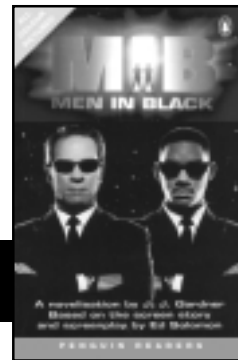


## Teacher's notes

## Men in Black

A novelization by J J Gardner  
Based on the screenplay by Ed Solomon



## SUMMARY

**A**n outrageous mixture of comedy and science fiction, the film 'Men in Black' was one of the most successful films of 1997. The novelization of the film, upon which the Penguin Reader version is based, loses none of the surprises and maintains the same crazy humour. This is a wonderful story for teenagers - and for adults!

The Men in Black, as in the title of the film, are American government agents. They have no names, no contact with their families, and their existence is totally secret. They wear black suits and very dark glasses. Their job is to observe and track aliens, who have been living on this planet since the early 1950s. These aliens disguise themselves to look exactly like human beings. The public has no idea about this, hence the utter secrecy of the Men in Black.

A special kind of alien arrives, a 'Bug' that kills people and other aliens. It has come to start an intergalactic war. If it succeeds, the planet Earth will be destroyed. Only the aliens know this and start to leave Earth. The Men in Black are puzzled. Why are all the aliens leaving?

When James Edward, a brave and clever policeman, meets an alien, he can't believe his eyes! Invited to join the Men in Black, he changes his name to Jay. He teams up with Kay, who is an expert on aliens. Kay has some big guns, and when he wants humans to forget the strange things they've seen, he shoots them with his 'neuralyzer' gun - and they can't remember a thing! Together, Kay and Jay make a formidable team, as they try to stop the planet from being destroyed by the 'Bug', who has entered the body of a man called Edgar.

## ABOUT THE FILM

'Men in Black' is a film that leaves viewers longing for a sequel! It is an extremely funny movie: by the end, viewers will have laughed so much that they may feel the need to see a doctor! It is full of surprises. The director, Barry Sonnenfeld, has succeeded in the most difficult trick of all - to make the unbelievable believable. Much of the reason for his success in doing this is his choice of the two leading men in the film. Tommy Lee Jones plays the part of Kay, one of the Men in Black. Jones is tall, grimfaced and craggy. He has a seriousness of manner which makes

people believe what he says - if he says there are aliens in New York, of course there are aliens in New York. The second Man in Black, Jay, is played by Will Smith, who brings to the part his unique brand of laid-back wit.

The screen story and screenplay for 'Men in Black' were written by Ed Solomon. Solomon has written other famous screenplays for films - 'Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure', for example - and he also writes for television. 'Men in Black' was produced by Steven Spielberg, one of the greatest film-makers of the twentieth century. As in 'ET', the hugely successful science fiction film made by Steven Spielberg, the special effects in 'Men in Black' are ingenious and fascinating.

'Men in Black' is Hollywood at its dazzling best, transporting viewers into a world of fantasy from which they really do not want to come back!

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

*Men in Black* is in the grand tradition of twentieth century science fiction stories. Science fiction truly began with the book *The War of the Worlds* (1898), written by the English novelist H G Wells. This is a powerful story of how the planet Earth is invaded by Martians. Since then, the science fiction genre has developed rapidly.

In the 1990s, there is a widespread - if rather unlikely, in the opinion of some people - belief that there is life on other planets. Sightings of Unidentified Flying Objects are quite common, and in the USA in particular, a significant minority of people claim to have been abducted by aliens. A number of books have been published on this subject, not all of them arguing against the idea. Inevitably, the Hollywood film industry has capitalized on these beliefs and possibilities. The most famous science fiction movies of all time are probably Steven Spielberg's 'ET' and George Lucas's science fiction fairytale, the 'Star Wars' sequence.

Psychologists have their theories as to why twentieth-century man is so fascinated by the idea of life on other planets: man is a creature who must constantly explore and enlarge his frontiers. Now that the continents of the earth, once so mysterious and unknown, have been minutely explored, where can man look next, if not to the

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stars? Man sets both his imagination and his scientific intelligence to work, and the results are that men can walk on the moon and create wonderfully outrageous stories such as *Men in Black!*

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. Supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found on the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Ask students to do the 'Before You Read' exercises on p.39 of their books. Then put them in groups of four. Ask them to draw a group picture of an 'alien'. One student begins by drawing one part of the alien. He hands the sheet of paper to the student next to him who draws another part of the alien. The sheet of paper goes round the group until the drawing is complete. Then students write a description of the alien that they have drawn.

