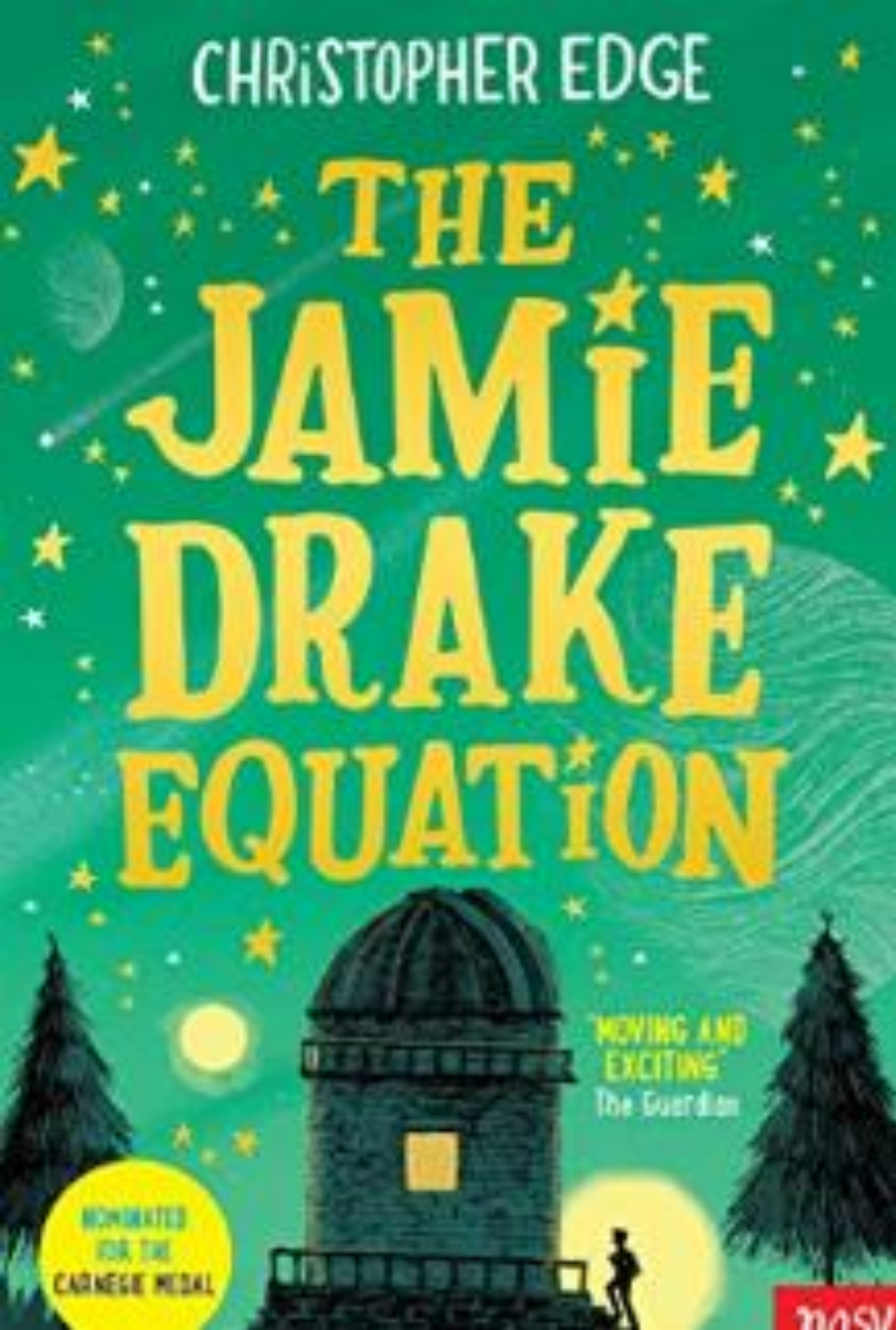


RECALL

- Can you give a brief summary of the story so far.
- Use no more than 5 sentences!

RECALL

- Jamie Drake is a normal boy whose dad is an astronaut who is about to launch a mission to search for aliens on Friday (which is also Jamie's birthday).
- He goes to an observatory near his house because his mum and dad used to go there when they were younger.
- While he is there, he meets an astronomer who is also looking for alien communications through a hacked link to the Hubble Space Telescope.
- Jamie accidentally downloads an alien called 'Buzz' onto his mobile phone who begins communicating with him and taking over his mind from time to time.
- Jamie overhears his mum and dad discussing their divorce which he had no idea about it via a video-link to the ISS.

