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Teacher's Guide for

# Alien Invasion & Other Inconveniences by Brian Yansky

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## HOW DID THE BOOK BEGIN?

I wanted to write a novel about alien invasion, but I knew that I didn't want to write a novel about the invasion itself. The first line I wrote told me a lot about the book I was going to write: *It takes them less time to conquer the world than it takes me to brush my teeth.* It gave me my narrator's voice, and it told me these aliens were going to have to have awesome power and it confirmed that the story was going to be about what happened after the aliens conquered the earth. So the beginning of the book really was the beginning of the book.

## WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

### SYNOPSIS

Jesse is in history class when a formidable, efficient race of aliens quietly takes over the earth in less time than it takes him to brush his teeth. Most humans simply fall asleep and never wake up. In moments, everyone Jesse knows and loves is gone, and he finds that he is now a slave to an alien leader. On the bright side, Jesse discovers he's developing telepathic powers, and he's not the only one. Soon he's forging new friendships and feeling unexpectedly hopeful. When a mysterious girl appears in his dreams, talking about escaping,

Jesse begins to think the aliens may not be invincible after all. But if Jesse and his friends succeed, is there anywhere left to go?

Brian Yansky offers a funny, grim novel packed with everything boys and sci-fi fans love: aliens, humor, action, and a healthy dose of triumph.

## YEAH, BUT WHAT'S IT REALLY ABOUT?

When I wrote about the Sanginians conquering and settling Earth, I was thinking of Colonialism and Imperialism by European and (late in the period) American powers, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and still going strong into the beginning of the last century.

The powerful (in terms of military power) conquering the weak and exploiting them has been a trend on our planet for a long time. In the early days no one bothered to justify this much, but as civilization became more, well, civilized, there was a greater need for justification. So by the era of Colonialism a lot of people were uncomfortable with just conquering and taking what they wanted, so they looked for justification. Many European powers claimed that they were civilizing the world, bringing civilization to primitives who would otherwise live on in their ridiculously outdated ways. Various religions claimed they were saving souls. Sometimes, as in the American West, the claim was that civilization needed to expand and that progress was good for our species so primitives would just have to change or face extinction. Sorry for your loss.

In my novel, I wanted to create a situation where the people of earth had to deal with a civilization so superior to them that they had no chance at

defense. The Sanginians are brutal and arrogant imperialists. They believe it's their right to take over worlds and enslave the primitives that exist on them. I wanted to use this situation to explore various issues, some of which I anticipated, like slavery and other social issues, and some of which came up as I wrote, like ecology.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is it possible there might be other life in the universe? Why? Why not?
2. Why are the Products Rights Groups on the home planet of Sanginia upset about this colony? What is their view of product/non-product?
3. Is the planet, Earth that is, better off under a Sanginian colony or a human society? The Sanginians have a love of green and nature and a dislike for technology. What changes do they make in Austin? What further changes do you think they might make to the planet?
4. Does might ever make right? The history of humankind is littered with examples of advanced societies (in terms of technology) conquering less advanced societies. Is this always wrong? What are some arguments for why it is wrong? Are there any situations when it might be right?
5. At one point in the novel Lord Vert argues that the enslavement of humans by Sanginians will help them join the larger community of the universe. Is this a valid argument for what the Sanginians do?
6. Is it possible that one day our machines might become so advanced they achieve consciousness like the machine worlds in the universe of the novel? If this is possible would they need us or want us? Why or why not?

- 7 . Bartemous is a Sanginian anthropologist whose specialty is America. What are some of the mistakes he makes about American history? Is the history in our history books infallible? What are some of the reasons errors might occur?
- 8 . In the novel, Jesse, talks to his father often. How is he able to do this? In what ways does talking to his father help Jesse?
- 9 . Why does Michael react the way he does on the bus when he and Jesse first meet? What does he mean slavery is in his genes?
- 10 . What are some of the ways the main characters change because of the invasion?
- 11 . Why do you think the Sanginians call humans “product”?
- 12 . Why do the aliens say, “I’m sorry for your loss”? Do they mean it? Are there phrases in our culture that we use without thinking?
- 13 . The Sanginians don’t believe product can have any but the most primitive powers of the mind. How does this help Jesse and his friends escape? What does Jesse say his and his friends’ one advantage is?
- 14 . Near the end of the novel one of the rebels says, “We’re New America” when Jesse asks where New America is. What does he mean?
- 15 . Jesse and his friends and other humans begin to have abilities that allow them to read minds. Would it be cool or terrible to be able to hear what other people think?
- 16 . Is the ending hopeful? Do you think humankind has a chance of surviving?

## ACTIVITIES

1. Have students, working with partners, research several examples in the history of mankind where an advanced society conquered a less advanced people. Have them sum up the consequences.
2. Group Activity: Do a Readers' Theater. Have groups of three or four find scenes in the book that they can convert into a short skits and perform for the class.
3. Write a persuasive essay by a Products' Rights Group member who is against conquering civilizations or by a government official who argues the need for such colonization.
4. Have students create a You-tube video or draw graphic novel panels or create a power-point presentation of one important scene in the novel.
5. Host a quiz show. Break the class up into teams of three or four and come up with content questions from the novel. Group the questions by difficulty. Offer small prizes to the winners.
6. Have students, working with partners or groups, do an art project showing what earth or one particular place on earth would look like when the Sanginians have made it their world.