

## STARI Unit 2.2 *The Big Nothing* Distance Learning Packet

---

### Materials needed:

- This independent/partner reading packet
- *The Big Nothing*
- Fluency passage packet at assigned level



### For families:

This packet is designed to guide your students through the work of reading and comprehending the Unit 2.2 novel, ***The Big Nothing***, by **Adrian Fogelin**. Students may use the packet independently, working at home.

### How can I support my child in completing this packet?

STARI is meant to be a **discussion-based curriculum**. In fact, our research shows that it is students' talk about text that builds their comprehension skills. Therefore, we encourage you to try to find any possible opportunities for students to engage in talk about text. Could students connect with their partners virtually, to talk via phone or computer? Could you, or a sibling or other family member, read the novel and talk about it with your child? The more students are able to talk about the text, the more improvement in their skills we expect to see.

### How should students use the fluency packets?

STARI students have been assigned a fluency level: A, B, C, or D. They have been taught a 2-day fluency routine. The steps of the routine can be found on pp. 3-4 of the packet. Students should engage in this 2-day routine one to two times per week. Each day of the routine involves a timed reading of the assigned passage. If students are able to pair up with someone (parent or family member, or online partner) to time them, that is ideal. Alternatively, they can record themselves reading and use the recording to time themselves, or submit the recording to their teacher.

### How can we access the novel?

The novel for this unit is *The Big Nothing*, by Adrian Fogelin. If students were not able to bring their copy of the novel home prior to schools closing, your local bookstore or an online retailer may be able to ship it to you, or you can buy a digital copy. Alternatively, you may be able to check out a digital copy from your local library. Finally, some STARI schools have directed students to online free libraries such as Open Library and National Emergency Library.

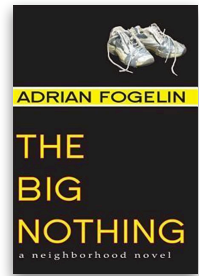
This packet is no substitute for the rich discussion that takes place in STARI classrooms, but we hope that it provides continuing support for students in these difficult times. For more information, contact your child's teacher or visit [serpinstitute.org/stari/distance-learning](http://serpinstitute.org/stari/distance-learning).



This page has been intentionally left  
blank for printing purposes.

**For students:**

This packet will guide you through the work of reading and comprehending the Unit 2.2 novel, ***The Big Nothing***, by **Adrian Fogelin**.



**Where do I start?** Check with your teacher. Where were you in the novel when school closed? If you can't figure it out, you can start from the beginning.

**What do I do?** Follow along in the packet to read the text in *The Big Nothing* and answer the questions in the packet. Complete the fluency routine when the packet reminds you to.

**But don't I need a partner?** Yes, if possible. For fluency, can you connect with a classmate over the phone to do fluency practice? Can you ask a parent or sibling to time you when you read? If you don't have a partner, record yourself reading (you can use your phone). Then you can listen to the recording and time yourself.

For reading the novel, can you connect with a classmate to discuss the book on the phone? Can a parent, sibling or family member read the book too, and discuss it with you?

**But I don't have the book!** If you are not able to get the book from school, try downloading a copy from your local library, or Open Library, or National Emergency Library. You can read it on your phone.

This isn't the same as reading in class with your teacher. But you can do it!

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 1-9)

**Overview:** As you read, try to figure out what life is like in Justin’s family and how Justin is feeling.

**Vocabulary:** During reading, clarify the following words:

**paranoid** (p. 1): acting suspicious or mistrustful without a good reason

**suspect** (p. 1): to believe something

**indignantly** (p. 2): showing anger about something unfair

**confess** (p. 2): to admit guilt

**confronting** (p. 4): to stand up to someone



**Comprehension:** Read p. 1 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

What characters are introduced here?

---

---

What do we learn about Justin from his letter?

---

---

---

What do we learn about Justin’s family?

---

---

---

**Guided reading, continued**

 **Read pp. 2-7 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Why are Justin’s parents fighting? Look for a hint in the text, read it aloud, and explain.

---

---

Can you find a place in the text where Justin talks about the way he feels about himself? Why does Justin feel this way?

---

---

Re-read from the top of p. 5. What is “The Big Nothing”?

---

---

 **Read pp. 7-9 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Summarize what happens after Jemmie stops by Justin’s house.

---

---

Find a place where Justin says something sarcastic or funny. Write down what he said and explain.

---

---

So far, what do we know about Jemmie?

---

---



Before you read these pages, complete the Day One fluency routine for passage 6.

# Partner reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 10-14)



**Pages 10–12:** Justin sees Ben, thinks about Duane, and goes home.



Look for:

- facts about Duane

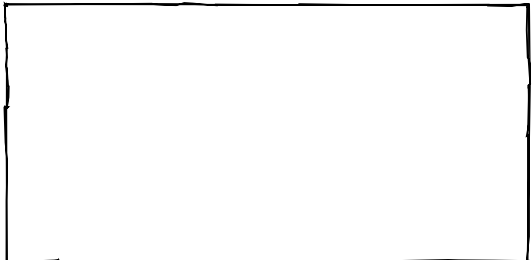

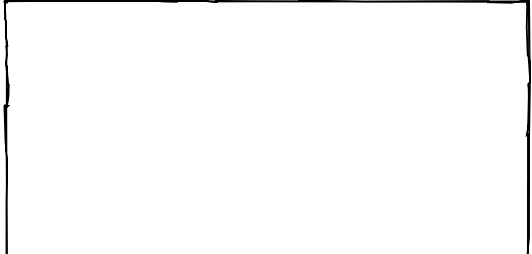



Read silently to where it says, “I do a drop and roll . . .” on page 12.



Turn and talk with your partner.

Together, come up with three facts about Duane. Draw and label a small picture for each fact. Write the page number where you got the fact.

Fact	page #	Picture
1. _____ _____ _____	_____	
2. _____ _____ _____	_____	
3. _____ _____ _____	_____	

continued 

Why do you think Justin misses his brother Duane so much?

---

Share your answer with your partner. Write down your partner's idea, too.

---

**Pages 12–14:** Justin's mother comes home after a big fight with Justin's father.



Look for:

- details of what happened with Justin's parents
- another Big Nothing



Read silently to the end of the chapter on page 14.



Turn and talk with your partner.

### **Skills Review: Summarizing**

Summarize what happened with Justin's parents.

WHO \_\_\_\_\_

DID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

Together, find where it says, "I unplug myself when things are bad, but her Big Nothing is way bigger than mine." What does Justin mean here?

Justin means that his mom \_\_\_\_\_

---

### **Make a prediction**

What do you think will happen next with Justin and his mother?

---

### **Lesson 20**





Before you read these pages, complete the Day Two fluency routine for passage 6.

## Guided reading

### The Big Nothing (pp. 15-26)

**Overview:** As you read, look for strong characterization. Authors have characters think, say, and do things to let us know who they really are. Ask yourself, “Why did the author have this character think, say, or do that? What is she trying to tell us about this character?”

