

# Plan B

Alien cats with a diabolical plan to take over Earth?  
That's right. Prepare to be delighted.

## About the Story

Lexile: 650L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

### Learning Objective:

to write a "missing" scene from a story based on details revealed in the story's final scene

**Key Skills:** inference, plot, author's craft, text structure, character, narrative writing

### Essential Questions:

- What is the power of love?
- What makes us want to fit in with those around us?
- How do authors keep readers engaged?

### Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, W.3, W.5, W.9, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.

**As You Read:** Look for clues about what Nathan's family is.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Whoever is reading this, I have no idea who you are. I haven't even figured out where I'm going to stick this thing when I'm done with it, but it'll be somewhere secret, somewhere hard to find, and it might be a long time before anyone reads it. A year. Ten years. Maybe more.

**What to look for when the grown-ups are scuttling everyone else.**

Even is different. He moved here last year, and he's a good friend, you know? He laughs at everything, even when the joke is on him. He's not worried at all the time, like I am. And one day this winter, I just—said it. I told him about us. All I wanted was for someone to know me, to understand me. I hate hiding and pretending all the time. I know from wouldn't flip out on me, and he didn't. And I'm so much happier, having someone I can talk to about real stuff. But right now I'm worried about him. He was supposed to come over after school today, after my appointment with the doctor.

**What if he stops by with a bag of Mr. Paws' veggie nuggets?**

Did I mention I'm making Fenchel's of Spain Day? Yeah, while I'm locked in here, Señora Puma is bringing amazing food to school to share with our Spanish class and—

**What if I fall asleep. Second time that's happened since I got locked in here? I haven't heard anything in a while.**

**What if the grown-ups find out?**

I won't supposed to tell anyone about us. Obviously. But when sixth grade started, I finally found a real friend. And that kept this big secret inside me for such a long time. Mom says I have "a good friend," and yeah, we have monthly Skype with the others. Celia from California, Isaac from Indiana, Tilly from Texas, and so on. But the Skypes are awkward, with the parents looking nervous in the background. **Part of the fun is hanging out with nobody watching.**

**1 INFERENCE** What questions might Nathan be talking about?

**2 INFERENCE** Why are the adults heading upstairs and scuttling everyone else?

**3 PLOT** Does Nate come by? Explain how you know.

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## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at [scope.scholastic.com](https://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Read-aloud
- Vocabulary
- Text-to-speech

### Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: Plan Your Scene
  - Close Reading and Critical Thinking
  - Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
  - Core Skill Workout: Inference
  - Literary Elements: Character Thinking Tool
  - Choice Board
  - Quiz\*
  - Contest Entry Form
- \*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

## 1. Preparing to Read

10 minutes

### Do-Now: Respond to a Journal Prompt (5 minutes)

- Project or digitally share the following prompt: *In your journal (or on your own paper), spend five minutes writing about secrets. Here are a few ideas: what it feels like to keep a secret; a time you kept a secret; a time you trusted someone else with a secret. But you can write about anything related to secrets that you think of. Your journal entry will remain private—no one else will read it.* When students are done writing, let them know they are about to read a story about a boy with a very big secret.

### Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard, or if you're remote, share it on your screen. Review the definitions as a class. (Optionally, have students complete the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *commandeered, regulating, reverting, serums, transcendently*

## 2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a student read the As You Read box on page 25 or at the top of the digital story page.
- Point out the directions at the top of the column on the far right side of page 25 and read them aloud to your students.
- Read the story once through as a class. Optionally, have students listen to the read-aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.

- Divide students into groups to read the story again, pausing to discuss the close-reading questions that appear in the margins of the print magazine or by clicking on the bolded text on the digital story page. Have students record their answers in the margins or on the **Close-Reading Questions activity**. *Tip: If you're remote, you can have each group respond in a shared doc or discuss the questions in their own chat rooms.*

### Close-Reading Questions (15 minutes)

*The close-reading questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **What questions might Nathan be talking about?** (inference) *Possible answers include that Nathan may be wondering if and how the alien cats will succeed in turning all humans into cats like themselves. If the reader has opposable thumbs, it means the reader is human and the alien cats did not succeed. If the reader does not have thumbs, it means the alien cats did succeed in turning humans into cats.*
2. **Why are the adults looking nervous and scrutinizing everyone else?** (inference) *The adults are likely looking nervous and scrutinizing everyone because they are looking for signs that anyone might be turning back into a cat.*
3. **Does Evan come by? Explain how you know.** (plot) *You can infer that yes, Evan does come by with empanadas from the fact that in the last section of the story (the debriefing of Undercover Agent Bartolomej), Agent B offers his supervisor empanadas. You can infer that these are the empanadas that Evan delivered. Also, Agent B says that a friend stopped by earlier; the reader can infer that the friend is Evan.*
4. **So far, the author has given hints about Nathan's family, but has not revealed the whole truth. Why might this be?** (author's craft) *The author has likely given hints but not revealed the whole truth to pique readers' curiosity and make them want to keep reading. Also, by not revealing everything right away, the author gives readers an opportunity to use their imaginations as they try to work out what exactly is going on.*
5. **Why is this line important? What does it connect to later in the story?** (text structure) *This line is important because it is later revealed that the beings on the Boat have been putting a serum in the toothpaste that they've been giving Nathan and the other kids. This serum slowly turns the kids—who are human—into cats. At this point in the story, we see Nathan brushing his teeth with that toothpaste, having no idea that it is changing him into a cat. He might even think it's helping him not turn into a cat.*

