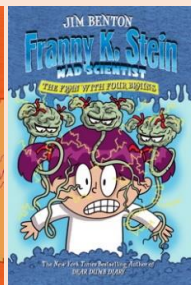
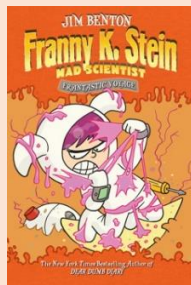
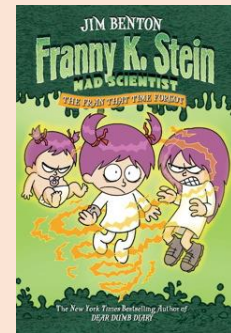
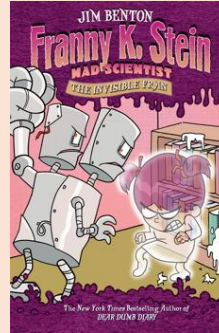
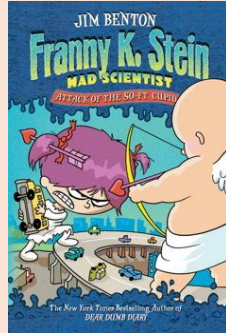
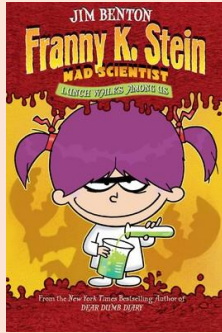


## A Reading Group Guide to

### *The Franny K. Stein series*

By Jim Benton



### About the Series

Franny K. Stein is not like the other students in her elementary school. They have hobbies like stamp collecting and baking, but Franny has her own laboratory where she conducts outlandish experiments. The only problem is that her creations don't always turn out the way she intended. While her family and classmates don't always understand Franny, they've learned to appreciate that things won't be boring whenever Franny is around—and if things go wrong (as they inevitably do), Franny K. Stein, mad scientist, will always find a way to save the day.

### Discussion Questions for Books 1–9

#### **Book One: *Lunch Walks Among Us***

1. Why does Franny have a hard time making friends? If you could give her advice about making friends, what would you tell her? What do you like most about Franny?
2. Miss Shelly suggests that Franny approach making new friends as an experiment. Explain how Franny uses the scientific method to learn about her classmates. What is her first hypothesis? How does she test her hypothesis? What does she learn as a result of her experiment?

3. Franny tries to change her personality and behavior in order to fit in with her classmates. Have you ever felt like you needed to act differently in order to make friends? How did it make you feel? Were you able to speak honestly to someone about your feelings? What did you learn from that experience? Explain your answers.

4. What helps Franny's classmates learn to stop being afraid of her? Why do you think people are often frightened of things that are different or unfamiliar?

5. What qualities make Miss Shelly a good teacher? Do you have a favorite teacher? What makes them a great teacher? Why is it important to have positive role models in your life?

**Book Two: *Attack of the 50-Ft. Cupid***

1. Why do you think Franny has a hard time understanding Valentine's Day? Why does she misunderstand Miss Shelly's explanation of a valentine? Choose a different holiday and explain how you would describe it to Franny so that she would understand.

2. Why does Franny's mom decide she needs a dog? Why do you think Franny does not like Igor at first? What changes her mind? Have you ever changed your mind about something that scared or bothered you? If so, what caused you to do so?

3. To help create valentines for her classmates, Franny creates a matrix, which you can find in the book. Try creating your own poem generator matrix. What did you enjoy most about creating the matrix? What did you find most difficult?

4. If you had Franny's inventions, the Manifester and the Biggerizer, what would you do with them? What do you think would happen next?

5. Imagine that Franny was one of your classmates. Design the perfect Valentine's Day card to give her. Then discuss your reasons for the design with your classmates, noticing all the similarities and differences between your cards. Do you think Franny is an easy person to understand or get to know? Do you think this is true for most people?

**Book Three: *The Invisible Fran***

1. Why is Franny excited about Hobby Day? How did Franny's suggestions about how to improve her classmates' hobbies make them feel? Why do you think they felt this way? How could Franny have done things differently?

2. Why does Franny want her classmates to try doing mad science experiments? Explain everything she does to try to get her classmates interested in becoming mad scientists. How do you feel about science? Would you have been convinced to do experiments?

3. What does Franny explore while she is invisible at school? If you could be invisible for a day, what would you want to do? Explain your answer. What could be some of the perks and challenges of being invisible?

