



Branded

Eric Walters

Reading Level: 4.1

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AR Quiz # 136646

Book Summary

The principal announces that the school is implementing uniforms, and Ian finds himself caught in a conflict. His friend Julia wants him to devise a plan to fight the decision, and the principal is determined to convince Ian that the uniforms are a good idea. Ian wants nothing to do with the issue. While doing research for a social justice class, he learns that the manufacturer of the uniforms is on the top-ten list for human rights violations. When he tells the principal this, all he gets is a reminder that the penalty for refusing to wear the uniforms is suspension, and Ian finds himself caught in a whole new conflict—one with himself.

Author Bio

Eric Walters is no stranger to social justice issues. His book *When Elephants Fight* (co-written by Adrian Bradbury) takes on the subject of the effect of wars on children, and *War of the Eagles* and *Caged Eagles* are novels about Japanese internment in British Columbia. A passionate literacy advocate, Eric enjoys visiting schools to talk about the power of books. Eric lives in Mississauga, Ontario.

Connecting to the Text

Theme

Theme, the broad idea of the story, can be revealed in the lessons learned by the characters. Use the following topics for individual writing or research exercises, or group debate and discussion.

Standing up for what you believe

- Julia takes her role as student president seriously. She likes to be consulted by the principal on decisions that affect the students. It's difficult for Julia when Mr. Roberts tells her she can't be involved in these decisions, because she wants to stand up for what she believes. At the same time, she has to remain within the school's rules.
 - ◆ Think of ways you can let people know about something you believe in, while operating within your school's rules. For example, if you want to raise awareness of bullying, how could you go about it? Describe the topic that's important to you and your ideas of how to respond. Can you share it with your teacher or school administrator? Is there a way to make it happen?
 - ◆ How does your response compare to Julia's (use of walkouts or protests)?

Helping others

- Ian learns that there are much worse things than having to wear a uniform to school. He learns that his school's uniforms were made "in a sweatshop by child labor." Mr. Roberts encourages Ian to take a leadership role in starting a social justice club at their school, to "make the student population aware of world issues...to think globally and act locally."
 - ◆ Imagine a social justice club at your school. What would it take to establish one? What kind of activities would this club participate in?
- Ian learns a lot about how products like school uniforms can be manufactured in countries that don't have the same child labor laws as his country. In chapter eight, he learns "In some countries, there are no laws, or if there are laws, they're so different from ours. It's legal for little kids to work twelve hours a day. It's legal to pay them next to nothing."
 - ◆ What are ways that you can make informed decisions about the clothes (or other goods) you buy?
 - ◆ If you found out that your shoes or clothes were made under these conditions, how would you feel about that, and what would you do?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Writing

Use the quotations below to connect to the novel's characters, plot and themes through short stories, poems, rap compositions or by rewriting lyrics to popular songs.

- *Many people think it takes bravery to fight back, but it takes even more bravery to not fight back.* (Mr. Roberts)
 - ◆ Imagine a situation where someone has to “hold back” in a difficult situation. How could this person demonstrate bravery? What circumstances lead to the difficult situation you imagine? How does that person(s) feel, while “in the moment”?
 - ◆ Do you believe this quote is true in every circumstance? Why, or why not?
- *You learn from good examples and bad examples.* (Ian)
 - ◆ Name someone you believe acts as a poor example to kids your age. What advice could that person give to reach kids in a meaningful way?
 - ◆ Now think of someone you feel acts as a good example. If you could tell them what to keep doing or what to try next, what would it be?
- *You know, in half the countries in the world, kids would be thrilled to get a uniform and be able to go to school.* (Ian)
 - ◆ Imagine that you are a child working in a sweatshop, being paid very little to work twelve hours a day. There are no laws to protect you, and even where there are, they are often broken. Where you work, there are no health or safety codes. What would you like to tell the people who buy the products you work on? How would you like to share your experience with them?
- *An open mind is a good thing.* (Mr. Roberts)
 - ◆ Can you think of someone you know who is “close-minded” and someone who is “open-minded”? How do their world views differ? Tell a story from each person's point of view. Encourage students to exaggerate creatively to make their point.

Vocabulary

The following words are used in *Branded* in the context of Ian's school life, the introduction of uniforms and Mr. Roberts' leadership style. Invite students to choose from the writing exercises below, using four or more vocabulary words in their responses.