6. **What is this line a hint about? Explain. What other hints can you find throughout the story?** (text structure) *This is a hint about Dad's (and Mom's) true nature as a cat-like alien. It's a hint because cats are known for hating water. Other hints include that Nathan starts sleeping all the time (cats sleep a lot throughout the day); that Nathan has 49 friends whose names all alliterate with the state where they live (this suggests that the names are likely fake, and that Nathan is part of some sort of program that has placed one family in each state); that Nathan's dad shakes hands with their cats and has taught them how to cook (because Nathan's dad sees the cats as equals—because they are his equals); that Nathan's mom was excited about a fish fry (cats love fish); and that Nathan's mom had to learn how to express herself like a human (suggesting that she is not actually human).*
7. **Is Agent B exactly who the supervisor thought he was? Explain.** (character) *Agent B is not who the supervisor thought he was either. The supervisor seems to be under the impression that Agent B is a devoted undercover agent, working for the Boat and dedicated to the mission. But remarks in this section reveal that Agent B helped Nathan's family escape and take off with the Boat, and he is now covering up what he did. Agent B, you can conclude, has come to love Nathan's family and, like Nathan's mom, is motivated by love above all else.*
8. **Why is this a clever conclusion to the story?** (author's craft) *On one level, Agent B is using the expression "end of story" to mean "I have nothing more to say on the subject," and when the supervisor repeats the phrase back as a question, he is asking Agent B, "You're really not going to say anything else?" On another level, the characters are speaking directly to the reader, telling the reader that they have now reached the end of the story "Plan B."*
9. **Summarize what is revealed during Agent B's debriefing about what happened after Nathan's mom shouted "Plan B!"** (plot) *During the debriefing, it is revealed that Toto, a.k.a. Bartolomej, is an agent for the Boat who has been undercover as Nathan's family pet. It is further revealed that Nathan's family took off on the Boat with all of the serum that was going to be used to turn the humans into cats—and that Toto helped them do this by teaching Nathan's mom how to drive the Boat and giving her his keys to the Boat. And it's not just that Toto helped the family escape; Toto and Nathan's mom had worked out a plan in advance for how this would happen (Plan B). You also learn that the doctors were somehow knocked out while the family made their escape; it's not clear how this was done. And you learn that Nathan's friend Evan did indeed stop by; you can assume that the empanadas Agent B is offering his supervisor are the ones Evan brought over. (Maybe Toto put something in the empanadas to put the doctors to sleep?)*

- As a class, discuss the following questions.

### Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **Why do you think the author included the parts of the story about Nathan's friendship with Evan?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that these sections were included to make Nathan more sympathetic or relatable to the reader, or just to make him a more fully developed character. Nathan's need for and appreciation of true friendship also connects to the larger idea of love and relationships in the story; just as Nathan's mom abandons the mission because of her love for Nathan, Nathan disobeys the instruction not to tell anyone about his family because of his need for connection with a friend.*
2. **In this story, the alien cats first plan to turn themselves into humans so they can live on Earth; when that doesn't work out, they decide to turn the humans into cats instead. Why do you think the alien cats did not consider trying to live on Earth just as they are?** *Answers will vary. One possibility is that the alien cats thought that if they lived on Earth in their true form, the humans would treat them as cats—that is, that humans would treat them the way we treat the cats here on Earth—and the alien cats were not interested in being treated that way. Another idea is that if humans found out that there were aliens living among them, the humans would surely try to imprison the aliens and study them (as is often the case in science fiction).*
3. **During the debriefing of Agent B (a.k.a. Toto), Agent B tells his supervisor, "Don't worry about me. I have something lined up." Do you think Agent B really does have something lined up? If so, what might it be?** *Answers will vary.*
4. **Did you think this story was funny? If so, what made it funny?** *Answers will vary. Those who found the story funny might say that they found the absurdity funny—particularly when combined with the realistic voice of the narrator. Others might mention specific details, like all the little clues that the parents are really cats, or how Nathan starts sleeping all the time once he starts turning into a cat, or how the discussion of the empanada is part of the otherwise serious debriefing of Agent B. Students who found the story funny may discover that it can be quite hard to explain what makes something funny!*

## 3. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Plan Your Scene**. This activity will help students organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 29 in the

printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.

- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.