#### Vocabulary:

**conviction** (p. 20): Convictions can mean “beliefs.” In this chapter, you’ll read that Ben’s mom has anti-war convictions.

**mediocre** (p. 24): to be just okay at something

**harmonize** (p. 25): to sing or play along with a tune

**surgeon general** (pp. 25-26): a spokesperson on public health issues



**Comprehension:** Read pp. 15-19 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Identify some strong characterization for Justin’s mom. What did Justin’s mom think, say, or do? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

---



---



---

Identify some strong characterization for Justin. What did Justin think, say, or do? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

---



---



---

Look at the top of p. 18. What does Justin do with his mom’s purse? Did he do the right thing?

---



---



**Guided reading, continued**

 **Read pp. 20-26 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

What is life like in Jemmie's family?

---

---

What do Justin and Nana Grace talk about while they're washing dishes?

---

---

What kind of mom is Jemmie's mom? Make an inference and give evidence.

---

---

---

Read the last paragraph before the break on page 26. What do these thoughts tell us about Justin? About Justin's family?

---

---

---



Before you read these pages, complete the Day One fluency routine for passage 7.

## Partner reading

### The Big Nothing (pp. 26–30)



**Pages 26–27:** Justin goes home and makes lunch.



Look for:

- actions that show how much Justin cares about his mom.



Read silently to where it says, “Moo juice coming right up,” on page 27.



Turn and talk with your partner.



Find two things that Justin does to try to cheer up his mom. Draw and label a small picture for each thing. Write the page number.

\_\_\_\_\_ page:

\_\_\_\_\_ page:

continued



**Pages 27–30:** Justin gets an invitation from Ben.



Look for:

- reasons why Ben and Justin do what they do
- details about Justin’s mom



Read silently to the break on page 30 (this symbol: ○).



Turn and talk with your partner.



*Ben wants Justin to come to the movies because*

---

*Justin decides to go the movies because*

---

### Characterization



Look back over pages 26–30. Find a line or two that tells us about Justin’s mom. Copy the lines below.

---

---

---

page # \_\_\_\_\_

*These lines tell us that Justin’s mom*

---



# Homework

## The Big Nothing characterization

Justin's mom (Kathy Riggs) and Jemmie's grandmother (Nana Grace) are two important characters.

1. Circle the quotes that talk about Nana Grace. Underline the quotes that talk about Justin's mom.
2. Draw a sketch on the next page of each character.

“Under her apron is a shiny blue dress with pink flowers. The feathers on her hat flutter as she shakes her head.” (page 21)

“[She] doesn't dress, except to put on a robe and slippers.” (page 27)

“She scuffs down to the kitchen and dumps most of the sandwich in the trash.” (page 27)

“‘You *do* have a healthy appetite,’ she says, sliding more bacon onto my plate.” (page 23)

“Maybe you'd be better at piano . . . Won't know unless you try.” (page 24)

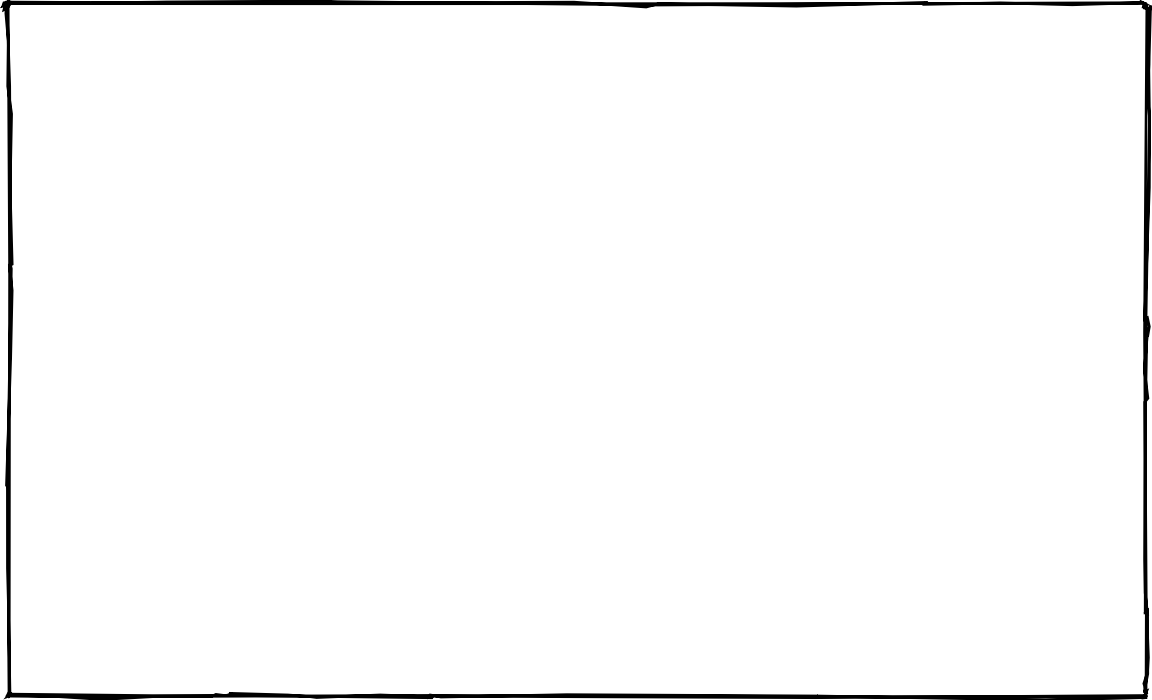
“As she burrows deeper into the bed, she sends out a muffled command. ‘Go. To. School.’” (page 16)

“‘Come on in the kitchen. I'll wash, you dry,’ she said.” (page 23)