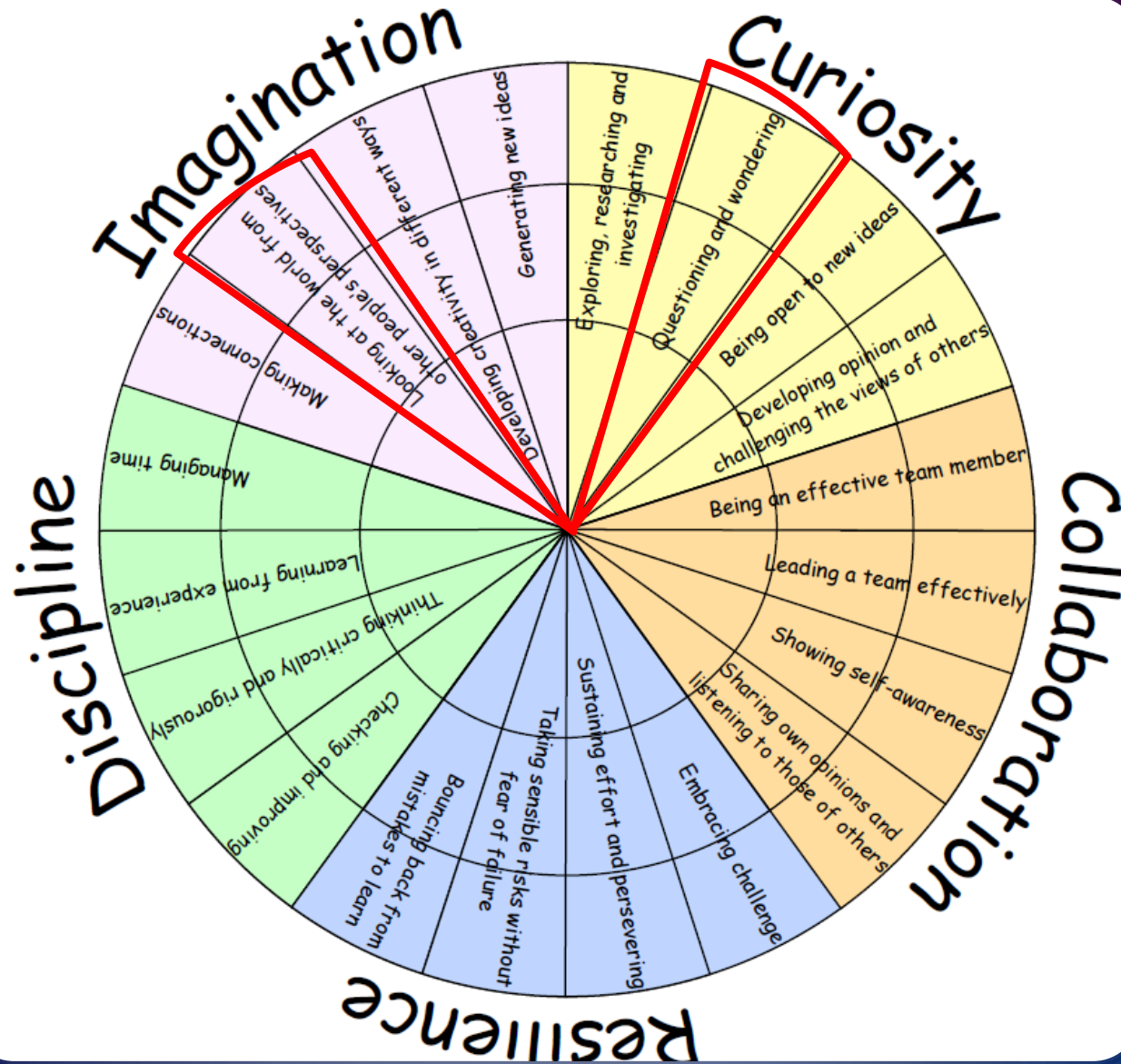


THE JAMIE DRAKE EQUATION

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?



Sitting on the side of the stage next to Mrs Solomon and Mr Hayes, I look out at the rest of the school. The hall is packed, every class sitting crossed-legged on the floor, while the teachers huddle round the edges. It's easy to spot my class sitting halfway down on the right. In their alien costumes, they look like a band of extraterrestrial bounty-hunters who've beamed down to school by mistake, marooned in a sea of royal-blue school uniforms.

In the front row the littlest kids are bouncing up and down with excitement, pointing up at the stage as they talk among themselves. But I'm not the person they're excited to see. He's on the huge

projector screen that has descended from the ceiling to fill most of the stage.

I glance up at this to see my dad floating on the ISS.

"Hello, Austen Park Primary. This is Commander Dan Drake and I'd like to welcome you all aboard the International Space Station."

