

The Adventures of Captain Underpants

Dav Pilkey

FIELD GUIDE



Book Summary

George and Harold are two adventurous boys who enjoy making trouble and tormenting their principal, Mr. Krupp, at the Jerome Horwitz Elementary School. One day George and Harold decide to hypnotize Mr. Krupp so that they won't be punished anymore. For fun, they tell him to be Captain Underpants, a fictional character in a comic strip that the two boys created. Incredibly, Mr. Krupp turns into Captain Underpants and goes off to save the world. Captain Underpants needs assistance, however, and so George and Harold, feeling responsible, follow him. And so the *Adventures of Captain Underpants* begin.

Since this series follows the time-honored serial format of building on the last episode, it is important that the books be read in order.

Series

Captain Underpants

Publisher

Scholastic, 1997

ISBN

0590846280

TC Level

8

Basic Book Information

Dav Pilkey is well known for his zany humor from the books *Dogzilla*, *The Hallo-Wiener* and *The Dumb Bunnies*. *The Adventures of Captain Underpants* strikes the same chord, playing with words and situations. This humor is what some adults call adolescent or "bathroom" humor, but it's all in good fun and in surprisingly good taste with no gratuitous violence. There is a section in the book that follows a comic book format, with many boxes across the page, with action and bubble dialogue. The comic book section was written by George and Harold, the two boys, and is full of ridiculous spelling errors. There is a section called "Flip-o-rama" where the reader is encouraged to flip the pages of the book back and forth to create a moving picture, sort of like a flipbook.

Noteworthy Features

Kids love this book and the entire series, partly because it is irreverent and partly because it is interactive. *The Adventures of Captain Underpants* gives readers, most often boys, the sense of a comic book: It is easy to read, full of action, and it contains moments of pure fantasy. Dav Pilkey has given this book the appeal of a comic book with his wisecracking wit and sassy play on words.

George and Harold are very like the pesky boys we've all known growing up and seem a bit like our wilder selves, too. George has a flat top; Harold has a really bad haircut.

There is a lot of dialogue in this book that is easy to understand. All dialogue is either referenced or encased in bubbles. Readers moving from

the systematically referenced dialogue of *Nate the Great* can transition well into *Captain Underpants*.

Teaching Ideas

Comic books are not held in much esteem these days, if they ever were. But they have always had a following among children, and even some adults, because they are action-oriented and easy to follow. Capitalizing on this interest can serve many classrooms and struggling readers well, and provide some great laughs. Like comic books, the *Captain Underpants* series moves quickly between students-children are always eagerly waiting for a classmate to finish reading. Dav Pilkey does a great job mimicking this genre, while also using it to the reader's advantage, by integrating the comic book format with that of a regular chapter book.

Captain Underpants can serve several purposes for developing readers. First, it appeals to reluctant and struggling readers because of its subversive content, and gets them to read. It can also be used to move readers stuck in easier, early chapter books like *Nate the Great*, on to more meaty reads like *Marvin Redpost* by Louis Sachar. *The Adventures of Captain Underpants* can also become part of an ongoing humor study that a partnership, class or book club undertakes. Dav Pilkey uses his illustrations to show more than his words reveal, as well as using words that could be taken in more than one way (double entendre).

Students may encounter difficulty with this text because of the varied format. An introduction to the book that addresses how to read the sections that are not narrated would be helpful to readers.

Teachers might refer back to this book during writing workshop to show how words can be placed in pictures, and also how students can vary format in their own writing.

Book Connections

Other Dav Pilkey books that readers will enjoy are *The Hallo-Wiener* and *The Dumb Bunnies*.

Genre

Chapter Book

Character's Gender

Male

Teaching Uses

Independent Reading; Partnerships