



Agent Angus

K.L. Denman

Reading Level: 2.7

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AR Quiz # 150840

Book Summary

Angus and his best buddy, Shahid, share a love of science and their robot, Gordon. Recently, the artistic Ella Eckles has had a peculiar effect on Angus. When a stink bomb at the school provides a chance for him to talk to her, he claims to share her interest in reading facial expressions and declares his ambition to become a crime-solving mentalist. He impresses Ella by identifying the stink bomber, but fails to mention he witnessed a scrawny kid setting off the bomb. When Ella's treasured sketchbook is stolen, she asks Angus to find the thief. Shahid thinks Angus should confess that he's not a mentalist, but Angus is certain he can learn to read people and recover Ella's sketchbook. He asks Shahid to help him investigate the suspects: Gaga Girl; the art teacher, Mr. Wilder; and finally, "scrawny kid." Equipped with rearview sunglasses and an informant who lurks in the washroom, the duo bungles their way through a series of encounters that alarm Shahid and provide Angus with some unfamiliar exercise.

Author Biography

K.L. Denman was born in Calgary, Alberta, and spent her childhood in a house one street away from the open prairie. When she was eleven, her family moved to Delta, British Columbia, and she got to know life on Canada's West Coast: tides, clam digging, rain gear, green grass year-round and enormous trees. It was there that Kim and her sisters got their first pony. She continued to live near Vancouver for many years while finishing school, attending college, and eventually getting married and starting a family. She always loved writing and when her teenaged children and their friends provided inspiration and re-kindled memories of this challenging passage, writing for teens became an irresistible venture.

Today she lives on a small farm on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast with her family of people, two dogs, three cats, two horses and an elderly mule. When she's not writing or caring for critters, she's reading, trying to grow vegetables, taking pictures, or volunteering at therapeutic riding.

Connecting to the Text

Theme

One of the themes in *Agent Angus* is reading people by observing their body language and facial expressions. Ask students to identify examples from the novel where characters “read” each other (there are many). In a large group discussion or paragraph-writing exercise, ask students to discuss this theme, drawing from examples from the novel. Can using visual cues like body language and facial expressions sometimes prove helpful? But can they also lead us to misunderstand another's intentions or motivations? You may also wish to bring the topic of cultural differences into the discussion. Examples of “reading” from the novel include:

- Angus describes the “scrawny kid.” He says he had a “nasty sneer.” Angus described him to Ella: “See how he's twitching...and whispering...Now he's looking around... He's got guilt written all over him” (ch. 1).
- Angus observes Shahid after Grunt leaves the washroom: “He drops his hand, his eyes narrow and a whole bunch of other stuff happens, fast. Little changes in his face occur that involve his brows, his nostrils and his mouth” (ch. 3).
- When Ella tells Angus that someone stole her sketchbook, she “emits a little whimper and starts blinking rapidly. Her mouth quivers, and she opens her arms wide” (ch. 3).
- Mr. Wilder, the art teacher, “stands with his arms folded across his chest” (ch. 4).
- Angus observes Rolf: “He's shuffling along, hands in pockets, narrow shoulders hunched” (ch. 11).

Connecting to the Curriculum

Art

Ella wants to be an animator so she spends a lot of time practicing drawing facial expressions. She says, “I'm trying to capture the details that show what people are feeling...It's hard to pinpoint certain facial cues” (ch. 1). As an art project, challenge students to collect images of various facial expressions and create a collage. You may wish to bring in magazines or newspapers that can be cut up, or invite students to print images from online and then paint or color them using different media. Students may wish to try different approaches, such as:

- A side-by-side presentation of two very different emotions, such as happiness and despair, or confusion and confidence.
- A timeline showing a human “life cycle” from infant to elder, with a different emotion demonstrated for each age.
- A celebration of diversity where one or more emotions are presented with images from different cultures, religions, countries, etc.

Drama

In chapter 5, Angus and Shahid decide they need to learn more about facial expressions so they look for websites that show people's faces demonstrating different emotions. In *Agent Angus*, many emotions are noted, including anger, confusion, defiance, guilt and surprise.