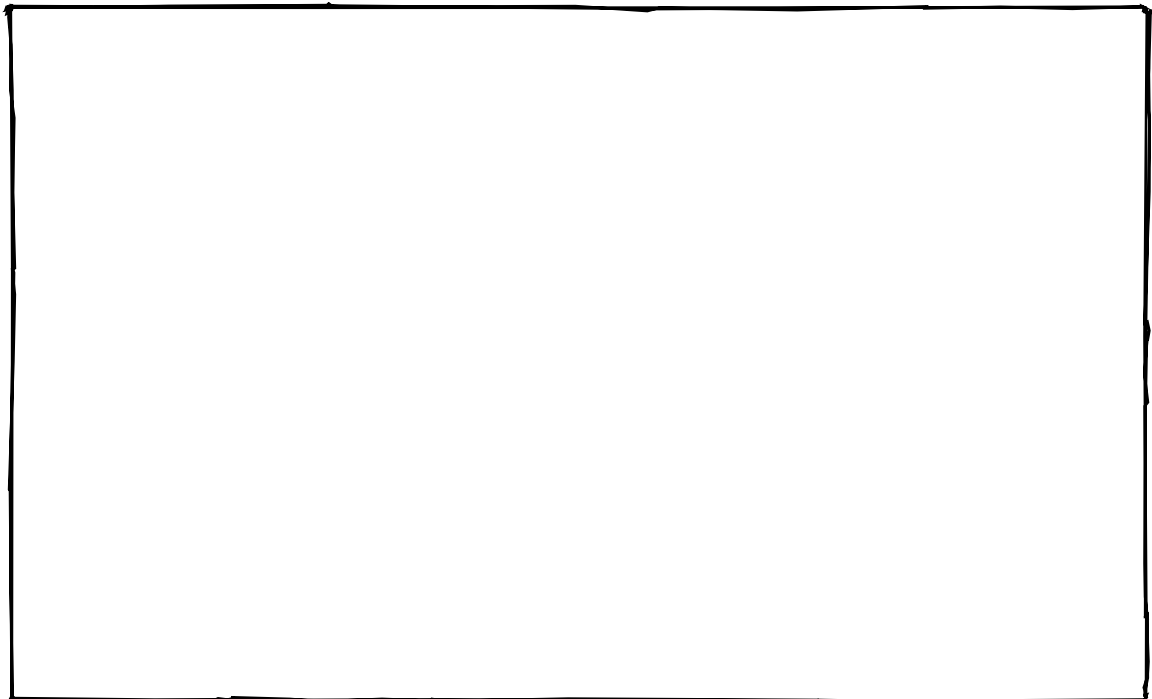
“She's sitting in the half-dark kitchen, hands flat on the table like she's waiting for nail polish to dry, only it's too dark to polish nails. I flip the light switch. She keeps staring at her hands.” (pages 12-13)

continued →

Copyright is provided to SERP for  
*The Big Nothing*, by Adrian Fogelin  
courtesy of Peachtree Publishers.



**Nana Grace** (Jemmie's Grandmother)



**Kathy Riggs** (Justin's Mom)



Before you read these pages, complete the Day Two fluency routine for passage 7.

## Guided reading

### The Big Nothing (pp. 30-37)

**Overview:** As you read, look for hints about Justin’s feelings for Jemmie.

#### Vocabulary:

**multiplex** (p. 31): a movie theater with multiple screens

**oblivious** (p. 33): not noticing or not aware

**relapse** (p. 35): falling back into something, such as a sickness

**dismisses** (p. 35): rejects or passes over something



**Comprehension:** Read pp. 30-34 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

What were things like in the car? Who was in the backseat? Find and record a passage that describes what things were like in the backseat of the car.

---



---



---

Find and record a line that hints at Justin’s feelings for Jemmie. Does he want to impress her? How do you know?

---



---



---

Why do you think Justin notices when Jemmie’s arm brushes his arm?

---



---

Guided reading, continued

 Read pp. 34-37 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Who had a relapse? Which context clues helped you to clarify the word “relapse”?

---

---

---

Summarize what Justin finds when he returns home from the movies.

---

---

---

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 39–47)



**Pages 39–42:** Justin is sitting bored in English class.



Look for:

- something Justin realizes about Jemmie



Read silently to the break (this symbol: ○) on page 42.

When Justin stares at Jemmie’s neck, he realizes something.

**Circle** three words that tell about what Justin realizes.

surprise   emotion   pretty   feelings   love   like   necklace



Share answers with your partner.

- We picked the same words    We picked different words

**Pages 42–46:** As you keep reading, Justin goes home from school.



Look for:

- what Justin does to feel better
- characterization of Justin’s dad



Read silently to the break (this symbol: ○) on page 46.

On pages 42 and 43 we read about how Justin feels and what he does.



Turn and talk with your partner. Complete the sentence below.



When he wants to feel better, Justin \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

continued







Read out loud (you or your partner) the paragraph in the middle of page 45 that starts with, “You got supper . . .” and ends with “. . . I was laughing about the elephant.”



Discuss these questions with your partner.

What does this paragraph tell us about Justin’s dad?

This tells us that Justin’s dad is

---

What does this paragraph tell us about Justin?

This tells us that Justin is

---

**Pages 46–47:** Justin gets a phone call from his older brother Duane.



Look for:

- scary news from Duane



Read silently to the end of page 47.



Turn and talk with your partner.

Summarize Duane’s telephone call.

WHO Duane

SAID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN during his Monday night telephone call

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 49-59)

**Overview:** Justin is worried about Duane. Still, he keeps thinking about Jemmie. As you read, keep an eye out for his thoughts about Jemmie.

### Vocabulary:

**unprecedented** (p. 50): never happened before

**nonchalant** (p. 52): acting overly cool and relaxed

**barbarian** (p. 54): using no manners

**reverberates** (p. 54): a noise that vibrates and lingers

 **Comprehension: Read p. 49 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

What does Justin mean when he says, “I wish you were still digging holes at FSU.”?

---

---

Why are Justin and his mom suddenly watching the news all day? What are they hoping to find out?

---

---

 **Read pp. 50-54 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Why does Justin end up in Duane’s room playing his recorder?

---

---

While Justin is doing surveillance of (spying on) Jemmie’s house, what does he wonder about?

---

---

**Guided reading, continued**

How would Jemmie feel if she knew what Justin was up to? Is his behavior okay? Why or why not?

---

---

Make an inference: Do you think Nana Grace knows what's going on with Justin's parents? Why or why not?

---

---

 **Read pp. 55-59 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Is Justin good at playing the piano? Does he like it? Find a line or two from the text that helps answer these questions.

---

---

---

On p. 58, Nana Grace makes Justin an offer. What is the offer? Why does she make it?

---

---

When Justin returns back home, what does he find?

---

---



# Homework

Is war a “team sport”?

Here are quotes from Justin’s telephone call with Duane on page 47:

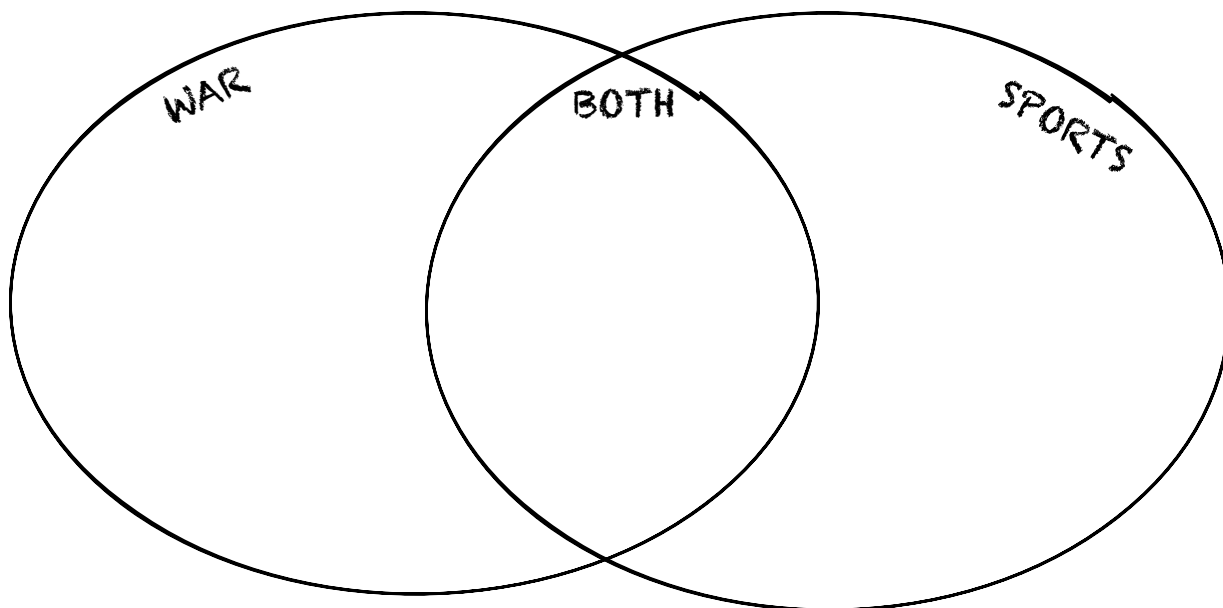
Justin: “I thought you signed up to pump iron and learn something so you could get a decent job. You’re a sports guy, not a fighter.”

Duane: “That was before I joined the Army, bro. Besides, war is the biggest team sport in the world.”

→ Is war “the biggest team sport in the world”?

1. Fill in the Venn diagram.

- a. On the left, write things that are true about war, but not about sports.
- b. On the right, write things that are true about sports, but not about war.
- c. In the middle, write things that are true about BOTH sports and war.



2. Complete the sentences below.

War is like sports because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

War is very different from sports because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Before you read these pages, complete the Day One fluency routine for passage 8.

## Partner reading

### The Big Nothing (pp. 59–65)



**Pages 59–62:** Here, we'll meet Leroy.



Look for:

- why Justin feels left out
- if Leroy and Justin like each other



Read silently to the bottom of page 62.



Turn and talk with your partner.

Justin feels left out. Make an inference. Why do you think Ben and Leroy didn't pick him up?



I think Ben and Leroy didn't pick Justin up because

---



---

Toward the bottom of page 60, Justin is talking about Jemmie. He says, "As long as I don't screw it up and tell her that I like her, I'll keep flying under the radar."

"Flying under the radar" is figurative language. What does it mean?

It means

---



---

continued 



Turn and talk with your partner.

How do Leroy and Justin feel about each other? Are they friends? Enemies?

Leroy and Justin are:  friends  enemies



I know this because on page \_\_\_\_\_, this happens: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

On pages 61–62, Ben and Leroy go to school to play basketball together. They don't ask Justin to join them. How does Justin feel? How does Ben feel?

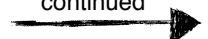
Justin feels \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Ben feels \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

continued



**Pages 63–65:** Justin goes to Ben’s house, and then back home.



Look for:

- details to help you infer how Jemmie feels
- why Justin’s mom is scared



Read silently to the end of the chapter on page 65.



Turn and talk with your partner.

With your partner, reread the paragraph towards the bottom of page 63 that starts with, “I skate by Jemmie’s...” and ends with “... she hops aboard.”

Make some inferences.



Jemmie feels

Give evidence.

I know Jemmie feels this way because she



Justin’s mom collapses. Find the word “collapsed.”

“Collapsed” is on page \_\_\_\_\_



Justin’s mom is “collapsed on the sofa” because



Before you read these pages, complete the Day Two fluency routine for passage 8.

## Guided reading

### The Big Nothing (pp. 67-79)

**Overview:** As you read, look for more details about Justin’s growing feelings for Jemmie.

#### Vocabulary:

**Persian Gulf** (p. 69): a gulf on the Arabian Sea that borders Iraq

**encouraging** (p. 69): a good sign

**deliberately** (p. 71): doing something on purpose

**talent** (p. 71): a natural ability



**Comprehension:** Read pp. 67-72 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Look back at the letter on p. 67. What new thing is surprising to you? Why or why not?

---



---

What do we learn about Justin’s dad on p. 67?

---



---

Summarize Justin’s second piano lesson. What is new and important here?

---



---

Can you make an inference about why Justin goes home when Jemmie asks him to stay?

---



---



**Guided reading, continued**

 **Read pp. 72-77 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Describe Justin's phone call with his dad.

---

---

What news does Duane share?

---

---

What tips does Duane give Justin? Does this sound like good advice to you?

---

---

---

 **Read p. 79 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following question:**

Why are Justin's grades dropping? Make an inference and give evidence from the text.

---

---

---



# Homework

Learning more about how Justin is changing



Find three events that tell us more about Justin's character. What can you infer about Justin from these events? Can you find evidence to support your claims?

Add these events to your chart of Justin's character.

	What happens?	What does Justin say, do or think?	What can you infer about Justin's character?
Event #1 →			
Event #2 →			
Event #3 →			

Remember to include the page number.



Do you think Justin is changing?

yes

no

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 80–90)



**Pages 80–85:** Here, Justin spends time with Ben.



Look for:

- the phrase, “... it’s like I’ve hidden a bomb...”
- what Ben and Justin do to help



Read silently to the break on page 85 (this symbol: ○).



Turn and talk with your partner.

## Figurative language



Find the line towards the bottom of page 81 that says, “But it’s like I’ve hidden a bomb under the cat.”

What does Justin mean? Why are the unpaid bills like a bomb? Talk it over with your partner.

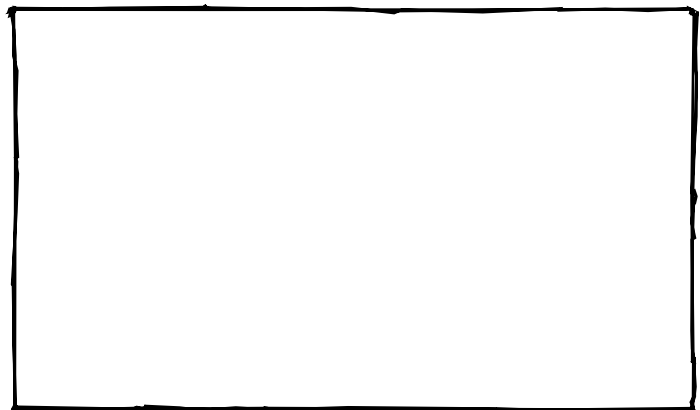


The unpaid bills are like a bomb because

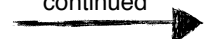
---

---

What do Justin and Ben do to try to help Justin’s mom?  
Sketch a picture.



continued



**Pages 85–90:** Justin visits Leroy. Then Justin watches an important speech.



Look for:

- the problem that Leroy helps Justin with
- what the State of the Union address says, so you can summarize