Finally, ask students to look through the pictures in the book and say how many pictures of aliens there are. Students' answers to this question will almost certainly be wrong as several pictures show a man (Edgar) who is an alien. Students will not know this. The dog on page 26 is also an alien. The body on page 23 holds an alien in it. Just tell the students that they are wrong and that there are ten pictures of aliens. This will make them really interested in the book!

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Chapters 1-4

In pairs or small groups, students answer these questions.

- There is an alien (or aliens) in each chapter. What do you know about each alien?
- Which alien do you think is the most dangerous? Why?
- Which alien do you like best? Why?
- Do you think the story is funny? Why/why not?

## Chapters 5-8

- Write chapter titles 5-8 on the blackboard, but in the wrong order. In pairs, students have to put the titles in the right order. Then write the first and last lines of each chapter on the blackboard. Again, they are in the wrong order. Ask students to say which are the first and last lines of each chapter. They can check their answers by looking in the book.
- Put students into groups of three. Ask them to take any conversation from these chapters and to act it out. But they must make one change in the conversation. Then each group acts its scene in front of the class.

The class listens and says which chapter the conversation is from and what the change is.

## Chapters 9-12

Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following questions.

- Would you like to be a Man in Black? Why/why not?
- Do you think the ending is good? Why/why not?
- Which things in these chapters don't you like and why? Or do you like everything?

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- Pre-teach the words 'planet' and 'reason'. Tell the class that they are going to have a discussion on the following subject: 'Is there life on other planets?'

Divide the class in half. Say to half A: 'You think that there is life on other planets.' Say to half B: 'You don't think that there is life on other planets.' Then divide each half into groups of four. Tell each group to write down reasons for their 'belief'. Go round the groups and help them. Then put A groups and B groups together, or have a whole-class discussion.

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Chapters 1-4

**aim** (v) to move a gun towards somebody or something  
**alien** (n) this thing lives and thinks, but is not a person from Earth  
**fire** (v) to use a gun  
**ground** (n) people walk on this  
**hole** (n) an opening in something  
**human** (n) a person  
**piece** (n) when something breaks, it breaks into pieces  
**real** (adj) for example: a toy dog is not a real dog

## Chapters 5-8

**bug** (n) a very, very small animal, usually with six or more legs  
**body** (n) all of a person

## Chapters 9-12

**jewel** (n) people pay a lot of money for this, and they wear it on their ears or their clothes



## Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only exercises are marked

### Activities before reading the book

- Make sentences from these half-sentences.
  - Kay and Jay are
  - The Men in Black find and watch
  - Bugs kill
  - The Bug wants to find
  - Kay and Jay want to find the Bug before
  - People all round the world saw
  - the Bug finds the Third Galaxy.
  - aliens and people.
  - Men in Black.
  - the film 'Men in Black' in 1997.
  - the Third Galaxy.
  - all the aliens in the world.
- Answer these questions. Then ask another student the questions. Write down his/her answers.
  - Did you go and see the film 'Men in Black'?
  - Did you like it? Why/why not?
  - Would you like to see an alien?
- Do the vocabulary exercise at the front of the book.

### Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-4

#### Chapter 1

- Are these sentences right or wrong?
  - Nick is taking the Mexicans into the USA.
  - The Mexicans have the right papers to work in the USA.
  - The names of the Men in Black are Janus and Kay.
  - Kay knows the alien is not a human because the alien does not speak Spanish.
  - Dee uses his gun on the alien.
  - Kay uses the neuralyzer on the detectives and Dee. Then they forget everything.
- Answer these questions.
  - What are the Men in Black wearing?
  - Look at the picture on page 3. Write a sentence about the alien.
  - Why does Kay use his neuralyzer on Dee?

#### Chapter 2

Which thing happens first? Which thing happens second? Write a number next to the sentences.

- Edwards finds himself in a Chinese restaurant.
- The man shouts 'The world is finished' and jumps out of a window.
- Kay fires his gun at Jeebs, and suddenly Jeebs has no head.

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- Jeebs sells a carbonizer gun to an alien.
- The man's gun falls and breaks into a million pieces.
- Kay aims the neuralyzer at Edwards and Edwards forgets everything.
- A man runs up and down Madison Avenue. Policeman James Edwards follows him.
- Kay takes Edwards to a small, dirty shop.

#### Chapter 3

- Answer these questions:
  - Why does Edgar go outside?
  - What is in the hole?
  - What happens to Edgar?
  - Who or what comes back into the house?
  - What did the alien want?
  - How does Beatrice know it is not Edgar?
  - What does Beatrice do?
- Find the word 'imagine' in your dictionary. Imagine this: when the alien changes its face, Beatrice does not fall to the floor. She talks to the alien. Write their conversation.