Everyone starts clapping and cheering, their excited whoops filling the hall with noise. I didn't know any of this was happening until I got to the school hall. Hayley Collins was waiting for me there and explained how Dad was feeling bad about missing my birthday on Friday, so they'd set up this live link as a birthday surprise.

Raising his hands, Mr Hayes gestures for quiet.

"So," the head teacher says, speaking into the microphone that's transmitting his words to the ISS, "who's got the first question for Jamie's dad?"

A forest of hands shoots up across the hall.

"Your class teachers have all got roving microphones so that Commander Drake can hear your questions. So if you're picked to ask a question, wait until you've got hold of the microphone before you start to speak."

Mr Hayes drops his gaze on to the front row. There a little kid with black curly hair looks like he's trying to pull his own arm out of its socket, thrusting his hand as high as it will go in his desperation to get picked.

"Let's start with a question from Miss Brightman's class. Harrison, isn't it?" As his face lights up with excitement, the boy nods his head as Miss Brightman rushes to hand him her roving microphone. "Don't forget it's a long way up to the International Space Station, so speak as loudly and clearly as you can."

Harrison wraps both his hands around the microphone, staring up in wonder at my dad on the projector screen. That's when I realise, I recognise this little kid. It's the baby alien boy who stopped me in the corridor on Monday morning and I instantly know what question he's going to ask.

"How do you go to the toilet in space?"

Everyone starts laughing, even Mr Hayes. There's a two-second delay and then Dad joins in too.

“That’s a very good question, Harrison,” he says, trying to pretend he hasn’t been asked this a million times before. Dad lets go of his microphone for a second, letting this float in front of him. “As you can see, the microgravity up here can make going to the toilet a little tricky. Luckily, the toilets on the International Space Station use suction, a bit like your vacuum cleaner at home, to make sure we don’t end up with any unpleasant floaters.” Dad grabs hold of his microphone again. “But on my spacewalk tomorrow, I’ll be wearing Maximum Absorbency Underpants just in case I need a wee.”

I sink down in my chair as everyone laughs again. Now the whole school knows that my dad will be wearing a space nappy tomorrow.

Luckily, that’s the only question about Dad’s toilet habits as Mr Hayes fields the questions from the rest of the school.

“What’s it like being weightless all the time?”

“What do you eat and drink on the space station?”

“What can you see out of the window right now?”

And Dad answers them all, talking about how great it is to be in space and showing off some of the cool things he can do in microgravity along the way, like spinning a space somersault, drinking water droplets out of the air, and playing with the yo-yo that I bought him for Christmas.

“Let’s take a couple of questions from Jamie’s classmates now,” Mr Hayes says, his gaze landing on the alien outpost of Class Six. “What do you want to ask, Aaron?”

Aaron lowers his Dalek plunger as our teaching assistant, Miss Tyler, hands him a microphone.

“What would happen if you forgot to put your spacesuit on before your spacewalk tomorrow?” he asks.

There’s the usual two-second delay before Dad begins his reply.

“Well,” he says, “my spacesuit is really more of a spaceship. It’s called an Extravehicular Mobility Unit – or EMU – for short. The life-support backpack gives me eight hours of oxygen and the rocket propulsion system of the Advanced Manned Manoeuvring Unit that fits over the EMU will transport me safely to the higher orbit of the Lux Aeterna launch platform. Inside my helmet there’s a communication system that lets me talk to Mission Control and a built-in video camera that lets them see

exactly what I’m doing.”

“But what would happen if you forgot to put this on?” Aaron interrupts, the egg whisk stuck to his head wobbling as he keeps a tight hold on the microphone.

There’s a burst of static as Dad’s and Aaron’s voices overlap, which gives Miss Tyler the chance to wrestle the microphone out of Aaron’s grasp. Then Dad’s voice fills the hall again.

“Well, space is a dangerous place. There’s cosmic radiation to contend with, the temperature can veer from 120 degrees Celsius to minus 150 degrees in the shade, and without any air to breathe in the vacuum of space, I’d probably suffocate in about fifteen seconds flat.”

I shift uneasily in my seat, suddenly wishing I was anywhere but here.

“Let’s have another question,” Mr Hayes says brightly. “What do you want to ask, Araminta?”

Taking the microphone in her lizard claw, Minty fixes my dad with a bug-eyed glare.

“Can I go on one of the Light Swarm spaceships?” she demands. “I want to meet the aliens.”

Up on the big screen, a huge grin spreads over Dad’s face.

“Looking at the pictures your teachers have sent me of your intergalactic outfits, I thought I’d made contact with aliens already. But I’m afraid you wouldn’t be able to hitch a ride back to your home planet on one of the Light Swarm probes.”