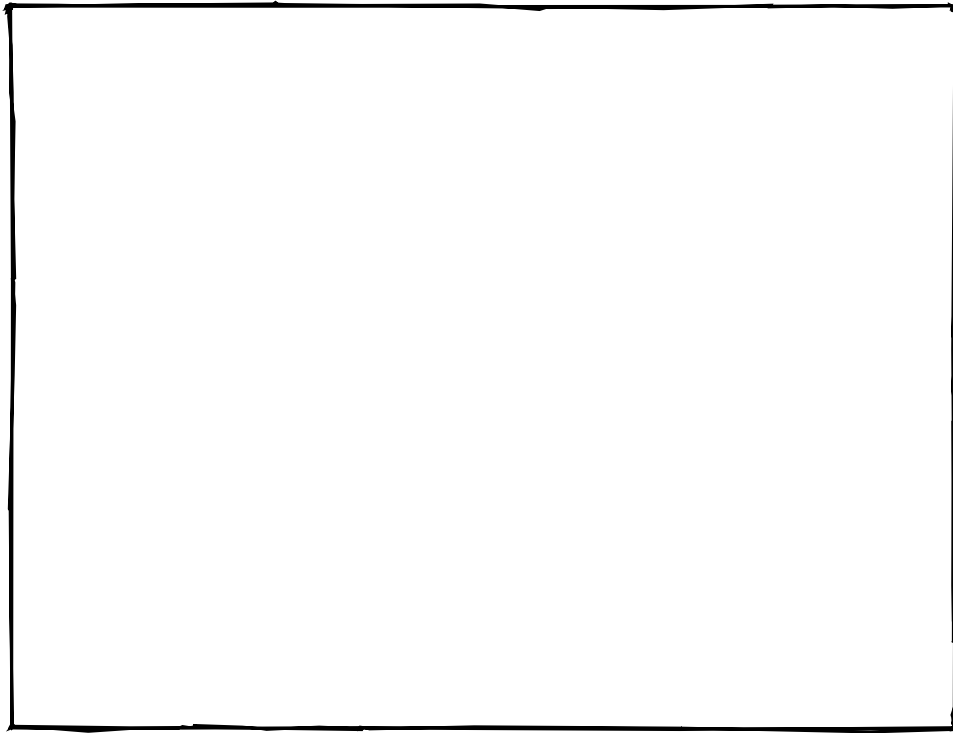


Read silently to the end of the chapter on page 90.

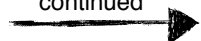


Turn and talk with your partner.

What problem does Leroy help Justin with? Sketch a picture.



continued



## Read out loud

At the top of page 89, there is a real quote from President Bush's real State of the Union address. It begins, "... the success of our cause will depend on you," and ends with "... America believes in you."

Read the quote out loud. Then, listen to your partner read it out loud.

- I read the quote out loud
- My partner read the quote out loud



This quote makes me feel

It makes me think about

Summarize the State of the Union address.

WHO President George W. Bush

SAID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

WHY \_\_\_\_\_

After the speech, do Justin and his mom know what will happen to Duane?

- yes
- no

## Making inferences about character

How does Justin feel at the end of this chapter? Make an inference. Then, give evidence.

I think Justin feels

I think this because

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 91-100)

**Overview:** You will learn more about Duane’s experience as a soldier and read about a visit that Justin has with Mr. Barnett, a Vietnam war veteran. As you read, look for hints about how Justin feels after his visit, and how he copes with his feelings.

### Vocabulary:

**ordnance** (p. 93): military weapons, equipment, and ammunition

**unconvincing** (p. 95): failing to make someone believe that something is true

**incinerated** (p. 97): burned up

 **Comprehension: Read p. 91 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Identify and record a line that tells you what Duane is experiencing. What does it mean and why is it important?

---

---

---

How has the possibility of war changed Duane’s day-to-day experience in the military? Explain.

---

---

 **Read pp. 92-94 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Describe Justin’s visit with Mr. Barnett.

---

---

## Guided reading, continued

How is Mr. Barnett's perspective on the war different from Justin's parents' perspective? How is it the same?

---

---

---



**Read pp. 94-100 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

What does Justin do when he first gets home from his visit with Mr. Barnett? Can you find a line that describes how Justin feels?

---

---

---

Justin pays the family's bills. Forging a signature is illegal. In your opinion, is Justin doing the right thing here, or the wrong thing? Why?

---

---

---

What positive steps does Justin's mom take?

---

---







Before you read these pages, complete the Day One fluency routine for passage 9.

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 101-108)



**Pages 101-104:** Justin hides out. Then, Cass and Jemmie fight.



Look for:

- why Justin hides
- details that will help you summarize



Read silently to the break on page 104 (this symbol: ○).

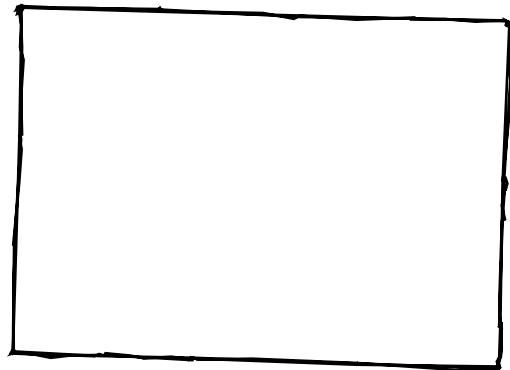


Turn and talk with your partner.

Draw a quick sketch of Justin's face.

Justin feels self conscious because

\_\_\_\_\_



## Skills Review: Clarifying

At the top of page 104, it says, "Cass has undergone a weird, skirt-wearing conversion since she and Ben started going together. Even though it's cold, Jemmie sticks stubbornly to their old uniform, shorts and a T-shirt."



In the passage above, underline the words that tell us what Cass used to wear.

Now, Cass wears

What could conversion mean here?



Conversion means

Can you think of a different kind of conversion?

Sometimes people convert from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

continued



**Pages 104–106:** Jemmie and Cass have a fight in school and Justin goes to Jemmie’s house to play the piano.



Read silently to the end of page 106 where it says “but it’s a sad one.”



Turn and talk to your partner and fill in the columns below.

Cause	Effect
	Justin plays a sad tune on the piano at Jemmie’s house
Cass and Jemmie have a fight in school (p. 104)	

**Pages 106–108:** Here, Cass and Jemmie talk, and Ben and Justin talk.



Look for:

- what happens with Cass and Jemmie
- what Ben says about his feelings



Read silently to the end of the chapter on page 108.



Turn and talk with your partner.

Summarize what Jemmie did after school.

WHO Jemmie

DID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE at the school

WHEN after school

WHY \_\_\_\_\_

continued



## Making inferences about character



Find a line that tells how Ben feels about Justin. Copy it below.

---

Do you think Justin feels the same way?

yes

no

On page 108, after Ben says how he feels, Justin says, “This is my chance to say how I feel. This is my chance to talk.” Why doesn’t Justin say how he feels? Make an inference.

