



Switch

A.S. KING

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning and connect it to an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

Sixteen-year-old Tru Becker is growing up in a world that doesn't work the way it should. For almost a year, time has stood still, and the world is governed by N3WCLOCK, a web page that tells you what time and date it would be if Earth hadn't fallen into a fold in time and space. Is it an alien invasion? Government conspiracy? Tru has more pressing things to worry about. There's a strange switch in the middle of her house that her dad is hiding beneath bigger and bigger boxes, so Tru feels as if she's living in a plywood maze. Her mother left when the clocks stopped, and her brother is disappearing deeper into his own problems.

Tru struggles to navigate her family's problems, especially when the inside of her house starts to spin on its axis. As the family try to reconnect with each other within the ever-changing landscape of their home, Tru starts to understand the way energy moves through her into the world.

Switch is a surreal, generous novel that explores the effects of trauma and uncertainty on family and adolescents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.S. King is the author of many acclaimed novels and has won the Michael L. Printz Award in 2020 for *Dig*, a Michael L. Printz Honor in 2011 for *Please Ignore Vera Dietz*, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 2012 for *Ask the Passengers*, The Amelia Walden Award, The Carolyn Field Award, and one time she won £50 on a scratch card.

The *New York Times* called her 'one of the best YA writers working today'. King lives in Pennsylvania.

BEFORE READING

1. How important is it to you to know what time it is? Discuss how you use time in a normal day. How would your life change without time to mark it?
2. What do you expect of a book described as 'surreal'? What kind of writing techniques do you think the author might use to tell this kind of story?
3. Talk about your experiences during the 2020 lockdowns. Did this lockdown time make you think differently about your connections with friends and family, and your community?

WHILE READING

1. On the first page of the story, Tru says 'you are probably confused. We are confused, too.' What questions do you have about the story at this point? What questions do you think the characters have?
2. How does King explore the theme of lies and lying in the book?
3. The novel is broken into three main sections – AFT3RMATH, 1NCID3NT / EV3NT, and ORIG1N. What distinguishes each of these sections? How does Tru describe the significance of these terms?
4. Why does Richard speak so much in Portuguese? Why do you think he feels so isolated from the rest of his family?



5. Tru struggles throughout the book to come up with her thesis statement. Why do you think this is? What would you say her thesis statement is?
6. How would you choose to mark time if it stopped?
7. How does Tru feel about the members of her family?
8. What do you think Tru's Dad is afraid of? Why is he building the boxes?
9. What direction does the energy of the book travel? What does the switch turn on/off?
10. When do you realise that Sister is a liar? How do you know?
11. 'Isn't that why you threw so far? So everyone would look?' says Carrie to Tru (p. 143). Why does she say this? Is she right? Why do you think Tru threw as far as she did?

AFTER READING

CHARACTERS

1. Why do you think the writer uses the metaphor of the missile launcher, rifle and assortment of bombs to describe Tru, Richard and Sister? What does this tell you about each of them?
2. Who is in control of the narrative? Do you trust that they are telling the truth? Make note of any moments where you doubt whether Tru's story accurately reflects the reality.
3. We only learn about Sister from the mark she leaves on other people's lives. 'My sister—the eddy / the hurricane. Us—the eye / hiding in the bathtub' (p. 22). What marks does she leave? Where do you think she is?

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. King uses dashes rather than commas or full stops to punctuate Tru's thoughts: 'I stared at the workings / chewed them like gum / but was too scared to flip it / blow the bubble' (p. 3). What impact does this technique have on the way you read and understand the novel? Do you like it? Why/why not?
2. Make a list of the phrases that are repeated multiple times in the novel. What do you think the significance of these phrases are? Do they always mean the same thing, or do they mean different things at different points in the story?
3. Explain the difference between literal and figurative or metaphorical language. In small groups, discuss whether the following examples are literal or figurative:
 - The switch
 - The rooms inside the house spinning
 - Tru's ability to freeze people in time

THEMES

Trauma

1. What traumas (small and large) are each of the characters in the book navigating? Why do you think they struggle to share these with each other?
2. Why do you think language that is figurative or surreal might help us to talk about things that might otherwise be too difficult or painful?
3. Reflect on the collective trauma that people have experienced as a result of the pandemic. How do you think this shared trauma is explored in the book?

Emotions

1. Tru believes that 'when we are stuck in an unmoving arrow / fold in time and space, emotions are the powerful force that will break us out' (p. 14). What does she learn about emotions throughout the book? How do her own emotions change?
2. Tru belongs to the Psych Team: 'five weirdos who believe that the human mind has something to do with escaping a fold in time and space' (p. 12). Are they correct?
3. Choose one of the emotions from Plutchik's Clock, and make a list of words and images that remind you of that emotion. How does reflecting on an emotion help you to understand it better?

Time

1. Why do you think we rely on our understanding of time so heavily? What does the book suggest would happen without a way to mark time?
2. 'Cell phone providers argued over the idea of fake time / decided it would be unethical', (p. 1). Do you agree that it would be unethical to use 'fake time'? What do you think of N3WCLOCK as a solution?

RESPONDING

1. Use metaphors to write about a difficult emotion or memory. Write a short reflection on whether this style of writing allowed you to explore this emotion/memory differently to describing it literally.
2. Imagine that you are one of the other 'anomalies'. Write a scene for the book that explores a day in your life. What is happening? When do you realise that something unusual is happening? How does it make you feel? Write the scene in first person, using the voice of your chosen character.
3. Draw a map of Tru's house, using the descriptions from the book. Which rotation does your map align with? Make a note of what is happening inside the house during this rotation. Imagine that you are Carrie, seeing inside the house for the first time. What is your reaction?
4. Write a prologue to the book that shows how the world reacted when time first stopped. Think about who you are, and which point of view you'll tell the story from.