Dad reaches out of shot to pick something up and when he reappears on the screen I see he’s holding what looks like a silver postage stamp in the palm of his hand. I recognise this immediately as one of the Light Swarm probes.

“You see, these tiny spacecraft are only one centimetre long and there’s just no space for anyone to hitch a ride.” With a delicate touch, Dad slides out a tiny black chip from the heart of the probe. It looks just like any SD card that you’d find inside your phone. “This wafer-sized chip weighs less than a gram, but contains all of the probe’s cameras, its communications system and power source. When I reach the HabZone module of the Lux Aeterna launch platform tomorrow, I’ll make sure that all these chips are fitted to the Light Swarm probes before I press the button to send them on a hundred-and-eight-trillion-kilometre trip to Tau Ceti.”

The school hall is silent now as everyone stares at this interstellar spaceship that fits into the

palm of Dad’s hand.

“Of course it’s not just my spacewalk that I’ve got marked on my calendar tomorrow,” Dad continues, placing the probe out of shot. “There’s another reason that it’s a special day.” As he reappears on the screen I can that see he’s holding a gift-wrapped box. “I think there’s just time for one final question.”

This is my cue. Hayley has explained everything to me and she’s now standing in the wings on the other side of the stage, holding the same gift-wrapped box in her arms. As Mr Hayes hands me the microphone I know exactly what I’m supposed to say, the words written down on a scrap of paper just in case I forget.

Hey Dad, it’s Jamie – what have you got me for my birthday?

Then Dad’s going to wish me happy birthday for tomorrow and Hayley will walk out to give me my birthday present. When she saw how worried I was looking, Hayley couldn’t stop herself from telling me what’s under the wrapping paper. It’s a Lego model of the International Space Station and Lux Aeterna Launch Platform. It even comes with a minifigure of my dad in his EMU spacesuit. Hayley says it’s one of a kind. It should be the best birthday present ever, but as I look up at Dad on the projector screen I feel a sudden surge of anger.

Is this what life is going to be like now? Sharing my dad with a roomful of strangers and getting my birthday presents second-hand? Having everyone think that Dad’s some kind of superhero when really he’s tearing our family apart?

I grip the microphone more tightly, my knuckles whitening as I stare up at Dad’s smile.

“Are you there, Jamie?” he asks, a slight echo on his words as they fill the school hall.

Mr Hayes clears his throat to let my dad know that the satellite link is still working. From the other side of the stage, Hayley shoots me a worried look, her arms sagging slightly under the weight of the Lego box.

A faint buzz from the phone in my pocket reminds me that Dad doesn’t know everything after all. There’s a lump in my throat the size of a small planet and as I fight back my tears, I know the

question I’ve got to ask.

“If it’s so great being an astronaut, why don’t you just stay up there?”

It takes two seconds for my question to reach Dad on the ISS, so before he even has the chance to answer, I drop the microphone and run off the stage.

“Jamie!”

I hear Hayley and my teachers calling me back, then the sound of Dad’s voice crashing through the speakers.

“Jamie, are you OK?”

But I keep on running – out of the hall and past the empty classrooms, out through the door and across the playground, out of the school gates and down the street – not stopping until I finally run out of breath.

I can’t stop myself from crying as I stare up into the clear blue sky. Through my tears, I see the sun shining down uncaringly. According to Mrs Solomon, the light that’s now hitting my eyes left the surface of the sun eight minutes and twenty seconds ago. That was probably when Dad was showing off his yo-yo tricks on the ISS. Before I told him he should just stay in space if he was having so much fun up there. What’s the point of him coming home if he’s not planning to stay?

I feel my mobile phone vibrating in my pocket, the muffled sound of Buzz’s voice calling out to me. I pull it out to see the golden spiral on the home screen spinning frantically.

“Jamie!” Buzz’s voice sounds almost anxious. “There’s a storm coming.”

With a hollow laugh, I hold the phone up to the bright blue sky.

“Don’t be stupid,” I say. “There’s not a cloud in sight.”

But before Buzz can speak again, my mobile phone starts ringing.

I look down at the caller display and see three letters there.

DAD

With a fresh surge of fury, I stab my finger against the power button. The ringtone cuts out as the screen fades to black.

QUERIES



How does the author show you that everyone in the school is excited about this assembly?



Why did the author describe the hands that went up to ask the first question as a 'forest'?



What happened earlier in the book that appears again in this chapter?



Look at the highlighted paragraph: why do you think that the author has put this into the story?

PREDICTION

AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER, WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN DURING DAD'S SPACEWALK?

HOMEWORK

LISTEN TO CHAPTER 19 ON PODBEAN:

<https://www.scotholme.com/podcasts>

