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Teachers' Notes
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Aristotle's Nostril By Morris Gleitzman

Synopsis

Aristotle just wants to be happy. Or perhaps this is just too much for a germ to expect. There's so much important work to be done that it seems no other germ in the nostril has any interest in fun or thinks at all about the possibility of happiness. Everyone has a job to do and there are endless rules and regulations to ensure everything is kept under control. Aristotle can't help being different and he's not sure if it is a blessing or a curse. One thing is for certain, his crazy ideas keep landing him in big trouble. And his brother Blob seems to get dragged into that trouble every time! Blob is beginning to wonder how he could be related to such an idiot and the other germs have had enough of Aristotle's 'silly' behaviour. When the final straw is broken, the two are completely banished from their homeland. Sent forth into the unknown – the world outside their nostril – there is suddenly much more to worry about. What they discover amazes and mystifies them – and of course gets them into enormous trouble all over again! Who would have dreamed there'd be another nostril right next to their own? No-one in their own nostril certainly. And no-one in the stumbled-upon one either as it turns out. In fact, instead of curiosity and interest, their discovery arouses fear, suspicion and anger - potent ingredients for conflict. Nostril inhabitants move towards waging all out war. Then, when Blob turns against him, Aristotle struggles to regain his sense of hope and belief in a better future. Some timely advice based on historical events (bodily ones of course) and another ingenious plan land Aristotle in the very centre of the storm... that is in front of the assembled troops and the Prime Minister, the opposing forces and their King with only a birthday cake to turn the tide! Blob's exasperation is replaced by admiration when Aristotle averts the great battle of the nostrils. And strangely enough, Aristotle's dream becomes a reality. After all, it is harder to feel different when everyone around you starts feeling the same way – happy.

Using these Teacher Notes

At times suspenseful and strange, (often gross and grotty) and at times heart-warming and witty, this novel offers plenty of action (and body bits) sure to capture the reader's attention and fire the imagination! (and possibly alter your view about what's going on in your nose...)

Individual readers and small groups can enjoy delving into the story using the range of stimulating activities which follow. Designed to challenge and promote analytical and creative thinking, each chapter's tasks can be assigned before, during or after completion of the chapter or of the whole book.

Multiple activities follow Chapter One to excite interest about diverse aspects of the story and encourage creative interpretation that goes beyond the actual text.

Use in **shared guided reading sessions** or as **individual response tasks**, allowing students to generate further questions and present their learning in a variety of preferred ways.

For those students capable of thinking at higher levels, there are "**Extension**" **questions** which offer interesting tangents and provide scope for more abstract or complex investigations.

At the end of the Chapter-by-Chapter activities, you will find some "**Bigger**" **ideas** that may be used flexibly to inspire whole class discussion or individual exploration or as the basis for developing tailored learning assignments.

Chapter One

Aristotle irritates Blob with his reference to 'exotic foreign places' - "I assume you mean places outside the nostril" Blob responds (p.2).

a) Which body part would you choose to be if you were to go on a special journey to what you'd consider an 'exotic foreign place' in the body (e.g.: blood cell to ear drum, finger to toe, nerve to vein, brain neuron to nail cartilage)?

- Take that journey and describe the sights, sounds, smells and feelings you experience from that very particular perspective. You can detail things on the way or around you at your destination.

- Demonstrate understanding of some of the other relevant jobs being done by different body parts you meet on the way or observe at journey's end.

b) "We're not here to be happy...we're here to make sure the nostril operates in an orderly and efficient manner" (p.5) So says Blob in response to Aristotle's crazy suggestion that being happy is important!

- Is he right? How would you feel if you lived in that world?

c) Detect facts in the fiction.

- What do you know about the life and death of germs?
- What can you find out to uncover truth hidden in the humour or alluded to in the text? Such as - “we germs don’t have birthdays, we don’t live long enough” (p.3)

d) Think about bodily functions – that is the jobs performed by different body parts or systems (e.g.: circulatory, skeletal or nervous) that keep a body functioning.

- Offer your selection of who gets the ‘fun’ stuff and explain why.

e) On page 6, Aristotle feels dejected about being ‘different’.

- Is he different? How do you think he reached that conclusion?
- What advice would you give to a person in his situation?

Extension:

➤ Find out about the “real” Aristotle, a Greek Philosopher (384-322BC). What did this famous philosopher have to say about happiness, among other things?

➤ Locate some quotes from Aristotle and choose 3 which you think relate to this story or are particularly relevant to a character or event. For example: “We make war that we may live in peace” or “Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence”

Chapter Two

a) The world of Aristotle’s nostril is very rigid and controlled.

- Draw on this chapter (and others where possible) to collect evidence that supports or refutes this statement.
- If the rules and regulations weren’t strictly enforced – or weren’t followed at all – what possible outcomes do you foresee?

b) Blob and Aristotle’s relationship makes for interesting exploration.

