



Vanish

Karen Spafford-Fitz

Reading level: 3.7

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AR Quiz # 158381

Book Summary

Fourteen-year-old Simone is having trouble making friends at her new school. When her leadership studies class is paired with kindergarten students to mentor throughout the school year, to her surprise Simone enjoys the Kinderbuddy Project, and she develops a special friendship with her Kinderbuddy, Lily. But as the bond between Simone and her Kinderbuddy grows, she realizes that a crisis is looming in Lily's family. Simone calls upon Aaron, the reluctant heartthrob of the class, for help, and they become key witnesses to events neither of them could have predicted.

Author Biography

Karen Spafford-Fitz grew up in an old limestone farmhouse near Kingston, Ontario, where her early training as a writer involved reading thousands of books. In fact, it was impossible to walk across her bedroom without stubbing a toe on *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *Nancy Drew*, *The Hardy Boys*, *Trixie Belden*, and her father's old Lone Ranger books.

Karen studied English Language and Literature at Queen's University. She followed that up with a degree in Education and went on to teach elementary and junior high students for eight years. Two daughters and a move across the country later, Karen began creating her own stories for children and teenagers.

When Karen is not writing in her Edmonton studio, she is often running with her rambunctious German shepherd, who helps Karen train for her next half marathon. Karen also enjoys speaking to students about the inspiration for her stories, the creative process and the writing life.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Novel Study

To engage students with the main characters in *Vanish*, use the following as group discussion topics, individual novel study or paragraph-writing exercises:

- In chapter 1, Simone explains that she lives with her mother: “My dad took off before I was born...It’s always been just Mom and me. Her jobs never pay well, and we’re always struggling to make ends meet.” She also says, “Given my father’s disappearing act, I don’t have a great opinion of dads to start with” (ch. 7). How do Simone’s feelings about her own dad influence her understanding of Rachel and Lily’s situation?
- In chapter 7, Simone says, “Slowly the pieces start fitting together. The fake address, Rachel’s mood swings, her visits to the school.” For each of these “pieces,” Simone made an assumption about Rachel; that she was protecting Lily from Blake. What was really happening for each of them?
- After Constable Dakin interviews Simone, she has an “Aha” moment. She says, “Maybe Blake didn’t abduct Lily and Rachel after all.” After reading chapter 14, explain what changed Simone’s mind.

Plot Study

In *Vanish*, Simone demonstrates a wide range of emotions. In chapter 1, she feels bored in her Leadership Studies class and wishes she had friends. Then Simone makes a friend in Lily, and later partners with Aaron to find Lily after her abduction. Invite students to track Simone’s emotions, chapter by chapter, using the chart below. After reading each chapter, students should include a sentence describing Simone’s emotions, as below. After finishing the novel, invite students to discuss their results in pairs or triads.

Option: You may wish to expand this exercise to include discussion of emotional intelligence or plot progression. Students may also wish to define their own indicators (bummed, scared, freaked out, etc.).

Emotions Chart

CHAPTER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
anxious	4														
worried	3														
happy	2														
bored	1														

Chapter 1: _____

Chapter 2: _____

Chapter 3: _____

Example Chart

CHAPTER	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
anxious	4								×	×	×				
worried	3					×		×				×	×	×	
happy	2		×	×	×	×		×							×
bored	1	×													

Chapter 1: Simone is bored in her new school and in Leadership class.

Chapter 2: Lily chose Simone for a Kinderbuddy. Simone was please and enjoyed herself for the first time at school.

Chapter 3: Simone really enjoys hanging out with Lily but can't understand why Lily's mom seems to be friendly one moment and angry the next.

The Writer's Craft

In chapters 1-3, Karen Spafford-Fitz uses a powerful metaphor to describe Ms. Boyd, Simone's Leadership Studies teacher. Ask students to consider the following examples. To what is Ms. Boyd being compared? Do we better understand how Simone feels about Ms. Boyd through use of this metaphor?

- Ms. Boyd “gives our class a deadly stare...Her hand twitches toward her pocket”
- Ms. Boyd’s “hand flits toward her over-stuffed caution-card pocket”
- Ms. Boyd “delivers one more menacing stare...”
- Ms. Boyd has a “demented warning look...”
- Ms. Boyd “picks out a few kids...by her killer glare”

Connecting to the Curriculum**Leadership**

Simone is in the eighth grade Leadership Studies class. In chapter 1 she says, “At my last school, the leadership study kids had to deliver speeches about bullying or school spirit to classes of bored kids.” In her new school, the Kinderbuddy program is part of the Leadership class. In a large group, invite students to discuss leadership, recording key themes on the board.

What qualities make a good or poor leader? Can anyone be a leader? Are there reluctant leaders? What leaders do you admire, and why? What activities would you choose if you could develop your own Leadership Studies class? Following this discussion, bring attention to Simone's behaviors in *Vanish*:

- Mrs. Mankowski said that “one of the goals of the Kinderbuddy project is for [students] to learn to work with new people” (ch. 2). Why is that an important quality for leaders? Do you think Simone learned to do this in *Vanish*?
- Provide an example where Simone demonstrates the “poor” leadership qualities you listed. For example, she jumps to a conclusion about Lily's Dad, assuming he abducted Lily.

- Think of an example where Simone demonstrates the “good” qualities you describe. For example, when the Kinderbuddies are being assigned, she notices that Lily is uncomfortable with Aaron so she suggests that they all work together. Later, when Lily gives Simone a gold ring, Simone returns it as quickly as possible.

Art

As a creative project, ask students to design a split portrait of Simone and the Runway Girls, using a collage of images and text. On one side, use images of Simone, and on the other, of the Runway Girls: Stacy, Miranda and Tessa. Include images and text that represent the dichotomy. For example:

- Simone: poor, no exotic vacations, single parent, no friends, lonely, shops at a thrift store. She is not a cool kid at school and has lived in a lot of tough neighborhoods.
- Runway Girls: have a lot of nice things, “mummies and daddies,” are an exclusive clique, can shop for the “latest styles” at the malls (ch. 1).
- Consider where each “side” has opportunity to demonstrate leadership and add text bubbles describing each. For example,
 - ◆ *Simone doesn't have a lot of money, so she knows how to use resources wisely. Simone cares about Lily and it shows. She has a phobia about speaking in front of people, but she could do it if she tried, especially if it was important to her.*
 - ◆ *The Runway Girls are very popular. If they choose to do the right thing, they could be role models for a lot of kids. There is opportunity for them to grow into leaders.*

Option: Introduce students to the concept of juxtaposition, where objects or themes are intentionally positioned side by side, resulting in a new and often deeper meaning. Searching “juxtaposition photography” online will provide examples; however, preview to ensure images are suitable.

Drama, Vocabulary

In chapter 10, Simone watches a newscaster reporting on the “apparent double abduction” of Lily and Rachel by Blake. Invite students to act out a news report at the end of the novel, summarizing Simone’s experiences with Lily. Encourage students to find out the facts through novel study, and then conduct live interviews in their skits. Students should use a 4-W approach to summarize what happened in *Vanish*: What, Who, Where and When.

You may wish to expose students to the format of a news report. It begins with a title and a catchy lead that briefly summarizes the 4-Ws. The remainder of the newscast should be organized into a few concise paragraphs with consistent tense.

Encourage students to use 5 or more words from the vocabulary list below in their reports.

abduct	details	mistake	serious
assumed	disturbed	nervous	vanished
awkward	eventful	notice	whereabouts
confusing	explained	questions	
deadbeat	impact	ransacked	
describe	interrupt	remember	