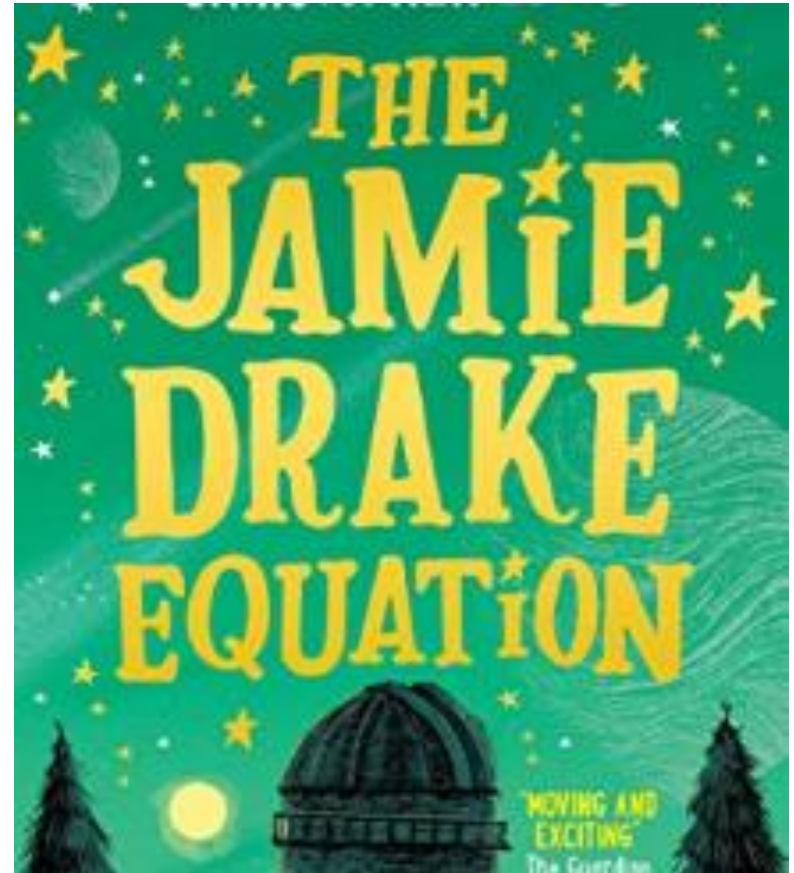


THE JAMIE DRAKE EQUATION

BY CHRISTOPHER EDGE

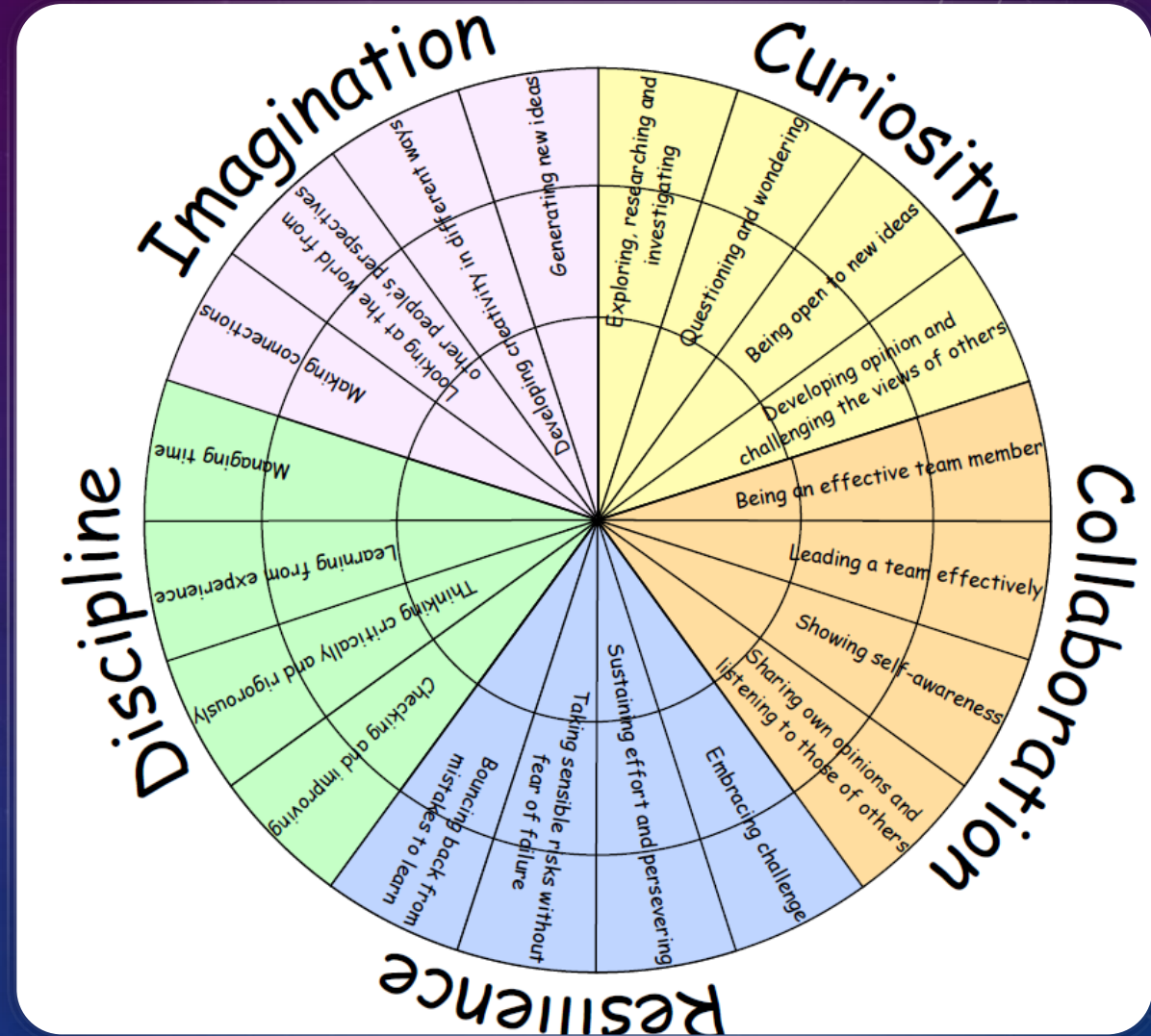


RESPONDER (15II)

- 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?





On the home screen of my phone, the golden spiral is still frozen mid-spin and I'm starting to wonder if Buzz will ever speak again. I've got so many questions racing round my head, but the one I really want to know the answer to is the one it's impossible to ask. The only question that might explain why my family is falling apart. I can barely even whisper this to myself as I sit here alone in the darkness of my room.

"Why doesn't Dad love us any more?"

As if in answer to my question, the phone suddenly vibrates.

"Who is Dad?"

I stare at the screen in total astonishment. The golden spiral is spinning again as a metallic voice echoes from the speaker. Professor Forster said this was impossible. Buzz is back and it's talking to me.

I shake my head, trying to make sense of how this can be happening as my thoughts tumble and whirl.

"Who is Dad?" Buzz repeats again, the robotic voice sounding softer, almost human now.

I take a deep breath. If this really is an alien civilisation on the other end of the line, I've got to make sure I give the right answer. The fate of the human race could depend on what I say. It could mean the difference between invasion and an invitation to join the Galactic Federation.

With a trembling finger, I tap on the phone screen to bring up my camera then flick through the gallery of pictures until I find the one I'm looking for.

"This is my family," I tell Buzz. "Mum and Dad, Charlie and me."

In the picture Dad is standing with one arm around Mum, smiles beaming from both their faces as a fairytale castle sparkles with light behind them. I'm holding Dad's other hand looking up at the camera with a huge grin as Mum cradles baby Charlotte in her arms. This photo was taken at Disney World in Florida on Dad's day off from his training on the Light Swarm launch simulator at the Kennedy Space Centre. It's my favourite picture of us all together.

Without me touching it, the photo suddenly zooms until Dad's face fills the screen. I can see every detail of his smile, his sunny features unlined with worry. He looks so happy – just like the rest of us. I search his eyes for any trace of doubt – looking for a sign that could explain what's gone wrong, but I can't see a thing.

"Where is your dad?" Buzz asks.