Justin doesn't tell Ben how he feels because

---

---

---



Before you read these pages, complete the Day Two fluency routine for passage 9.

## Guided reading

### The Big Nothing (pp. 109-118)

**Overview:** As you read, think about Justin’s and Jemmie’s perspectives on their relationship. Get ready to make a prediction about their “undate”

#### Vocabulary:

**objective opinion** (p. 110): an opinion based on facts, not feelings

**professional** (p. 112): something done skillfully for money. Amateur soccer players don’t get paid, but professional players do

**indifference** (p. 113): not caring about something

**anxious** (p. 115): very worried or nervous

**spontaneously** (p. 116): happening suddenly, all on its own



**Comprehension:** Read pp. 109-113 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

What is Justin thinking? What does he want? Find a line that gives information about his feelings.

---



---

What does Jemmie want? Find a line that tells what she’s saying and how she’s acting.

---



---

What do you predict will happen on the “undate”? Will Justin and Jemmie become more like a couple? Or will they stay just friends?

---



---

Guided reading, continued

 Read pp. 115-118 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Why is Justin’s mom anxious about the “undate”? Is she right or wrong to be anxious?

---

---

---

What do Justin and his mom do for each other on Valentine’s Day? Are these characters changing or staying the same? Explain.

---

---

---

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 118–127)



**Pages 118–124:** Justin and Jemmie have an update.



Look for:

- the word “reassures”
- details that will help you summarize



Read silently to the break on page 124 (this symbol: ○).



Turn and talk with your partner.



**Clarifying: “reassures”**

On page 120, find the word “reassures” near the top of the page.

Who is reassuring who?

\_\_\_\_\_ is reassuring \_\_\_\_\_ about her \_\_\_\_\_

What could “reassure” mean here?



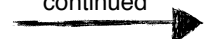
When you reassure somebody, you \_\_\_\_\_



Look back at pages 121 – 123. Find a part where it sounds like Jemmie and Justin are having fun. What are they doing?

Justin and Jemmie are \_\_\_\_\_

continued



## Making inferences about character

Is Jemmie starting to think of Justin more like a boyfriend?

- yes    no



Find a line that supports your opinion, and copy it below.

\_\_\_\_\_



Check with your partner. Do you have the same opinion about Jemmie and Justin?

- We both think Jemmie is starting to think of Justin as a boyfriend.  
 We both think Jemmie and Justin are just friends.  
 We have different opinions about Jemmie and Justin.

**Pages 124–127:** Duane has news, and Justin’s dad makes a guarantee.



Look for:

- Duane’s important news
- Justin’s dad’s guarantee



Read silently to the end of the chapter on page 127.



Turn and talk with your partner.

Summarize Duane’s important news.

WHO Duane \_\_\_\_\_

WILL DO WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

TO WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

WHY \_\_\_\_\_

continued 

## Figurative language



Find on page 126, where Justin says, “I thought he just dropped calls on us like water balloons: he can hit us, we can’t hit him.”

What is Justin saying?

Justin is saying that not being able to get in touch with his dad makes  
him feel

---

## Clarifying: “guarantee”



Find where Justin’s dad says, “Everything’s going to work out. I guarantee it.”

Here, guarantee means

---

---



## Make a prediction

Justin's dad says, "Everything's going to work out." What do you think? What will happen with Justin's family?

Make a prediction about Justin's dad.

*I predict Justin's dad will* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Look back at p. 124-127.

What facts can you find to back up your prediction?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_



Share your prediction with your partner. Listen to your partner's prediction, too.

I read my prediction to my partner

I heard my partner's prediction

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 129-137)

**Overview:** As you read, think about how Justin’s perspective on the war differs from both Cass’s and Ben’s perspective.


### Vocabulary:

**intense** (p. 129): serious.

**crucial** (p. 131): necessary, something that is needed.

**sociable** (p. 132): liking the company of others.

**patriotic** (p. 133): supporting your country.

 **Comprehension:** Read pp. 129-131 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Find a line or two where Justin talks about the superstitions he has about his dad coming home. Do you think people feel this way in real life?

---

---

Can you find some lines with strong characterization of Justin’s dad?

---

---

 **Read pp. 129-137 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

At the beginning of this chapter, who is Justin looking for? Why?

---

---

Why is Ben upset? What does he believe?

---

---

**Guided reading, continued**

Why is Cass upset? What does he believe?

---

---

Are Justin's feelings about the war more like Ben's, or more like Cass's? Can you find a line or two that shows what he is thinking about Cass's family's position on the war? Explain.

---

---

---

---

 **Read p. 137 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

How is this letter different from previous letters? Can you find some evidence here about how wartime is changing Justin?

---

---

Justin has given his dad a deadline for returning home. Make a prediction: Will his dad meet the deadline? Why or why not?

---

---



Before you read these pages, complete the Day One fluency routine for passage 10.

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 138–143)



**Pages 138–139:** Justin sees Mr. Butler playing the school piano. Then, he goes to Jemmie’s to play piano himself.



Look for:

- info to help you summarize what Justin finds in the “cafetorium”
- sentences that tell us what music means to Justin



Read silently to the bottom of page 139, to the words, “a little farther out.”



Turn and talk with your partner.

Summarize what Justin finds in the “cafetorium.”

WHO \_\_\_\_\_

DID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE at school, in the cafeteria/auditorium

WHEN soon after Duane ships out

Why does Adrian Fogelin include this scene? What does it tell us? What makes this scene important?



This scene is important because

\_\_\_\_\_

continued





On page 139, find a strong sentence or two that tells what music means to Justin. Copy the sentence or sentences below.

---

---

---



Explain to your partner what this means.

- I explained my sentence(s).
- My partner explained his/her sentence(s).

**Pages 140–143:** Jemmie gets hurt, and Justin helps.



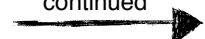
Look for:

- what happened to Jemmie
- what Justin did, and how he felt



Read silently to the end of the chapter on page 143.

continued





Turn and talk with your partner.

Summarize what happened to Jemmie.

WHO Jemmie

DID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

Why did this happen to her? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why is it a big deal? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did Justin do? To help Jemmie, Justin

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Find a sentence or two that tells us how Justin felt about helping Jemmie. Copy the sentence or sentences below.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In your own words, how did Justin feel?

Justin felt



# Homework

Causal words help connect ideas

Pair up four of the causes on the left with four effects on the right.

On the lines below, write sentences that pair up the cause with the effect.

Use the words *then*, *consequently*, *as a result*, *therefore*, or *so* in your sentences.

Causes	Causal words	Effects
Cass's father won't let her date.		If war breaks out, he must fight.
Justin's dad is out of town.	then	<b>She has to stop running for a few weeks.</b>
Justin makes a finger elephant.	consequently	Justin and Jemmie wind up on an undate.
Nana Grace thinks Justin has talent.	as a result	Justin carries Jemmie up the porch steps.
<b>Jemmie hurt her shin.</b>	<b>therefore</b>	Justin and Jemmie end up "technically holding hands."
Duane enlisted in the military.	so	Justin's mom is depressed.
		She invites him to play her piano.

