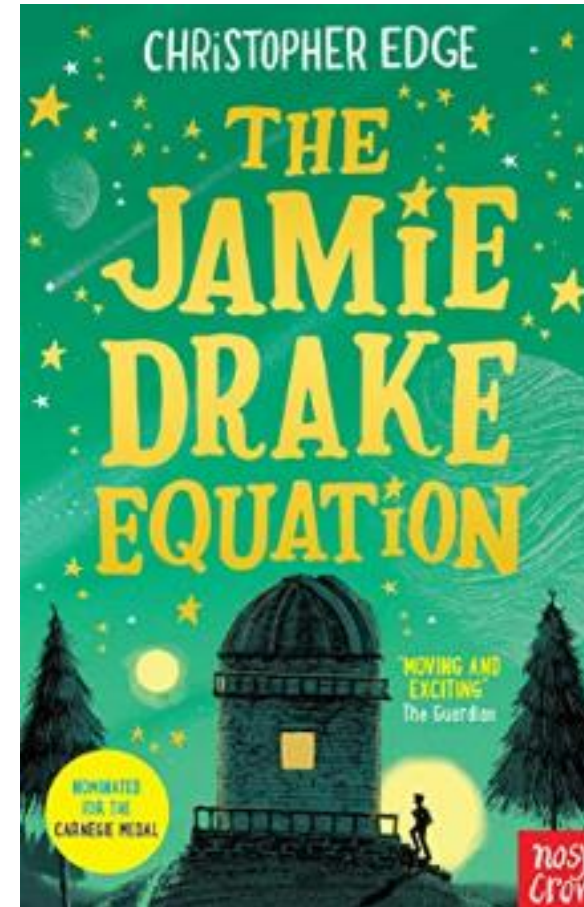


THE JAMIE DRAKE EQUATION

BY CHRISTOPHER EDGE



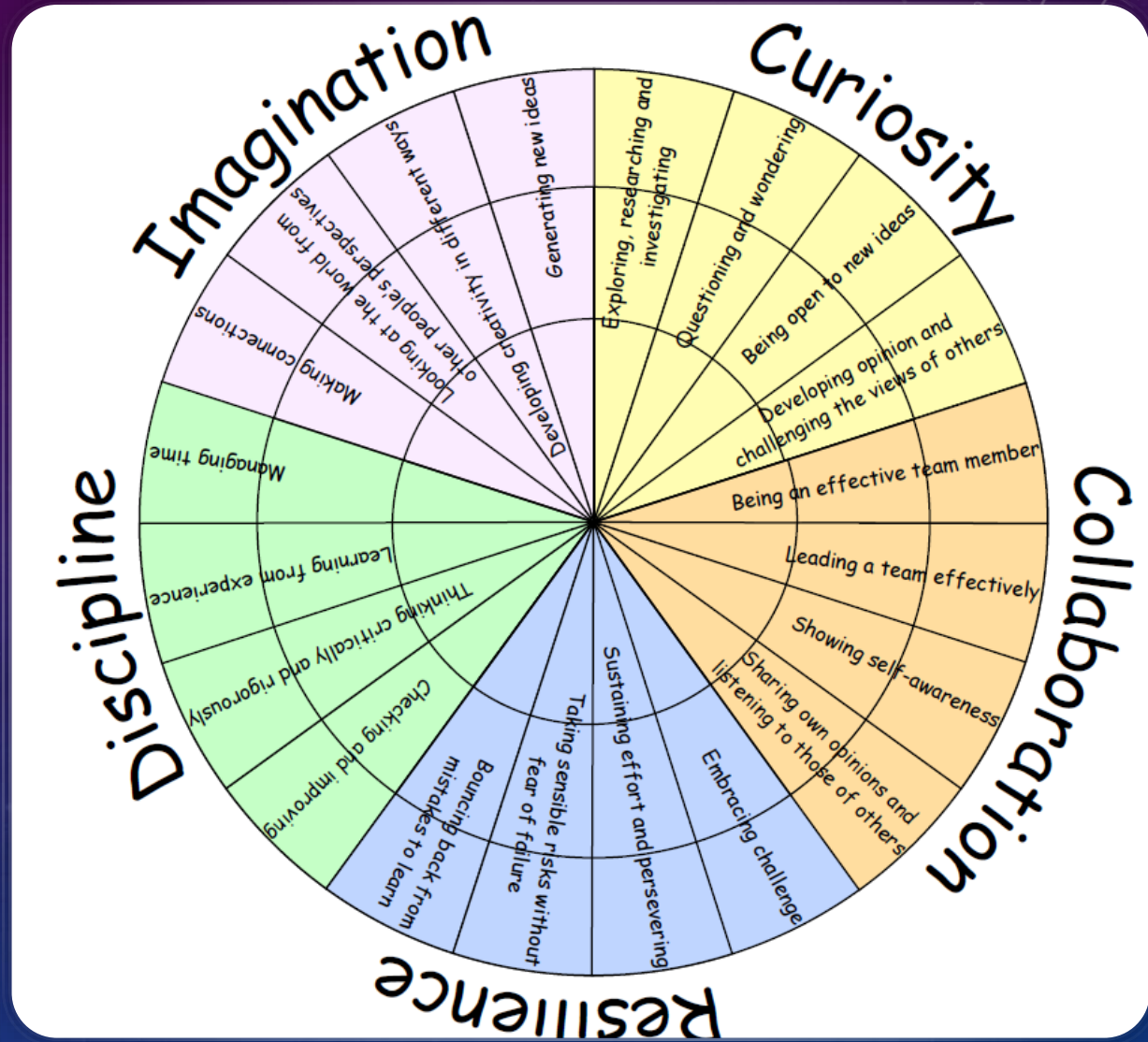
RESPONDER (15II)

