Base Alpha. The students should discuss their life living in space, and how it has changed since moving there. To enrich the activity, record the "report" and allow students to use props and costumes when they are filming.

4. Over the past fifty years, space exploration has been a national priority, but due to other needs, funding for the program has waned and some people believe it's no longer a necessary or justifiable expense. Have students research how the space program is funded and its current goals and objectives. After examining their collected data, have students determine if they support the program and have them write a persuasive paper, explaining their position. Alternatively, students can prepare a speech designed to convince others of their view and present it to their classmates.

5. Throughout the course of the novels, readers are offered great insight about Dash's point of view on the events that occur. Students should assume the role of one of the secondary characters from either Moon Base Alpha book and draft a diary entry detailing what they've experienced and witnessed. To prepare, they should create an outline using the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why). Students should write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, etc.)

6. Many of the characters in *Space Case* and *Spaced Out* are not as they appear. Consider the importance of appearances and the need for disguising one's self—what might be a rationale to

do so? What are the ramifications and consequences of such a choice? Select one character from the novel and write a short analysis of his/her choice to use a disguise.

7. In small groups, have students select a favorite from one of the Moon Base Alpha books and create either a digitally or manually illustrated graphic novel for that scene. Using a digital comic strip creator (such as <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/>), have students use the strips to create storyboards for their scene. They can select original art, images, or graphics. As part of the evaluation component, consider panel size and number of panels, transitions and layouts, artwork, writing, and lettering.

8. Consider the setting for this series: 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 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.

9. Advice Column: Ask students to describe one of the problems faced by a character in *Space Case* and *Spaced Out* and write advice to him/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.

10. Fortune Cookies: Have students imagine they are dining with three characters from the series. Have them create fortune cookie statements for each character, making sure they tell you which character received the fortune and why it is fitting.

11. If These Walls Could Talk: Ask students to create a conversation between one of the characters in the series with some intangible thing (justice, love, goodness, greed, etc.) or his/her conscience. Have them script the conversation for dialogue, making sure they use appropriate punctuation.

12. Character Report Card: Ask students to examine the ethical nature of a character’s actions and choices in *Space Case* and *Spaced Out*. Have them set up a “report card” using a chart and include the following four categories: respect, responsibility, cooperation, caring, integrity, self-control, honesty, and effort. In addition, include a teacher’s comments section. In each category, give the character a letter grade that you believe he/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/support the grade.

13. Character Analysis T-shirt: Select a favorite character from the series 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, as well as the character’s name, picture, and description. The right sleeve must list the character’s strength, 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.

14. Gift Giving: Have students select five or more gifts that would be perfect to give to one of the characters in *Space Case* and *Spaced Out*; while these gifts can be tangible or intangible, they should be things that he/she would really want or need. Students should write an explanation, detailing how they chose each gift for the appropriate character.

15. Character “To Do” List: Students should create a “to do” list for one of the characters in *Space Case* or *Spaced Out*, with an explanation as to why those tasks are so necessary for that particular 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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