



## **Firewall**

Sean Rodman

Reading level: 4.1

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### **Book Summary**

Josh is a gamer. After his parents' divorce and his move from Chicago to a small town where he doesn't know anybody, he copes by staying up way too late playing *Killswitch* online. Then he discovers a "mod" version of the game that is an exact reproduction of his new town. Strange things start to happen in the game, and they are somehow connected with events in the real world.

### **Prereading Idea**

Ask a student to volunteer to show the class how a virtual-reality game operates. Perhaps the student can show how he builds structures in the game, creates weapons or employs weapons to attack other players or defend himself. The student volunteer can also point out how the first-person perspective in virtual-reality games gives the player a more in-depth experience.

**Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas**

- In the world of virtual-reality games, players can create alter egos, becoming anything they want to become and possessing powers that would be unattainable in reality. Ask students to create alter egos of themselves in an alternate universe. Each alter ego's appearance, powers, world and relationships should be designed by the student. The world and characters may be presented in any digital format, using software that is available to the students.
- In chapter 2 (pages 15-19), Griggs lists the cliques, or social groups, in his high school by name and description. He and Josh then discuss the hierarchy of the cliques and how they operate in their high school. Divide students into small groups and ask them to read Griggs's list of cliques and then compare it to the cliques in their own school. Ask each group to create a three-column chart of the cliques in their school. Have them list the cliques in their school in the first column, then describe in the second column how those cliques operate within the school and, in the third column, how the cliques interact with one another and with students who are not in any clique. After discussion, have students individually write a reflection piece on the social impact of the cliques.
- In chapter 8, Josh imagines a comic strip of what he considers his best life. Ask students to think about their lives and what aspect of it they could enhance to make it almost perfect. Then ask each student to create a storyboard, comic strip or short story to convey the idea of their perfect life to present to the class.

**Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel*****Character***

At the end of chapter 1, Josh says, "I'm dead in the virtual world, and my real life sucks even more." Ask students to discuss passages from the book that either support or refute Josh's statement about his life based on his actions and the situations in which he finds himself. Then have students work with a partner to write a two-voice poem featuring Josh's voice and the voice of his alter ego. Students should include alternating lines spoken by each character and unison lines that are spoken by both characters. Students should practice reading the poems in character and then present their poems to the class.

***Conflict***

The main characters in *Firewall* deal with both internal and external conflicts. Ask students to select one character and create a chart identifying the different conflicts the character faces, the emotional impact of each conflict on the character, and how each conflict is resolved. Invite students to share their charts with other students who selected the same character. As a class, discuss new insights or understandings based on the sharing activity.

**Theme**

The title of the book could reflect the theme. On page 50 of chapter 5, Jane states that the firewall can become a prison, not a castle. Ask students to restate Jane's explanation of a firewall in a thematic statement and to create a poster with that statement, visual elements and text excerpts that support the thematic statement. Display the thematic posters in the classroom.

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. Why does Josh refuse to answer Jane's calls and texts?
2. How does Josh continue to make an enemy of Aaron, the football player?
3. Who are the "pod people"? Why does Josh give them that name?
4. How does Griggs respond to Josh's idea that "nobody wants guys like us in their group"?
5. The author uses a metaphor to describe high school: "High school is a combat zone that can't be survived alone." Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
6. How do Josh and Griggs react when they find the mod that is built like Valleytown? What weirdness do they notice about the virtual version of their town?
7. Why does Josh begin to use the Valleytown mod like his own playground?
8. Why is Jane hurt by Josh's reaction when she gives him access privileges to edit the Valleytown mod?
9. What occurs in Josh's life that leads him to unplug from people so that he can plug into the virtual-reality game?
10. Why does Josh feel so uncomfortable killing the zombies that have faces of real people? What does Josh do about his idea that Sudo is using the virtual game as practice for real life?

**Writer's Craft****Vocabulary Enrichment**

Ask students to find the following words in the novel and look up their meanings in the dictionary, writing the definition that most closely fits the meaning of the word as it is used in context. Have students create a student-developed writing dictionary to be used throughout the year. Students should add a page for each of the words and list the meaning of the word. Students will continue to build their understanding of the words by adding synonyms, antonyms, illustrations and ways they see the word used during the year.

pixelated	ch. 1	stealthy	ch. 4
obscures	ch. 1	fiddles	ch. 5
clamber	ch. 1	futile	ch. 6
flinch	ch. 1	ferocity	ch. 6
wince	ch. 1	obsidian	ch. 10
grimace	ch. 1		

**Author Biography**

**Sean Rodman's** interest in writing for teenagers came out of working at schools around the world. In Australia, he taught ancient history to future Olympic athletes. Closer to home, he worked with students from over 100 countries at a nonprofit international school. He is currently the executive director of the Story Studio Writing Society, a charity dedicated to unleashing the creativity of young writers and improving literacy. Sean lives in Victoria, British Columbia. For more information, visit [www.srodman.com](http://www.srodman.com).