4. Explain how each of her classmates' hobbies end up helping Franny defeat the robot. What lesson can you learn about the importance of respecting everyone's unique talents and interests?

5. Describe one of your hobbies or interests. If you were in Franny's class, how could you use your hobby to help defeat the super stupid robot?

#### **Book Four: *The Fran That Time Forgot***

1. Why do you think it makes Franny angry when people don't take her creations seriously? How would it make you feel if you were in her shoes? What would you do?

2. Reread the descriptions of Franny's experiments based on sayings she's heard her mom use. This type of saying is called an idiom. With your classmates, brainstorm other idioms that you've heard. What do they mean? If you were going to conduct an experiment or invent something based on one of these idioms, what would it look like?

3. What does Franny invent to help her "have her cake and eat it too"? How would you use this invention if you had one?

4. What causes Franny's classmates to laugh at her? How does it make Franny feel? What does she decide to do? Have you ever had someone laugh at you? How did you feel?

5. If you could travel into your past or future, where would you go and what would you do? Explain your answer.

6. What does Franny tell baby Franny? How does this advice impact future Franny? What advice do you think she *should* have given herself?

#### **Book Five: *Frantastic Voyage***

1. The title of this book is an allusion to the 1966 movie *Fantastic Voyage*, about a group of scientists who find a way to travel inside the human body. Have you ever seen a movie or television show where a character traveled inside the body? If you could embark on a scientific voyage inside a body, would you want to do it? What do you think that journey would be like? What do you think you would learn?

2. What gives Franny the idea to build a television to distract Igor? What effect does the television have on him, especially the advertisements? Do you think television is a beneficial or problematic invention? Explain your answer.

3. What problem causes Franny to decide she needs to build a Doomsday Device? Can you think of a better solution to her problem?
4. Before Franny decides to shrink herself and go inside Igor to defuse the Doomsday Device, she considers her options. Can you think of other options she should have considered?
5. Summarize the problems that Franny encounters on her “Frantastic” voyage and the steps she takes to solve those problems.

#### **Book Six: *The Fran with Four Brains***

1. Jim Benton writes, “Franny truly loved mad science, so she never minded putting in the time.” What activity or subject do you love so much that you don’t mind spending a lot of time working on it? How did you discover what you love? Is there anything else you’re interested in that you haven’t tried or investigated yet?
2. List all the extra activities that Franny does. Why does Franny’s mother want her to do so many things? How many extra activities do you do? Why do you do them?
3. Why does Franny create the Franbots? If you could create your own robot to do some of your work, what task(s) would you want it to do? What special talent would you give it?
4. Why does creating the Franbots turn out to be a bad idea? How does Franny defeat each of the Franbots?
5. What lesson do you think Franny learned after her experience with the Franbots? What lesson do you think her mother learned?

#### **Book Seven: *The Frandidate***

1. At the beginning of the book, Franny considers the things she might do if she took over the world. If you could take over the world, what would you do to make the world a better place? What would be the most exciting thing about taking over the world? What would be the most challenging?
2. Why does Franny tell her mother the truth about how the couch got destroyed? Have you ever been tempted to lie to get out of trouble? What did you do, and what was the outcome? What did you learn from the incident?
3. Why does Franny want to become class president? What do you think are good qualities for a class president to have? Would you want to be elected as your class president? Explain your answer.
4. Describe Franny’s original ideas for improving the school. How can a class president’s decisions affect all students? Would you have voted for her? Explain your answer.

5. Explain the steps Franny takes to create the Frandidate. What makes the Frandidate effective at persuading people to vote for her? What is the problem with the Frandidate?

6. What do you think Franny learned about the importance of honesty after her experience with the Frandidate? How do you feel about honesty? Think of some examples in your own life.

### **Book Eight: *Bad Hair Day***

1. Why does Franny think her mother wants her to change? Why does she decide to experiment with her hair, fashion, and makeup? Have you ever felt this way? If so, what did you do to try to make a change? What were the results?

2. Before she starts experimenting with the way she looks, Franny considers the fact that she dresses for practical reasons: her hair is in pigtails to keep it out of the way, and the lab coat protects her from dangerous chemicals. How would you describe your style? How do you decide what to wear and how to style your hair?

3. At the beginning of the book, Franny's mother says that Igor is "not going to win any beauty contests," but by the end, she says she thinks he might be, "the most beautiful dog that ever lived." What causes her to change her mind? Why shouldn't Franny's mother be quick to judge people or dogs, especially by their appearances?