- School Life

administration	auditorium	period	strict
announce	council	principal	suspension
assembly	detention	responsibility	uniforms
assignment	dismissed	school crest	
attention	mandatory	semester	

- ◆ Write a paragraph describing what happened when Mr. Roberts told the students and staff about the uniforms.
- ◆ Imagine that you are a student in Ian's class and you're against the new uniforms. Write a diary entry the night following the assembly. How do you feel about the uniforms? What choices do you have?
- ◆ Describe some of the rules Mr. Roberts put forward at Ian's school, and how he enforces them. If he was your principal, how would you feel about the rules?
- ◆ Describe some of the rules at your school. How are they enforced? Are there some rules (and consequences) you wish your school had?
- Forming an Opinion

admired	decision	opinions	principle
agree	different	participate	question
argument	disagree	position	understanding
bravery	neutral	practices	

 - ◆ Choose something that you have a strong opinion about, such as the legal driving age, school uniforms, the dress code at your school, homework on the weekends, use of cell phones in school, or another topic that's important to you. Now imagine there is someone who feels the opposite way about it. Write a letter to that person in which you try to convince them to consider your way of thinking.
 - ◆ Describe someone who you found out did not live up to your expectations of them. Perhaps it was someone who said they'd do something and didn't, or it could be a celebrity who was caught in a scandal which changed your opinion of them. Write a letter to them, explaining how your opinion about them changed, and why.
 - ◆ Describe someone who you admire. What is it about them that formed your opinion of them? Write a paragraph describing what you admire about them, and why.

Art

1. As an art project, ask students to imagine that the students and staff at their school will soon be wearing uniforms (or will soon get *new* uniforms). Ask students to design the uniforms and share their designs with the large group. Challenge students to consider factors such as durability, affordability and popularity in their designs. You may wish to introduce other considerations, such as weather or sensitivity to religion and culture.

2. There are many famous quotations from Mahatma Gandhi. Ask students to choose one from the list below that resonates for them and create a postcard, book cover or bookmark that illustrates and incorporates the theme of the quotation.

- ◆ *I want freedom for the full expression of my personality*
- ◆ *An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind*
- ◆ *Be the change you want to see in the world*

Option: You may wish to ask students to exchange the postcards with classmates or friends, as a way to learn about each other. There are many inspirational quotes from Gandhi available online through search engines such as Google.

Citizenship and History

The following ideas can be modified for independent or small group activities. Encourage students to make references to the novel where possible; for example, in chapter 1, we learn that Mahatma Gandhi said, “There are many causes for which I am prepared to die, but none for which I am prepared to kill.”

- Two historical figures are mentioned in Chapter One of *Branded*: Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King. Ask students to research either Gandhi or King, and prepare a short monologue in the voice of that person. Monologues could begin, “My name is...and here’s my life story...” Students should be prepared to share their monologues with the large group. Encourage students to be creative in their presentations (i.e., wearing the clothing Gandhi or King would wear). Ask the students who researched Gandhi to ask questions of the students researched King, and vice versa.
- In Mr. Roberts’ social justice class, the students discuss the political views of Mahatma Gandhi, who argued to use “passive resistance” and “told his followers to absorb the blows but not strike out against those who were hitting them”, and Dr. Martin Luther King, who argued that “it’s the moral duty of somebody to disobey a law he doesn’t agree with.” As a large group, discuss these views and their historical context. How were Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States influenced by the work of Gandhi?
- Mahatma Gandhi is honored around the world as an important leader in the independence of India, and was famous for non-violent “civil disobedience.” Ask students to write a short report on Mahatma Gandhi, answering the following questions:
 - ◆ Where was he born?
 - ◆ When Gandhi was your age, what was he doing?
 - ◆ When did he die, and how?
 - ◆ Gandhi is celebrated in India on his birthday, October 2. What is this day called, and what kind of activities do people in India participate in?
 - ◆ Name three interesting facts about Gandhi.

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

1. Lead a group discussion in which students consider the values demonstrated by characters in the novel. To get things started, ask the group to consider Mr. Roberts' values, based on what they know about him, and record those values on the board. (We know he values punctuality because he expects everyone to be on time; he values order because his desk is very organized; and he values fairness because everyone has to wear the uniforms, even the staff.)
 - ◆ Following this discussion, challenge students to look at their own values. *What's important to me, either at school at home or when I'm with my friends?* As you discuss values, add new values to the list (prompts: fairness, equity, honesty, prosperity, creativity).
 - ◆ Another way to explore individual values is to ask students which public figures they admire. Ask them to articulate why, and then see if they can link this to their own values. For example:
 - I admire this performer because s/he came from a rough childhood but worked really hard to get where s/he is today (values: self-determination, perseverance);
 - I admire this sports figure because s/he scores a lot of goals, and my team wins a lot of games (values: teamwork, performance);
 - I admire this actor because s/he is really good looking and rich (values: beauty, wealth);
 - I admire this singer because s/he does concerts for charity and raises a lot of money for important causes (values: unselfishness, caring, compassion).
2. The following topics would be suitable for individual reflection and writing exercises, or group discussions.
 - ◆ Mr. Roberts is a strict principal. Ask students to find two examples from the text that demonstrate this. For example, in chapter 1, Ian says, "We had a school assembly once a week, and it was the same as any other class. If you didn't attend you were given a detention." What does Mr. Roberts hope to achieve through his many rules? Does he achieve his goals? How do his methods compare to the rules in your school?
 - ◆ Discuss the pros and cons school uniforms. Use examples from the text where possible, and link the examples to students' experiences. Encourage students to show how a pro for one person could be a con for another. For example, Mr. Roberts argues that uniforms will help with school security because people will identify outsiders more easily, so students will be safer. But what if those same students get picked on, on their way home from school?