- I can articulate personal responses to literature, identifying how and why a text affects the reader due to authorial intent



LEARNING HABITS

- What do you think is the most important Learning Habit?
- Is it one of your strengths or is it something you need to develop?
- How will you know that you have practised that Habit during the lesson?



CHAPTER 4

Read through the text.

When you reach a section marker (which looks like this: **1**), stop reading and answer the query about that part. There is also a predicting part of the query - that is why I would like you to stop!

Query 1

How does the author make Jamie seem unhappy and alone in this part of the text?
Why do you think that the author uses a phone call from his dad here?

Query 2

Everything that an author writes is there for a reason.
What do you think the author's aim is when Dad tells Jamie about the observatory?
Why do you think that Jamie will go there?

Query 3

How does the author make us feel panicked at this point?
Do you think it will be something serious? Why or why not?

Query 4

Why do you think that the author is making it difficult for Jamie to get into the observatory?
What do you think the author intends to happen when Jamie does get into the observatory?



From up here on Beacon Hill you can see everything. The whole village is spread out below me like a Google Map. There's Granddad's house, the long back garden with the barn at the bottom backing on to the wild meadows. Luckily, I can't hear his guitar playing from here. Then over there is my school, Austen Park Primary, its green playing fields surrounded by the new housing estate. The houses look like little boxes and with my finger and thumb I pinch and drag out the empty air, trying to zoom in to imagine what kind of family I'd find inside each one. I bet they wouldn't have an annoying granddad like mine.

The sun is starting to dip on the horizon, turning the sky a golden orange. I've got the revision worksheet spread out on my lap, the page of equations still looking impossible to me. Then I hear the roar of the fighter jet before I see it, the plane keeping low as it hugs the hills, heading back to the RAF base where the US fighter jets are stationed.

I jump as my mobile suddenly rings. Fishing my phone out from my pocket, I look down at the caller display.

"Hi, Dad." 1

There's a two-second delay and then I hear my dad's voice on the other end of the line.

"Hi, Jamie. I just phoned your mum and Charlie at home, but I couldn't get hold of you, so I just wanted to check you were OK."

Dad's kind of amazing. He's not even on this planet, but he's still making sure I'm all right.

"Where are you, son?"

"Up on Beacon Hill," I say. "I just wanted a bit of peace and quiet for a while. Granddad's practising his guitar again."

Dad laughs.

"Beacon Hill's probably the only place in Bramsfield where you can't hear Neil's guitar. I used to take your mum up there when we first started going out."

Mum and Dad both grew up in this village. They started going out when they were still at school and have been together ever since. All the newspapers say it's so romantic.

"There used to be an observatory up there at the top of the hill," Dad continues. "Your mum and me would go in on their open evenings and look up at the stars. When I looked through the telescope, it seemed as though the moon was close enough to touch. I could even see the spot where Neil Armstrong took his first step. I think that's what made me want to fly a spaceship, but I'm stuck here whizzing round in low Earth orbit instead. In fact, I'm heading over you right now, Jamie. Give us a wave." 2

I look up, my eyes scanning the horizon until I see the familiar glint of the ISS – a silver streak in the darkening sky. Dad showed me how to spot this before he went up into space. It looks just like a fast-moving plane, but without any flashing lights and, because the ISS is so high up, it doesn't make a sound. Dad promised me that whenever he was flying straight overhead, he'd always keep an eye out for me.

"I can see you, Dad," I say, lifting my hand to wave at this shooting star.