On page 9, Blob offers to give Aristotle “*the usual character reference. The one where I explain to them that you’re basically a decent germ but also a bit of an idiot.*”

- What insight does this give the reader about the characters as individuals and as friends?

c) Highlight the opposing traits these two have by designing some form of comparison chart or table.

- For every quality that is a strength in Aristotle, find a potential weakness in Blob – and vice versa. Are they alike in any ways?

d) Rate the level of knowledge and awareness the nostril inhabitants have of the rest of the body based on pages 10 and 11. Come up with a simple scale and explain why you have given the rating you have.

Extension:

- Present an example from 'real life' that illustrates the impact of ignorance or awareness. What keeps people "in the dark" or "illuminates" something challenging for them?

Chapter Three

a) Aristotle observes – *"under a beautiful grove of newly sprouting nose hairs, a fully-grown parent germ was in the process of dividing into two kids germs."* (p.17)

And marches past *"a dust-sorting depot"* where microbes are being organized according to shape and colour.

- Investigate to find out what bodily processes might actually be happening here – i.e. taking place in a real human body?
- Find another example where a genuine biological function is described or 'personified' in the text.

b) Sneezes are perceived to be *"the most powerful and destructive weather condition known to germs."* (p.19) **Catastrophe planning!**

- Choose this or an alternative bodily "disaster" (e.g.: a burp, a hair cut, tonsillitis, or sunburn) then write or dramatise a "before & after" piece about it.
- Consider the following - what has to be endured and by whom? What build-up and warning signs will body parts experience? What potential outcomes are likely? What can body parts do to save themselves or prevent catastrophic results?!

c) The "shape of things to come" takes on new meaning in this story! Characters express their emotions and responses by adopting "shapes" – eg: the yellow microbe goes *"concerned-shaped"*, Blob becomes *"glum shaped"*, Aristotle sags into a *"disappointed shaped"* while Preston and Gavin struggle not to go *"grin shaped"*.

Look into this phenomenon by choosing one of these activities:

- Create a cartoon or graphic 'legend' which helps to illustrate how some of these shapes can be identified OR
- Locate more of the described shapes and create categories under which they can be listed (eg: positive or negative emotions, optimistic or pessimistic responses, etc) OR
- Compare and contrast the main characters by recording the 'shapes' each morphs into through the highs and lows of their adventure. Analyse these lists to offer some judgments about the personalities, philosophies and attitudes of the characters. Highlight any recurring themes or major changes.

Chapter Four

- a) Aristotle and Blob are terrified!
- Identify 4 things that are fuelling their fears – cite examples from the text to support your ideas.
 - Can you draw any parallels with 'real life' where people (as individuals, communities or larger groups) are terrified by 'the unknown'? In your view, are their fears reasonable or irrational?
- b) Discuss the ways each main character **reacts** to the dangers (real or imagined) and **rationalizes** in order to deal with what is happening.
- Would you recommend one approach over another?

Chapter Five

- a) Blob wonders "*Why would anyone need a second nostril? Particularly when their first one is operating in a very orderly and efficient manner with two hundred and thirty three thousand six hundred and forty-seven laws, bills, acts, rules, regulations and reminder notices.*" (p.33)
- What assumptions are inherent in Blob's statement?
 - Do rules and regulations always guarantee control and order? Present a persuasive case to explain your thinking.
- b) On p.35 when Aristotle sees the '*foreign nostril's nose germs*', he assumes they are just "*like us*" - but Blob has a totally different view!
- Why do you think they differ so dramatically in their reactions? Is one more likely to be right – Aristotle or Blob?
 - Do you recognize aspects that seem very much like 'human nature' in the behaviour of these germs?

Chapter Six

a) Evaluate Blob's calculation (p.40) about the reaction his news would get when he went back home. How accurate do you think he is?

b) To what extent would his own 'history' and his connection with Aristotle affect the way the other germs respond?

- Propose a more realistic calculation to match your predicted outcome!

c) Sketch a diagram which shows the hierarchy of command that Blob must go through to tell his tale.

- Give an opinion about the germs in positions of responsibility in this nostril. How would you improve their performance?

Chapter Seven

a) Make a mind map of Aristotle's hypotheses about what he could do as leader of the '*Royal Scouting Party*'. Be imaginative!

- What possible directions could he take – literally and figuratively!

b) Based on the picture you get of the King in this one nostril and the 'leadership' that has been exhibited in the other, predict the 'best' possible outcome and an alternative 'worst' possible outcome.

- Rate the chances of each with and without Aristotle's participation!

Chapter Eight

a) Blob slithers through "*the face-hair forest*" (p.57). For microscopic germs, what do you imagine the view or the perspective of their surroundings to look like – of the incoming traffic or nose hairs, to the rim of the nostril or the nasal passage?

