

Back to Normal?

A boy struggles with the ways that Covid-19 has changed his life

About the Story

Lexile: 710L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to write a dialogue between two characters that takes place after the story ends

Key Skills: inference, author's craft, tone, character

Essential Questions:

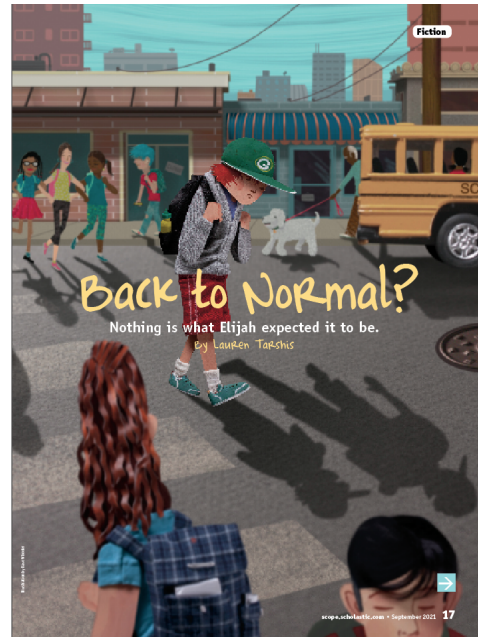
- How can we adjust to difficult changes in life?
- What role do friends play in our lives?
- How can we build and maintain friendships?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.5, R.7, R.10, W.3, W.9, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6

SEL Spotlight: Coping with change: Do Now (p. 2), Critical-Thinking Questions 3 and 4 (p. 5), Connected Readings (p. 5)

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



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Author read-aloud
- Vocabulary
- Text-to-speech

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- Fiction In a Flash: "The Stars Between Us"
- Fiction: "Aftershocks"
- Poem: "When This Is Over"

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

- Preparing to Write: Elijah and Devon's Conversation
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- **Core Skill Workout:** Text Evidence*
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

15 minutes

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

- Give students five minutes to respond to the following in their class journals or on a piece of paper: *Write about facing changes in life. Some questions you might answer are: What kinds of things cause life to change? Do you think that in general, people enjoy changes in life? Do you? Are some changes easier to deal with than others? Can you think of anything people can do to make it easier to cope with big changes in life?* Invite volunteers to share any part of what they wrote.

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions as a class. (Optionally, have students complete the practice activity for homework.) Highlighted words: *jabbering, lugged, lurches, stagger, trudge*
- The vocabulary words in this story are verbs that your students can act out; after reviewing the definitions, invite students to do so! Here are three approaches to choose from:
 1. Secretly assign each student one of the five verbs (or have each student choose one of the verbs) and then have students “perform” their word for their classmates to guess.
 2. Divide students into five groups and assign one of the verbs to each group. Give each group 30 seconds or so to perform their verb for their classmates.
 3. Invite the whole class to stand up together and perform each verb as you call it out.

2. Reading and Discussing

55 minutes

- Have a student read the As You Read box on page 18 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 19 and read them aloud to your students.

- Read the story once through as a class. Optionally, have students listen to author Lauren Tarshis read her story 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 words on the digital story page. Have students record their answers in their own document or on the **Close-Reading Questions activity**.

Close-Reading Questions (20 minutes)