As a drama exercise, ask students to work in small groups and make a list of eight to ten emotions. Then have students write each emotion on an index card. After switching cards with other small groups, have group members take turns demonstrating the emotions written on each card, with other group members guessing the emotions. After each demonstration, have students record what facial expressions or body language provided clues to guessing the emotion. After all groups have finished, debrief the exercise in a group discussion. Were the groups' findings similar? Did any groups find cultural differences in facial expressions or body language?

Geography, Social Studies

Angus and Shahid are close friends. In chapter 2, Angus says they have a "solid kinship." He also notes that there are some cultural differences between them. For example, Shahid's father is responsible for finding a wife for Shahid, but Angus says, "It doesn't work like that in my family." Encourage students to explore and celebrate cultural diversity within their own experience. Ideas include:

- Invite students to share music, photographs, stories, clothing, celebrations, desserts, etc., that demonstrate the culture of their families, teams or clubs.
- Invite students to share an experience where they had a friendship or interaction with someone whose culture was very different than their own.

Language Arts

Angus tells many lies in the novel. For example, he tells Ella he is a mentalist and an expert in body language. He said, "From out of nowhere comes this lie" (ch. 1) and "then inspiration strikes" (ch. 4). Given how naturally and convincingly Angus can lie, one has to admire his creativity under pressure! As a language arts exercise, ask students to imagine ways that Angus might use his creative talent in other, more acceptable ways.

1. Write a diary entry for Angus ten years in the future. Imagine that he is a professional storyteller, songwriter or videographer. How is he now using the ability that once got him in trouble?
2. Write a short paragraph describing an occupation where Angus' ability would be an advantage. For example, a toys or video games designer would need to come up with fresh, innovative ideas. How would his ability be an advantage to Angus? To the company he works for?

Vocabulary

K.L. Denman uses many powerful descriptive words in *Agent Angus*. Drawing from the vocabulary list below, invite students to use four or more of the words in descriptive sentences or short paragraphs. Students may wish to describe an event from the novel, or write creative sentences of their own. As some words may prove challenging for some students, chapter numbers are included. To get students started, examples of sentences are below.

abrupt (ch.6)	frivolous (ch.14)	pathetic (ch.9)	renewed (ch.2)
disgusting (ch. 12)	furtive (ch.1)	peculiar (ch.2,5)	sensitive (ch.1)
disturbing (ch.4)	massive (ch.1)	potential (ch.4)	shapely (ch.1)
elusive (ch.2)	menacing (ch.6)	reliable (ch.1)	trustworthy (ch.1)

- Being able to read body language would be a great skill to have but it takes a lot of practice. For now, it is an *elusive* talent I can only admire.
- The sea monster was *massive* and *menacing*! We wondered if the life raft was *reliable*!

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

In chapter 7, Angus realizes that he completely misread Mr. Wilder. He says, “I’d built a false reality in my mind and—Whoa! Maybe that’s what mentalists mean when they say reality is in our head?”

Making assumptions about others’ intentions or motivations is easy to do. To raise self-awareness of this, ask students to keep a log for a day or two that tracks when they (or others) could easily misread a situation or a person’s intentions or motivations. You may wish to indicate that students should find three to five examples, so the exercise is not too arduous. Examples can come from personal experience, observation of others, or even news programs, tv shows or movies. The intention of this exercise is not to come to a “right answer” or conclusion; rather, it is just to become more aware of how easy it can be to misjudge a person or situation.

- This exercise may prove challenging for some students so you may wish to share some examples, such as: *I saw a large, muscular high school senior working out in the community gym. I bet he’s a dumb jock. But it could be he’s recovering from a long illness and trying to get healthy.* Or *Standing outside at lunch, the principal had her arms crossed. Is she super mad or is she just cold?*
- Once complete, lead a large group discussion, debriefing the exercise. Was it difficult at first, and did it get easier? Were there examples where students recognized facial expressions and body language played a part in their assumptions? When assuming another’s intentions or motivations, were most of them negative?
- You may also wish to discuss current or historical events that involved one person making an assumption about another, with tragic consequences. A recent example is the murder of Trayvon Martin in Florida.