Outside my bedroom window, the sky is ink-black with a blanket of stars scattered across it. I hold the phone up to the open window.

"He's up there," I say sadly, scanning the sky for any sign of the International Space Station.

For a second, the low hum of the phone's vibration seems to quieten as if Buzz is looking out from the camera lens. Then I hear the soft tone of its voice again.

"That is where we come from too."

As I hold the phone up, I see a new picture appear on the screen, pale pinpricks of light studding the sky above Beacon Hill. I recognise the shapes of the different constellations Dad showed me when we stargazed together on nights like this: Pisces and Pegasus, Cygnus the swan and Aquila the eagle with the bright star of Altair shining from its head. When Dad first taught me how to look at the stars, I could never quite see the shapes of the animals and people that gave the constellations their names. We'd spend hours tracing their shapes in the sky, while Dad told me crazy stories about Greek myths and gods. But now as I look at the Archer with his bow drawn low over the horizon, these shapes Dad showed me are all I can see.

"From the stars..."

As I stare at my mobile, the shapes of these constellations suddenly shatter into pieces. I watch, amazed, as the stars begin racing towards the screen, pinpricks of pure white light erupting into brilliant blue flares and then fading to a red glow at the edge of the screen, again and again and again. It's like some out-of-control spaceship is taking me on a tour of the galaxy, travelling at the speed of light. I see clouds of dust and gas scattering into spirals and swirls as the emptiness of space surrounds me.

"We've travelled so very far."

In the centre of the screen, I see a single pinprick of light grow larger before splitting into twin stars, these bright white sparks transformed into fiery spheres. In the shadow of the larger star, I see the shape of a planet in orbit, a blue-green world that almost looks like Earth.

“Is this where you come from?” I murmur, watching hypnotised as the blue-green planet fills the screen. As the camera swoops, I can’t tear my gaze away from the bizarre alien landscape that’s unfolding in front of me, so strange yet strangely familiar too.

Twin suns shine in a bright purple sky above a vast forest filled with giant plants and ferns. Black flowers bloom in every direction and rising above these I can see huge golden spirals, shimmering like trapped sunlight. These unearthly skyscrapers are exactly the same as the ones I drew in class today, but instead of pastel colours they now glisten in high definition. This impossible picture – these imaginary alien cities spiralling into the sky – it’s all real.

“Home.”

The soft vibration of Buzz’s voice echoes inside my head. As the camera twists, the screen seems to blur as it circles round this enormous alien structure. It looks as if it’s made of liquid metal, its golden surface pulsing as a swarm of creatures rise up into the sky. The sound of their beating wings buzzes from the phone as behind them on the screen I watch the sun being pulled apart by an invisible hand.

The picture slowly fades to blackness as the phone stops vibrating. I jab my finger against the screen – not wanting this weird science-fiction film to end. It’s like my mobile phone has suddenly got a billion-dollar special effects budget and I can’t wait to find out what happens next.

But the only thing that appears is the golden spiral on my home screen, the icon now spinning soundlessly.

“Was that you?” I ask, the blurry image of those alien creatures frozen in my mind. I should feel scared, but somehow I know that Buzz doesn’t mean me any harm.

“We are the Hi’Ive.”

The golden spiral pulses in time with the sound of Buzz’s voice. The robotic tone that I heard when Buzz first started speaking has completely disappeared now. I can’t tell whether I’m speaking to a man or a woman, but does that even mean anything when you’re talking to an alien?

“If you’re an alien,” I ask, trying to make sense of the impossible, “how do you even understand English?”

The phone begins to vibrate in my hand, jumping like a flea with every buzz. I see countless texts scrolling across the screen, almost too fast to read. It looks like every text I’ve ever sent or received all scrolling by in the blink of an eye. A babble of voicemail messages erupt from the speaker, the sound of these all blurring into a single buzzing whine.

“We are the Hi’Ive,” Buzz replies. “We learn.”

I stare at the phone, my head ready to explode. But before I can ask another question, my bedroom door starts to open and I quickly shove my buzzing mobile under my pillow.

“What are you looking at?” Charlie asks as she peers round the door. “Is it rude?”

