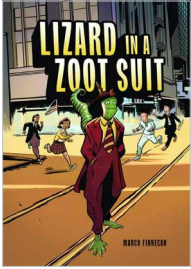




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Lizard in a Zoot Suit

Marco Finnegan
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

An imaginative adventure story for fans of *E.T.* and *The Shape of Water*

Los Angeles, 1943. It's the era of the Zoot Suit Riots, and Flaca and Cuata have a problem. It's bigger than being grounded by their strict mother. It's bigger than tensions with the soldiers stationed nearby. And it's shaped like a five-foot-tall lizard. When a lost member of an unknown underground species needs help, the sisters must scramble to keep their new friend away from a corrupt military scientist—but they'll do it in style. Cartoonist Marco Finnegan presents *Lizard in a Zoot Suit*, an outrageous, historical, sci-fi graphic novel.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Marco Finnegan is an educator by day and writes and draws comics by night. He lives in Temecula, California.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Secondary years 7-12
- Ages 12+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Graphic Novel

Themes/Ideas:

- Science Fiction
- Adventure
- American History



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Before Reading

Ask the students what they might know about America in the 1940's and create a mind-map. You can revisit this after finishing *Lizard in a Zoot Suit*, and see if students have new information to add.

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book – how close were your predictions to the actual novel?

Exploring the Text

Discuss the science-fiction genre. What are some tropes or rules of the genre? Name some examples of books or films that are indicative of the genre. How does *Lizard in a Zoot Suit* fit into the science-fiction genre, and how is it different?

What are the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Compare and contrast the characters of Cuata and Flaca. How do they approach and solve challenges that arise in the story differently?

Both the sisters and the lizard are struggling with the grief of losing a loved one. How is this loss explored in the novel? How does it affect their actions?

Many books and movies, especially science-fiction, have plots involving people finding and wanting to care for an otherworldly creature (for example *E.T.* or *The Shape of Water*). Why do you think this is so common? What could the creature be representing and why?

Read author Marcus Finnegan's Author Note about the Zoot Suit Riots. How does this change your understanding and reading of the text? Do further research on the Zoot Suit Riots. How are some of these same issues of racism and violence still deeply relevant today?

“Zoot suits embodied not only the unpredictable nature of jazz but also a larger stance of defiance. Among LA's young residents of color, their popularity soared.”
Choose and research another fashion item that's taken on cultural or historical significance and write a report on it.

Visit your school or public library and collect several other graphic novels. Compare them with *Lizard in a Zoot Suit*. How is *Lizard in a Zoot Suit* similar or different to other graphic novels?

Lizard in a Zoot Suit has Spanish slang and phrases throughout. Could you translate the Spanish using the illustrations and other dialogue as context? Look up the meaning of any words that you're not sure about.

Exploring the Illustrations

A short section of the novel is from the lizard's perspective, as he reflects on losing his family. How are these spreads presented differently to the rest of the novel through the style and colour?

Take a section of one of the novel and recreate it as unillustrated prose. Think about how to convey the mood, imagery, action and dialogue in words, rather than in graphic novel style. After completing this exercise, have a class discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of each style. Which do you prefer writing?

In most graphic novels (and comics), there is usually a white space between the panels called the gutter. Consider the difference between large and small panels, square and irregular shapes and full-page illustrations. Copy a page of the book, cut out the frames and arrange them on a piece of paper with a smaller gutter between each frame and then with a larger gutter. What difference does this make to our reading?

The graphic novel format allows authors to employ filmic techniques in the narrative. Find examples of filmic techniques in the novel and discuss how the author has used them to enhance the narrative.

Choose several spreads from the book and perform a visual analysis by responding to the following points:

- Objects – What objects and people can you see?
- Size – What size are the objects in relation to each other?
- Setting – Is a setting obvious? What is it?
- Colours – How are the two colours used?
- Position – Where are objects in relation to each other? Are they in the fore-, middle- or background?
- 'Camera' angle – From what angle do the pictures appear to be drawn? For example: high eye level, low, bird's eye view.
- 'Shot' type – What type of 'shot' has been used: close-up, medium, long, very long, etc.?
- Depth of Field – What is and isn't in focus?
- Light – Is the picture light or dark? Is it the same all over?
- Lines and vectors – In what direction do lines in the picture lead the eye?
- Body language and clothing – What facial expressions, gestures and use of space can you see? What is being worn?