- Find other descriptive phrases (in this and other chapters) or use your own imagination to create some images of what you as the germ might see. You could use words, pictures or art materials.

- Options: make a "map" identifying features and markings of the 'landscape' or zoom in on one aspect and describe it in detail; or develop your own idea!

Extension:

- Prepare a case to defend the action Blob takes at a critical moment. Is this a turning point for their relationship?

Chapters Nine and Ten

a) Ever heard the phrase “a catalogue of errors” or expression “a comedy of errors”?

- Relate either or both to the plot by listing and analysing the series of misunderstandings or miscommunications that have occurred to reach this point.

b) In your opinion, are all these errors “funny”? Explain your judgment.

c) Discuss your view on if, when and how errors can be a ‘good’ thing?

d) Appraise the performance of Len. Weigh up whether he is an asset or a liability for Aristotle.

Extension:

- Dialogue on p.77 revolves around the means and ends of achieving resolution. Detect the **irony** and explain it. What do you make of the plans?

Chapter Eleven

a) Illustrate the spiraling sequence of events or interactions in this chapter – in a diagram, graphic organizer, cartoon strip or other form of your devising. Include the following information in your design or representation:

- Who are the key players?
- How do things go from bad to worse?
- Where do they end up?
- Who is thinking what?

Chapter Twelve

a) Fold your page into 4 sections and write down these 4 headings. Record relevant information from this chapter to outline unfolding events.

1. **Sources of Help**
2. **Dangers faced or imagined**
3. **Strategies for persevering or coping**
4. **Major discoveries**

b) Or create your own 4 headings relating to another chapter, event or aspect of the story which interests you.

Chapter Thirteen

a) Aristotle and Blob experience a roller coaster ride of emotions and feelings in this chapter.

- Interpret their actions and reactions to make a list of as many as you can.

Chapter Fourteen

a) Explain how Aristotle's history works against him in this chapter.

- Does he deserve the criticism and doubt he attracts?

b) Have you ever been in a similar situation?

- What words of wisdom would you offer him?

Chapter Fifteen

a) Blob's strategy to try and turn the situation around – or at least delay it - what is it? Aristotle's tactic – what is it?

- Compare the two and judge the merits of each plan.
- Decide which has the greater chance of success, in the short and in the long term.

Chapter Sixteen

a) Select a scene!

Choose a scene from this chapter (eg: Blob's change of heart, Aristotle's grand but precarious entrance, the King's response or the assembled armies in action) as the basis for one of the following:

- A mime, freeze-frame or re-enactment (dramatization)
- A narration with sound effects (live or recorded)
- An art work – sketch, model, photo, cartoon or visual form of your choice
- A musical piece capturing the suspense, fear, joy, chaos - whatever appeals!

Chapter Seventeen

a) Distinguish what worked **for** Aristotle to enable his 'happiness' goal to be achieved. Do you feel that the forces working **against** him were weaker?

b) To what extent do you agree that his goal was achieved quite by accident (or a series of accidents!)?

c) Mood Swings – Design a **before/after** chart or table which compares the mood of the following characters in the lead up to the war, with the mood at the novel's conclusion:

King, Ministers, Prime Minister, Army germs on each side, Aristotle and Blob and any other characters of your choice.

- Explain your understanding of the contrast.

Bigger parallels to ponder...

Reflect on similar or comparable stories that happen in the real world to turn people or places into 'war zones'.

- What behaviours and conditions set the scene for conflict to develop?
- Can you identify major figures in the world today (at community, Government or international level) who are working towards peaceful resolution of problems?

Are common elements present between events, words, characters or deeds in the novel "*Aristotle's Nostril*" and a real-life situation you can think of?

- What kinds of actions inflame and incite?
- Who has the power to influence things?
- What peaceful resolutions and understandings have been achieved and by what means?

Think about your own definition and belief about "happiness" – you might like to share it or just reflect privately about it.

Bigger themes to think about...

Discuss the following to analyse and explore themes that emerge in "*Aristotle's Nostril*" or can be built upon further by relating the novel to real people and real life:

Conflict Resolution Tolerance Discrimination Individuality
Optimism Conformity Leadership Success & Failure Belief

History teaches Aristotle some important lessons.

- Is there something you have learned personally from history – your own history or that of your family, culture, community?

Has the world learned any lessons from history?

- Write about examples where real change has been brought about (for better or worse) as a result of historical events. Among aspects you could consider are the environment, poverty, war, geography, equality and peace.

Extension:

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"Aristotle's Nostril" is just a fun and funny tale – or is it?!

- To what extent do you think Morris Gleitzman's story is "allegorical"?
- Do you think the author has created "analogies" in character, plot, setting and themes that provide a different level of meaning and interpretation?

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ARISTOTILES
NOSTRIL