“No,” I say, my face flushing red all the same. I switch on my bedside lamp, Charlie taking this as a green light to shuffle into my room. “What are you doing out of bed anyway? You were supposed to be asleep ages ago.”

Charlie’s wearing her Peppa Pig pyjamas and, as she climbs on to my bed next to me, I can tell that she’s been crying.

“What’s the matter?” I ask, putting my arm around Charlie’s shoulder as she hugs her favourite teddy close to her chest. Dad gave this to Charlie just before he took off for the International Space Station. The cuddly bear is dressed in a bright silver spacesuit and Dad named it Teddy Gagarin, but Charlie just calls it Teddy Gaga now. “Are you OK?”

“I had a bad dream,” Charlie replies with a snuffle, wiping her nose with the bear’s furry paw. “I dreamt that aliens stole Daddy’s spaceship and he couldn’t find his way home.”

She looks up at me, her cheeks still blotchy and red.

“I want Daddy,” she sobs, breaking into tears again. “I want him home now.”

From upstairs I can hear the sound of Mum moving things round in her attic studio. Usually this would be my cue to shout upstairs and let Mum come and deal with Charlie. But after our argument, I don’t think that’s a good idea. I need to try something else to distract her.

“Hey,” I say, lifting Teddy Gagarin’s paw to wipe Charlie’s tears away. “Do you think Teddy Gaga would let any aliens steal Dad’s spaceship?”

“No,” Charlie sniffs.

“No,” I agree. “And you know what he’d do if they tried? He’d duff them up – just like this.” Wagging his arms, I show how Teddy Gagarin would throw some furry kung fu moves to fight off the aliens. “Douf! Douf! Douf!”

Charlie giggles.

“So you don’t need to worry about Dad getting lost in space. He’ll be back home next week to tell you and Teddy all about his adventures.”

I get up from the bed, reaching my hands out to Charlie before lifting her down.

“Come on,” I say. “Let’s get you back to bed before Teddy Gaga goes kung fu crazy.”

Charlie holds my hand as I lead her across the landing back to her bedroom. Through a crack in the curtains, the moon throws soft shadows over her Winnie the Pooh wallpaper. As she climbs into bed, I can see the fat yellow bear floating through the sky above her head. A bit like Dad really, although the ISS has solar panels instead of a blue balloon like Winnie the Pooh.

Deep inside, I feel the same surge of emotion that fuelled Charlie’s tears. I wish Dad was home too, but if he and Mum are really splitting up, I don’t know how long he’ll stay for...

With her head on her pillow, Charlie looks up at me with her big brown eyes.

“Aliens aren’t real, are they, Jamie?” she says, her nightmare now fading in the glow from her Peppa Pig nightlight.

“No,” I lie as I tuck her in under the covers. “You don’t need to worry about aliens.”

DEDUCTION

1. How do you know that 'Buzz' is talking to Jamie and not just sending a message out to anyone who can hear?
2. How do you know that 'Buzz' wants to learn about Jamie?
3. Who are the constellations in the night sky named after?
4. Where is 'Buzz' now? How do you know?
5. How did 'Buzz' learn to speak English?
6. Why does Jamie's face 'flush red' when Charlie comes into his room?
7. What is Charlie worried about?
8. How does Jamie make her feel better?

QUERY

9. Why do you think that the author tells you about how kind Jamie is to his sister?

DEDUCTION

1. Buzz is responding to Jamie's speech. It is asking Jamie questions.
2. It asks Jamie about his dad.
3. Greek myths and Gods
4. 'Buzz' is on Jamie's mobile phone. He says 'We have travelled so very far' which implies that he is on Earth. When Jamie holds up the phone to the sky, 'Buzz' can see the stars.
5. From Jamie's texts and messages on his phone.
6. Because he is doing something he doesn't want his sister to find out about.
7. Aliens stealing her dad's spaceship so he can't get home.
8. He says that her teddy bear, Teddy Gaga, wouldn't let that happen.

QUERY

9. It makes us like Jamie more so that we become more involved in the story.

HOMework

DRAW A PICTURE OF WHAT
YOU THINK BUZZ LOOKS LIKE.

DRAW WHAT YOU THINK
BUZZ'S HOME PLANET WOULD
LOOK LIKE.