

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Kid Who Ran for President

by
Dan Gutman

Book Information

Dan Gutman, The Kid Who Ran for President
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Judson Moon is a twelve-year-old boy who runs for the Presidency of the United States.

Topics: Adventure, Life Changes; Community Life, Politics; Countries/Regions, United States; People, U.S. Presidents; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8

Main Characters

Abby Goldstein Judson's good friend and classmate; Lane does not consider her pretty enough to be Judson's First Lady

Arthur Krantz Judson's classmate who used to be his friend; Judson now thinks he is a "dweeb"

Chelsea Daniels Judson's pretty First Lady candidate

Judson Moon the twelve-year-old main character of the story; he is a candidate for President of the United States

June Syers Judson's seventy-two-year-old former babysitter; she agrees to run as his Vice-President

Lane Brainard Judson's friend and campaign manager; he plans the entire campaign and writes Judson's speeches

Mr. Moon (Dad) Judson's father; he sells corrugated cardboard boxes

Mrs. Moon (Mom) Judson's mother; she sells carpet tiles

Pete Guerra a local news reporter; he starts a scandal about Judson just before Election Day 2000

President George White the current President of the United States; he is running for reelection

cronies friends, pals

naive innocent, unknowing

quaint old fashioned

ratified approved

sabotage to deliberately destroy

Synopsis

Right after election day in November 1999, twelve-year-old Madison, Wisconsin residents Judson Moon and his friend, Lane Brainard, are discussing politics while playing pool. Lane thinks a kid should run the country because the adults are responsible for the mess the country is in now. He is sure that there are ways of getting around the requirement that a candidate be at least thirty-five years old. They decide that Judson will run as an independent candidate in the 2000 Presidential election. Lane will be the campaign manager and will make all decisions until the campaign concludes. Although Judson does not believe he has any chance of winning, he agrees with the plan just for fun. He sends in the application and required signatures needed to be placed on the ballot, without indicating his age. A week later he receives a letter telling him he will be included on the Wisconsin ballot. The boys recruit the beautiful Chelsea Daniels, a classmate of theirs, to be the First Lady. June Syers, a seventy-two-year-old woman who used to babysit for Judson, agrees to be the Vice-Presidential candidate.

To promote the campaign and raise funds, Lane persuades a reporter, Pete Guerra, to interview Judson. The story appears on TV and in the morning paper. When Judson gets to school, he finds the entire school excited about the campaign. The principal asks Judson to address the school. Lane writes the speech, but Judson adds to it, saying his first official act will be to abolish homework. After successfully delivering the speech, he begins to have self doubts about his abilities to serve the country in such a lofty position at his age. What began as a joke is now becoming serious business.

Reporters descend on Madison, and they broadcast

Vocabulary

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the story across the country. Money and gifts begin pouring in as word of the campaign spreads. Because of the publicity, state legislatures are eventually persuaded to ratify an amendment to the Constitution eliminating the age requirement for the Presidency. The polls suddenly show the "Moon & June" campaign very close to the other contenders. Lane tells Judson he must participate in a nationally televised debate with the other candidates.

Judson practices intently for the debate, but just before he goes on the air, he realizes he has no business running for President. He responds to the debate questions jokingly, hoping to persuade the public not to take him seriously. After the debate, however, the polls indicate that Judson won the debate. He begins to lead the other candidates in the polls.

The day before the election, Pete Guerra creates a scandal by releasing a story about Judson breaking into another student's locker to steal an essay when he was in the fourth grade. Judson appears on national TV to admit his mistake.

Election Day arrives. The major networks begin projecting winners of states' electoral votes. Shortly before midnight they project that Judson is the winner of the election. At the acceptance party in a hotel ballroom, Judson says that the country must be in bad shape to elect him as President. He then resigns. The story ends with Lane starting to plan for Chelsea to enter the Miss America pageant.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

A constitutional amendment is proposed to eliminate the age restriction on running for President. Explain what the children of America do to help get the amendment passed.

Since children are not eligible to vote, the only way they can help to get the amendment passed is to persuade their parents to vote for it. They stop chewing their food well before swallowing it, go swimming right after eating, and begin defying their parents until the adults agree to support the amendment.

Literary Analysis

Lane suggests that Judson run for President, and Judson agrees to run "on a goof." Several times in the story he hopes that his actions will diminish his chances of winning. If Judson is doing so well, why does he not want to win?

When Judson decides to run, he does not believe it will be possible for him to win. He does not expect a constitutional amendment to be passed and certainly does not think adults will actually vote for him. He also does not expect Lane's hard work in managing the campaign, designing the platforms, and writing the speeches to be successful. Judson begins to realize he is just trying to fool everyone and that he really does not know the first thing about running the country. He hopes to lose so he will not have to reveal that he is not a good choice for President.

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Inferential Comprehension

When Lane first gets the idea of a kid running for President, he explains to Judson that politicians are selected by computers, media experts, image makers, and advertising. He says, "They might as well be selling soap." In what way is running for political office similar to selling soap?

In order for a politician to be successful, he must get his message out to the public. As Lane demonstrates in the story, the politician must have an attractive image, a slogan, a platform, and lots of publicity. Many of the same components are needed to sell soap. The soap must look and smell attractive, become widely known by its name and purpose, appeal to people because of what it does, and be marketed to consumers to persuade them to purchase it. The story infers that politicians are made in the same way. The look and appeal of a politician must be marketed to the public regardless of the person's private stand on issues and his ability to run the country.

Constructing Meaning

Judson would sometimes introduce himself to others by saying he was running for President of the "You-nited States." Why might he have used that phrase to introduce himself?

In telling others that he is running for President, he likely stresses the "you" syllable of United as a way of emphasizing the importance of the individual. By appealing to peoples' self-interest, they are more likely to take an interest in Judson and to vote for him.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Judson participates in a debate with the other Presidential candidates. The debate is sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Invite a member of the local League of Women Voters to come to the class to explain the group's history, purpose, and activities. The speaker should also explain why the organization frequently sponsors political debates and why political debates are important

to the election process.

Comparing and Contrasting Lane obtains information from the latest Gallup Poll on Americans' views on a number of issues. Have the students develop a similar list of issues of national interest such as gun control, nuclear power, and the death penalty. Then have the students take a poll of the class to determine what the top issues of concern are for the class. If available, students may want to check the Internet at <http://www.gallup.com> to compare the issues their class members think are important with current top issues in the United States and with the top issues cited in the book. Discussion should follow focusing on the varieties of important opinions from each source. Students should be encouraged to discuss the reason they feel the way they do.

Recognizing Plot Judson is able to campaign for President because the Constitution is amended to remove the age barriers for candidates. Have the students organize and conduct a panel discussion on the plausibility of eliminating the age restriction. Students should be chosen as panelists. The rest of the class should prepare the questions so that each student plays some role in the discussion.

Responding to Literature Lane writes a speech for Judson to give at the school assembly. The main idea of the speech focuses on grown-ups being responsible for the problems of the country. Have each student write a speech as if he or she were running for President. The speech should focus on one central idea or problem that could be changed. Each speech should be presented to the class.