4. In literature, we tend to associate animals with different characteristics. Dogs, for example, are associated with loyalty, while snakes are associated with evil. How do Franny's pigtails demonstrate qualities associated with pigs? How is her ponytail different?

5. What lesson do you think Franny and her mother learned about outward and inward beauty?

### **Book Nine: *Recipe for Disaster***

1. Franny says Igor's love of painting gave him a hobby that "was a lot safer for the world than when he helped Franny with her experiments." What does she mean by this? Look at Igor's behavior in the images that follow. What do you notice? How do his actions support Franny's statement?

2. The workers lugging the old furnace out of Franny's school laugh at her for wanting to use it to invent something new. They tell her, "'this thing has already been invented . . . it's a furnace.'" Look around your classroom. Are there any objects you can "reinvent" or put together to make a new device? What would its purpose be? Who would use it? Miss Shelly arrives and proudly defends Franny to the workers. Why were they underestimating Franny? Have you ever had someone underestimate you? Explain your answers.

3. Mona and Vincent convince Franny that having an art and music department at school is just as important as learning about math and science. How do they build their argument? Why does it



make sense to Franny? Investigate your own school's art and music departments. Are they in need of supplies? What might you do to help or convince others to care?

4. Helping Mona and Vincent with the bake sale fundraiser means Franny tries spending time in the kitchen instead of the lab. How might creating and following a recipe require similar skills to a scientist developing medicines or experimenting with chemical reactions? What does Igor do when Franny gets frustrated and wants to give up?

5. The Muffin Man that Franny creates is excited to do what he was created to do: bake delicious muffins. What effects do his muffins have on Franny's classmates? What is the first sign that something might be wrong? Why do you think the book is called "Recipe for Disaster"?

6. How does Franny defeat the Muffin Man? How does her invention help her classmates understand what the Muffin Man is "making them sacrifice"? What do you think you would see if you put on the Visualizer Helmet? What makes you the happiest?

### **Extension Activities Incorporating Books 1–9**

1. The creator of the Franny K. Stein novels, Jim Benton, is both an author and a cartoonist. Often, his illustrations add to the story by further developing plot or character. Choose a few illustrations that you find particularly interesting and explain how the illustrations add to your understanding or appreciation of the text.

2. Foreshadowing is a literary term used to describe something that gives a hint or clue about action that occurs later. Often, you don't realize something was foreshadowed until the end of a book. Go back to the beginning of one of the books in the series and look for examples of foreshadowing. Did you notice the foreshadowing the first time you read the book? How does it make you feel seeing the clues now? Does it change the way you interpret the story?

3. One of the most enjoyable parts of the Franny K. Stein books is reading about all of Franny's inventions. Go back through the books and make a list of all her inventions. Which one do you think is the best invention? Which one is the worst? Explain the reasons for your choices, and then create the script for a commercial for the invention you liked the best.

4. Some of the names in Jim Benton's series are homages to Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (along with the movies and comics that it inspired), while many of his other book and chapter titles relate to idioms, puns, or titles of other books, songs, or movies. Pick a few of the book or chapter titles and explain their significance. How do these references relate to the books' content?

5. Write and illustrate a chapter of your own story in the style of the Franny K. Stein books. If you were a mad scientist, what would you invent? What would your invention do? What could go wrong with it? If something did go wrong, how could your invention be stopped? Would you have a sidekick, a partner, or an animal friend?

6. How is a novel from the Franny K. Stein series different from a newspaper? Imagine you are a journalist and have to write a newspaper story about the events that take place in one of the books. Include interviews with witnesses and details from the book in your report.

7. In the second book in the series, Franny's mother gets Franny a dog, Igor, to be her lab assistant. Using evidence from the books, debate whether Igor is helpful to Franny or not. Make your case to a classmate, and see what insights they have to share.

8. Franny's favorite part of her house is her bedroom/laboratory. If you could design your own fantasy bedroom, what would it look like? Create an illustration of your dream bedroom and write a description explaining why it is as perfect for you as Franny's laboratory is for her.

9. Book Four: *The Fran That Time Forgot* is about Franny's entry in her school's science fair. What are the steps to creating a good science fair project? Develop a plan for your own science fair experiment. What question(s) will you try to answer? What is your hypothesis? How will you test your hypothesis? What will you need to conduct your experiment?

*Discussion questions for books 1-8 and extension activities prepared by Amy Jurskis, English Department Chair at Oxbridge Academy.*

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