"Me too, son," he replies, his voice as clear in my ear as if he were sitting next to me and not four hundred kilometres above my head.

There's a moment of silence as I try to work out what to say next. When Dad's at home I can talk to him about anything – all the funny things that happen at school, any problems I've got with my homework, what we're going to do together at the weekend. Everything I'm thinking about and all my worries too.

There's so much I want to tell him now. How I wish he was home for my birthday, how living with Granddad is driving me mad and how I can't stop worrying about his spacewalk on Friday. But when you've only got a few minutes to talk, it's hard to fit everything in.

Then I hear a long beeping tone in the background, like a phone that's been left off the hook.

"Are you still there, Dad?" I ask.

I hear the echo of my own voice on the line and then Dad's voice cuts back in.

"I'm going to have to go, Jamie. This is something I need to check out." 3

"Is everything OK?" I ask, panicking at the thought of anything going wrong up there. From meteor strikes to toxic leaks, Dad has explained to me all the different dangers he could face on the ISS. In an extreme emergency the astronauts have to take shelter in the Soyuz capsule that's connected to the space station in case they need to make a quick escape.

"No need to worry, son," he replies. "It's just a caution alert. Probably some computer system's gone offline."

As he speaks, the beeping tone suddenly stops.

"There you go," he says. "Panic over. I just need to find out what this alert was about and then I can inform Mission Control. I'll speak to you tomorrow on our family video call."

The ISS is dipping low on the horizon now, giving me one last glimpse before it disappears.

"Bye, Jamie."

"Bye, Dad."

And then he's gone, travelling around the world in a tin can at over 27,000 kilometres per hour.

I'm nearly out of breath by the time I reach the very top of Beacon Hill, my shadow lengthening as the last rays of the sun leach out of the sky. I can't stop myself from shivering. I should've brought a jacket. Mum is probably expecting me back about now, but I don't want to go home yet. I want to see the observatory that Dad mentioned first.

If it was here when my dad was a teenager, then it must be well out of date by now. They put telescopes up into space nowadays so that astronomers can look further and further out into the universe. I glance up at the darkening sky, clouds now starting to appear on the horizon as daylight fades away. You wouldn't be able to see much from here.

Then I see it, half hidden behind a bank of trees, a squat red-brick building topped with a white, dome-shaped roof. The walls of the building are half covered in ivy and shrubs, making it blend in with the woodland that surrounds it, and as I get closer I can see coils of barbed wire sitting below the lip of the dome, its white paint peeling in

places and mottled with a greenish tint. The observatory looks abandoned, the only clue to its former life the rectangular slit in the side of the dome, left open to the sky.

I reach a rusting chain-link fence, the battered red-and-white sign that's fixed to this warning:

**PRIVATE PROPERTY
TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED**

But less than a metre to the left I spot a gap between the fence post and a padlocked gate, the chain hanging so loose that it's easy enough for me to squeeze through.

Up close, the observatory looks even more derelict, its curved red-brick walls crumbling in places, the chunks of rubble almost lost among the weeds. It doesn't look like anyone has been here for years. There are no windows and as I skirt round the edge of the building in search of a door, I wonder what might be left inside. Maybe the telescope is still working and I'll be able to catch a close-up of Dad on his next orbit round in ninety minutes time. If I could just find a way in... 4

Then I see something that stops me in my tracks. Silhouetted against the setting sun, it looks like a robot riding on top of a giant techno-spider. It's nearly twice my height, its four metal legs extended and planted in the ground, while the satellite dish head is pointing to the stars. On its sleek white body I can see a bright blue logo:

*** L.O.G.S.**

Unlike the crumbling observatory, this looks like it's just fallen off the back of a spaceship. I step closer, peering at the strange machine to try and work out exactly what it is.

That's when I feel the shotgun press between my shoulder blades.

"Don't move," a woman's voice growls. "Or I'll let you have it."

DEDUCTION

1. Why does Jamie go up to Beacon Hill?
2. What does it mean that the village was spread out 'like a Google Map'?
3. Explain how you know that Jamie likes his dad from Section 2.
4. What did Jamie's mum and dad used to do when they went up Beacon Hill?
5. How can you tell that the ISS is not a plane?
6. Did Dad really wave to Jamie? How do you know?
7. What is Jamie's biggest worry at the moment?
8. Why do you think that Jamie goes up to the observatory?

PREDICTION

9. What do you think will happen next? Use evidence from the end of the chapter to help you form your opinion.

HOMEWORK



Write five things we know about Jamie so far that may be important to the rest of the story.



Listen to Chapter 5 on the Scotholme Podcast channel.