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

1. **Elijah just described Devon as annoying. But now Elijah is laughing. What does his laughter suggest about how he *really* feels about Devon?** (inference) *Elijah's laughter suggests that he actually finds Devon entertaining and fun to be around.*
2. **The author could have written "I look around," but she chose "I whip my head around." Why might she have made that choice?** (author's craft) *The author's use of "whip my head around" helps you understand that Elijah looks around quickly, suddenly, and with urgency. This in turn helps you understand that he is embarrassed and emphasizes how deep into his thoughts he was; he has just snapped out of his thoughts and feels a sense of panic that he hasn't been paying attention to what's been happening around him.*
3. **Think about how Elijah describes his surroundings as he walks to school. How might he describe the scene differently if he were in a better mood?** (tone) *Instead of focusing on the closed shops and restaurants, Elijah might notice new businesses that have opened up. Instead of seeing everyone as hurrying and too busy to pay attention to him, he might notice how full of life and energy everyone seems.*
4. **Why might Devon have chosen not to tell Elijah he was staying in Texas?** (character) *Answers might include that Devon didn't want to cast a shadow on his friendship with Elijah over the summer—he wanted things to stay as light and positive between them for as long as possible. Or maybe Devon was in denial about the move and felt like telling Elijah would make it seem real. Or maybe Devon felt guilty about abandoning his friend (even though it wasn't Devon's fault). It's also possible that Devon himself did not know that he wasn't coming back until after his mom talked to Elijah's mom.*
5. **Why do you think Elijah keeps hearing Devon in his mind? What does this reveal about Elijah and Devon's relationship?** (inference, character) *Elijah is likely imagining conversations*

with Devon because Elijah misses his friend and has Devon on his mind. That Elijah thinks so much about talking to Devon and can guess what Devon would say in any given situation suggests that the two are very close friends. It may also suggest that Elijah is used to relying on Devon for encouragement or advice.

6. **This is the second time Elijah has called Devon annoying. Why do you think Elijah is describing his best friend this way?** (inference, character) *It may be that because Elijah was hurt by Devon not revealing that he is staying in Texas, Elijah is angry and thinking of Devon in an unkind way as a result. It's also possible that Elijah is trying to convince himself that Devon is annoying so that he won't feel so sad about Devon not coming back. Obviously, though, Elijah is having a hard time doing either of these things; he always ends up laughing when he thinks of Devon, and it's clear that Elijah does not find Devon annoying at all.*
 7. **Why do you think Elijah's attitude toward Devon has changed?** (character) *At the beginning of the story, Elijah seems like he is determined to be angry. He keeps trying to convince himself that Devon is annoying. But at the end of the story, Elijah says that he misses Devon and is planning to call him. It's likely that Elijah's attitude has changed because he could not hold on to the idea of Devon being annoying—every time he tried, he ended up laughing—and because Elijah has stopped trying to push his true feelings away; he is allowing himself to be vulnerable. That is to say, Elijah has been sad and missing Devon all along, but at first, he was trying to ignore those feelings by focusing on his anger.*
- As a class, discuss the following questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

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

1. **We never actually hear from Devon in this story—we hear only what Elijah imagines him saying. Do you think Elijah's portrayal of Devon is reliable? Explain your answer.** *Answers will vary, though students are likely to say that the author gives us no reason to question Elijah's description of Devon. In fact, it seems as though Elijah attempts to portray Devon as other than he is but cannot do so. We also get the sense that Elijah and Devon are very close, so we can probably assume that Elijah knows Devon well and imagines what he would say fairly accurately.*
2. **Elijah asks himself, "When exactly did everything change? When did I know that everything would be different?" Why do you think he asks himself these questions?** *Answers will vary. Perhaps Elijah is trying to make sense out of a confusing time—trying to impose some sort of order on past events so that he feels more in control. Sometimes people feel that if they can better understand why or how something happened, it will help them accept or cope with that thing.*

3. **Do you think a lot of kids who read this story will be able to relate to it? Do you?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that a lot of kids will be able to relate to the story because a lot of kids are, like Elijah, facing a lot of changes and challenges this fall as they return to school.*
4. **Think about your own back-to-school experience this year. How does your experience compare to Elijah's?** *Answers will vary.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Elijah and Devon's Conversation**. This activity will help students organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 21 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.

Connected readings from the *Scope* archives that feature characters adjusting to difficult changes:

Fiction In a Flash: "[The Stars Between Us](#)" (December 2020/January 2021)

Fiction: "[Aftershocks](#)" (February 2020)

Poem: "[When This Is Over](#)" (June 2020)