#### Chapter 4

- Put the words in the sentences.
 

wants friendly girl hundred 1950s crazy questions aliens started

  - At 504, Battery Road, Edwards has to answer some .....
  - Edwards fires at the little ..... because she wanted to kill somebody.
  - The Men in Black have to find and talk to .....
  - The first aliens came in the early .....
  - The Men in Black ..... in 1955.
  - There are usually fifteen ..... aliens on Earth.
  - Edwards sees some aliens. Then he knows that Kay is not .....
  - Most aliens are ..... and work hard.
  - Kay ..... Edwards to be a Man in Black.
- Imagine that you meet an alien or aliens. Write 10-20 lines about the meeting.

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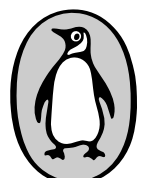
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## Student's activities

## CHAPTERS 5-8

## Chapter 5

Are these sentences true (✓) or false (x)?

- The alien has problems with Edgar's legs.
- A man arrives with a small van.
- There is a picture of a big dog on the van.
- The man kills Edgar.
- The space ship is in the house.
- Edgar puts the space ship in the front of the van.

## Chapter 6

1 Put the words in the gaps (.....).

remembers leave kill baby hole world  
'Jay' space says afraid

Edwards ..... that he will be a Man in Black. Kay shows him a big screen with a picture of the world. It shows every alien in the ..... at any one time. Kay gives Edwards the name ..... They go to find two aliens on the New Jersey Road. Their names are Mr and Mrs Redgick. Mrs Redgick has a ..... in the car with Jay's help. Mr and Mrs Redgick are leaving New York. They are going to meet a ..... ship. There are new aliens arriving and Mr and Mrs Redgick are ..... They want to ..... on the space ship. After this, Kay and Jay go and talk to Beatrice. Then Kay aims his neuralyzer at Beatrice and she ..... nothing. Kay goes outside and looks at the ..... in the ground. He says that there is a Bug in town. Bugs are bad because they ..... things.

2 In groups of three people, make the conversation between Kay, Jay and Redgick.

## Chapter 7

Answer these questions.

- Where does Rosenberg go?
- What does he take with him?
- Who does he meet in the restaurant?
- Is Rosenberg a human or an alien?
- Who comes over to Rosenberg's table?
- What does Edgar want to happen?
- What does Edgar do to the Arquillian and Rosenberg?
- What does he take with him?

## Chapter 8

1 Answer these questions.

- What do you know about Dr Lauren Weaver?
- What does the little green man say?
- What do you know about the Baltians and the Arquillians?
- Why is the Bug angry when he opens the box?
- What is Orion's Belt? Are there any galaxies on it?
- What is happening all over the world?
- Why do you think this is happening?
- Where does Edgar go next and why?

- Draw a picture of the dead man's head. Show the inside of it. Write 5-10 lines about the picture. Now look at the book again. If there are mistakes in your picture or your words, change them.

## CHAPTERS 9-12

## Chapter 9

Finish these sentences.

- The Bug can't leave town because . . .
- The Baltians and the Arquillians often fight over . . .
- The Bugs are happy when the Baltians . . .
- If the Bugs get their hands on the Third Galaxy, then the Baltians and the Arquillians . . .
- Kay talks to a dog because . . .
- Rosenberg's cat is important because . . .

## Chapter 10

1 Put the two parts of these sentences together.

- Edgar sees the Third Galaxy
- Edgar pushes Laurel
- The Arquillians fire at the Baltians
- There are two spaceships
- Jay fires the big gun and
- A Bug bigger than a truck
- The Bug
  - on the World's Fair buildings.
  - through the Earth.
  - into a taxi.
  - climbs out of Edgar's body.
  - eats Kay.
  - Edgar's ship comes back down to Earth.
  - inside the jewel on Orion's collar.

2 What do you think will happen next?

## Chapter 11

Answer these questions.

- Who kills the Bug and how?
- Why doesn't Kay want to be a Man in Black any more?
- Why does Kay give Dr Weaver his dark glasses?
- Why does Jay fire the neuralyzer at Kay?

## Chapter 12

Answer these questions:

- How do you know Laurel Weaver has the same job as Jay?
- What is her new name and why?
- Why do you think Kay gave Laurel this job?

## Activities after reading the book

Work with two other students. Find the words 'mime' and 'scene' in your dictionary. Mime a scene from the book - you cannot speak! Another group will watch you and say the words. You can say 'yes' or 'no' when they are right or wrong.