1. Jemmie hurt her shin. Therefore, she has to stop running for a few weeks.
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



Before you read these pages, complete the Day Two fluency routine for passage 10.

## Guided reading

### The Big Nothing (pp. 145-160)

**Overview:** Look for ways that Justin is growing as a character. Is he feeling more confident? Why? Is he taking more risks? What kind?

#### Vocabulary:

**regret** (p. 149): to feel sad or disappointed about something

**ensure** (p. 153): to make sure of something

**disgust** (p. 154): frustration, being fed up

**syncopation** (p. 159): changes in rhythm that make music sound jazzy or funky

**tempo** (p. 160): the speed of music, like a rhythm or beat



**Comprehension:** Read pp. 145-152 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Look back at the letter on p. 145 where Justin describes what he did the last time his dad called. What did he do? Why? Check your prediction about Justin's dad. Was it right or wrong?

---



---



---

Find where Justin talks about protests against the war. Did this happen in real life?

---



---

When Justin climbs into Nana Grace's truck, what is he thinking about? Why?

---



---



### Guided reading, continued

Look back at p. 148, where Justin says, “You’ll mess it up!” What is he talking about?

---

---

 Read pp. 153-160 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Look back at the letter on p. 153. How is Justin feeling?

---

---

Jemmie reveals something important to Justin during this piano lesson. What is it? Why do you think Jemmie trusts Justin with this information?

---

---

How do you know when a friend is someone you can trust?

---

---

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 161-165)



**Page 161:** Justin's letter tells Duane about his new attitude toward their dad.



Look for:

- details that tell us what's going on with Justin's dad



Read page 161 silently.



Turn and talk with your partner.

## Figurative language



On the top of page 161, find where Justin says his dad has “run the clock out.”

What does Justin mean?

He means that \_\_\_\_\_

## Making an inference



Read the P.S. at the bottom of the letter out loud.

- I did this
- My partner did this

What do you think the P.S. means? After reading this, what do you infer?



I infer that \_\_\_\_\_

continued 

**Pages 162–165:** Justin and his mom get a letter from Duane.



Look for:

- details that tell us who Justin really is
- info to help us summarize what's going on with Duane



Read pages 162–165 silently.



Turn and talk with your partner.

### Characterization

What is one thing Justin does that tells us who he really is?

Justin

This tells us he is

Does this fit with Justin's character?

yes

no

Summarize what the letter said. What's going on with Duane?

WHO Duane

IS DOING WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

WHY \_\_\_\_\_

continued





Find a sentence or two that tells us how Duane feels about the coming war. Copy the sentence or sentences below.

---



---

In your own words, how does Duane feel about the coming war?



Duane thinks that the war is \_\_\_\_\_

and \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the Cause and Effect table below.

Cause	Effect
	Justin eats a Baby Ruth, some potato salad, a popsicle. He has to distract himself. (p. 163)
Justin tells his mom that there's a letter from Duane. He's been waiting for her to open it. (p. 163)	
	Justin's mom gives him a hug. She's still crying. (p. 165)

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 167-174)

**Overview:** As you read, look for new developments in Justin and Jemmie’s relationship.

### Vocabulary:

**embellishing** (p. 170): to make something more complicated or fancy

**swells** (p. 170): grows bigger and bigger

**rummage** (p. 174): to dig through a container, like a bag or a drawer

 **Comprehension:** Read pp. 167 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Why does Justin want to give Duane Jemmie’s email address instead of Ben’s?

---

---

Can you find a joke Justin makes in the letter?

---

---

 **Read pp. 168-171 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

What is Jemmie’s reaction to the news that Justin got a letter from Duane?

---

---

Justin calls Trina Boyd the “local blond goddess.” What does that mean? What is Trina like?

---

---

### Guided reading, continued

Make an inference about how Jemmie feels about Trina. How do you know? Does this fit with other things we know about Jemmie?

---

---

---

What mistakes does Justin make at Jemmie's house?

---

---

 Read pp. 171-174 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Describe Justin's relationship with Mr. Butler.

---

---

Read p. 174 again. Summarize the conversation Justin has with his mom. What information is most important here?

---

---

---

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 175–183)



**Pages 175–179:** Justin and his mom watch the war begin on CNN.



Look for:

- details that will help you summarize how the war begins



Read silently to the break on page 179 (this symbol: ○).



Turn and talk with your partner.

On page 175, Justin reads Duane’s letter. Duane says that the war will start right away if Saddam doesn’t give up.



Look at pages 176–177. Find two things Justin does that show he is worried about Duane.

Justin \_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_

Justin \_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize how the war begins.

WHO the U.S. military

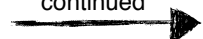
DID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_


WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

WHERE Baghdad, Iraq’s capital city

WHY \_\_\_\_\_


continued



 Look at pages 178–179. Now that the war has started, how is Justin’s mom feeling. Find two details that show how she feels.

Justin’s mom \_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_


Justin’s mom \_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_

 Read one of your details to your partner. Tell your partner what it shows about Justin’s mother.

**Pages 179–183:** Ben gets mad at Justin. Then, the two friends work things out.


 Look for:

- why Ben’s parents are upset about the war
- why Ben gets upset with Justin

 Read silently to the end of the chapter on page 183.

 Turn and talk with your partner.

Why is Ben’s dad upset about the war?

 Ben’s dad is upset about the war because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

continued 



Justin and Ben's friendship has had problems. Why?

Justin has been angry with Ben because...	Suddenly, Ben gets upset with Justin because...



How do Ben and Justin work things out? Tell your partner. Choose some sentences to read out loud that tell how they worked things out.

- I talked about how Ben and Justin worked things out.
- My partner talked about how Ben and Justin worked things out.

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 185-192)

**Overview:** As you read, look for an unexpected boost and an unexpected blow.

### Vocabulary:

**casualties** (p. 186): deaths in a war or in an accident

**oblivious** (p. 187): not aware, not noticing

**aspirations** (p. 187): hopes and dreams

**trudge** (p. 187): to walk slowly and heavily

**hesitation** (p. 189): a short wait or delay



**Comprehension:** Read p. 185 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

In the letter, Justin describes an evening at home. What happens?

---

---

What is the tone of the letter? Silly? Serious? Nervous? Afraid? Explain your answer.

---

---

---

What are Justin and his mom seeing, hearing, and doing while Duane is off at war?

---

---

---

Guided reading, continued

 Read pp. 186-192 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Look on p. 190, where Mr. Butler talks about a talent. What does he mean? Is he right?

---

---

---

This time, when Mr. Butler talks about piano lessons, Justin reacts differently. Find a sentence or two that describes his reaction. Why does he react differently this time?

---

---

---

What does Justin see toward the end of the chapter that upsets him?

---

---



# Homework

## Connecting your experiences to *The Big Nothing*

Justin and his mom watched the war begin on TV. While Justin watches the bombs fall, he knows that Duane may be in danger.

Here are some quotes to remind you about what you read:

“It’s almost ten o’clock when the war begins. The first barrage of Baghdad doesn’t last long. A few bombs explode over the city. Antiaircraft fire crackles from the ground, lighting up the smoky air.” (page 178)

“Trenches filled with oil are in flames...” (page 178)

“In all the time I watch, the cameras never show a single human, alive or dead. It’s all smoke and ka-boom, about as real as a video game.” (page 178)

Think of a time when someone you care about was in danger. What was the danger? How did you feel?

Write a paragraph or two about your experience. Try to include cause and effect sentences with the connecting words *since* or *because*.



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 193–202)



**Pages 193–196:** Justin gets a frightening message from Duane.



Look for:

- how the message gets to Justin
- why the message is scary



Read silently to the break on page 196 (this symbol: ○).



Turn and talk with your partner.

Who brings Justin the message?  Ben  Mr. Butler  Jemmie

What does Duane's message say?



Duane's message says that

---

---

Duane's message is scary because

---

---

On pages 195–196, Jemmie gives Justin a printout of an email from Duane. Jemmie asks Justin if he'll tell his mom about Duane's email. Justin doesn't tell his mom. He doesn't want to upset her.

Can you predict if Justin will tell his mom about Duane's email later? Why or why not?

I predict Justin

---

---



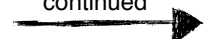
Turn and talk to your partner.

My partner predicts Justin

---

---

continued



**Pages 196–200:** Justin tells about gym class.



Look for:

- why Adrian Fogelin is telling us about this softball game
- what is interesting about it



Read to the break on page 200 (this symbol: ○).



Write down something Leroy says to Justin. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_

Write down something Jemmie says to Justin. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_

Share your quotes with your partner. What do these quotes show about Leroy and Justin?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do the quotes show about Jemmie and Justin?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Pages 200–202:** Duane explains his message.



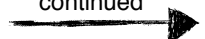
Look for:

- what really happened to Duane with the “something big” that “just blew”



Read to the end of the chapter on page 202.

continued





Turn and talk with your partner.

Duane explains his last letter. Summarize what happened.

WHO "some joker"

DID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN while Duane was sending e-mail

WHERE \_\_\_\_\_

WHY \_\_\_\_\_

Read the last sentence on page 202 out loud.

I did this

My partner did this

Now, QUIETLY show what Mr. Butler's "drumroll of joy" looks like.

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 203-212)

**Overview:** As you read, look for two disappointments, and watch how Justin reacts.

### Vocabulary:

**refuge** (p. 205): a safe place

**thoughtful** (p. 208): considerate, kind

**pathetic** (p. 210): miserable or weak

**suffocate** (p. 210): to stop breathing

**disentangle** (p. 211): to untangle



**Comprehension:** Read p. 203 from *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Why did Justin's dad write this letter?

---

---

Does Justin's dad apologize? What does he apologize for? Is it a real apology?

---

---

---

What does this letter tell you about Justin's dad? Does it fit in with what you already know about him?

---

---

---



**Guided reading, continued**

 **Read pp. 204-210 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

What two disappointments does Justin suffer with Jemmie?

---

---

Summarize Justin's night out. What is most important to remember?

---

---

---

Find a quote that talks about a realization Justin has about his mom. (Hint: try p. 207, second paragraph from the bottom). Explain the quote.

---

---

---

 **Read pp. 210-212 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Summarize what happened with the ladder and the roof.

---

---

Find a sentence toward the end of the chapter that sums up Justin's feelings at this point in the book.

---

---

# Partner reading

The Big Nothing (pp. 213–222)



**Pages 213–218:** Jack is back! How will Justin and his mom react?



Look for:

- important info to help you summarize
- why Justin’s dad comes back



Read until “I may be gone a while” on page 218.



Turn and talk to your partner and fill in the Cause and Effect table below.

Cause	Effect
	Justin smashes a chair to the ground and a chair leg rolls across the rug. (p. 215)
	Justin’s dad says that Justin had developed some backbone while he’s been away. (p. 216)
	Justin’s mom doesn’t cry when she sees her husband. Justin is proud of her. (p. 217)

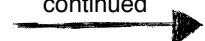
Summarize what happens.

WHO Jack, Justin’s dad

DID WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_

continued





Why did Jack come back? Talk it over with your partner.

**Inference**



I think the reason Jack came back is

\_\_\_\_\_

**Evidence**

I know this is the reason because

\_\_\_\_\_



Find where Justin says, “I feel myself flicker like a flame going out,” near the top of page 218. How does he feel here?



Try to think of two adjectives (like “happy” or “confused”) that describe his feelings. Talk with your partner.

my adjectives	my partner’s adjectives
1	1
2	2

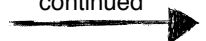


Read from page 218 to the end of the chapter on page 222. When you get to the words, “Family is family,” look up.



Turn and talk with your partner.

continued





Find on page 219, where Nana Grace says, “You can’t just toss family away.”  
What does Nana Grace think Justin should do?

Nana Grace thinks Justin should

---



---



Is Nana Grace right or wrong? Talk with your partner.



I think Nana Grace is  right  wrong because

---



---

My partner thinks Nana Grace is  right  wrong because

---



---

Read the last paragraph out loud. Listen to your partner read the last paragraph out loud.

- I read out loud
- My partner read out loud

In the last paragraph, Justin decides to

---



---



---

# Guided reading

## The Big Nothing (pp. 223-235)

**Overview:** Look for positive signs in Justin’s parents’ relationship. Look for signs that things are changing for Justin.

### Vocabulary:

**sarcastic** (p. 223): snide, harsh, funny in a mean way

**considerate** (p. 223): acting in a way that shows you’re thinking about other people’s feelings

**converge** (p. 233): to come together

**desolate** (p. 234): empty, lonely, sad

**expectations** (p. 235): what you think will happen



**Comprehension:** Read pp. 223-229 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:

Look back at p. 224. What opportunity does Nana Grace offer Justin?

---

---

What is happening with Justin’s mom and dad? What positive steps are they taking?

---

---

Describe Justin’s feelings toward his dad throughout the book. What were things like at the beginning? What were things like when his dad first came home? What are things like now?

---

---

---

---

**Guided reading, continued**

What advice does Duane give on the phone? Is it good advice? Why or why not?

---

---

---

 **Read pp. 229-235 of *The Big Nothing* and answer the following questions:**

Summarize what happened. What is most important to remember?

---

---

---

Do you think that Justin and Jemmie are about to become more than just friends? Find a line or two to support your opinion.

---

---

How has Justin's role in the family changed? How has he changed as a son and a brother?

---

---

How has Justin changed in school?

---

---

How has Justin changed as a friend?

---

---