

# HOLIDAY HOUSE

## READING GROUP GUIDE



## MIDDLE SCHOOL BITES

BY STEVEN BANKS  
ILLUSTRATED BY  
MARK FEARING

### ABOUT THE BOOK

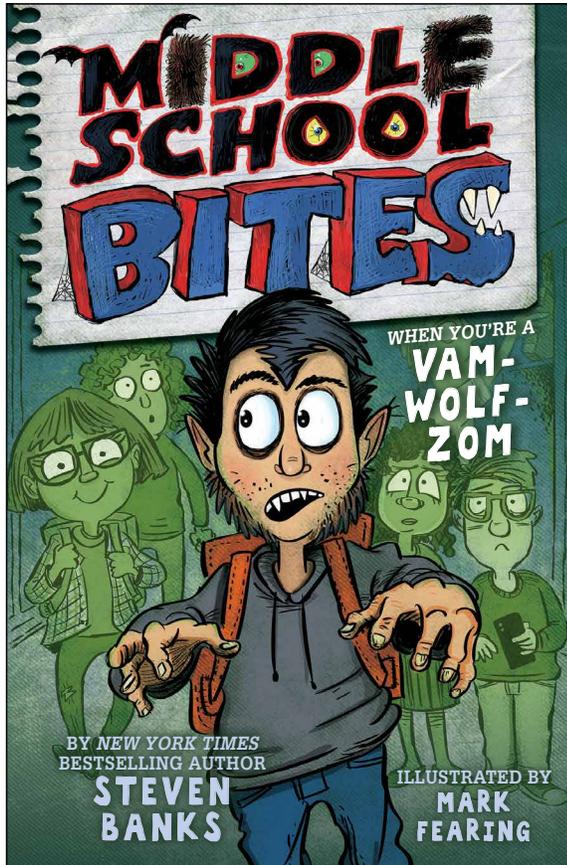
Tom is desperate to fit in at school, but he's hungry and howling, not to mention half dead. Blame it on the vampire—and the werewolf—and the zombie—in this monstrously funny new series from *SpongeBob SquarePants* head writer, Steven Banks.

Thanks to a series of unfortunate bites, eleven-year-old Tom is a triple threat: he's a Vam-Wolf-Zom. And just in time for the first day of middle school. So much for his *Invisible Tom Plan*. He never thought to make a *What If I Turn into a Vampire-Werewolf-Zombie Plan*.

Tom's toothsome saga is illustrated with clever cartoon-style art on every spread. Created by an Emmy-nominated writer for *SpongeBob*, *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron*, and *CatDog*, this new series is perfect for fans of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *The Last Kids on Earth*.

### READING GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Humor in novels is often revealed by what characters do and say. Point out the humor in this novel. Other than Tom, who are the humorous characters in the book? Cite scenes that are especially funny. How is this novel a humorous way of dealing with the trials and tribulations of middle school?
- Tom has an *Invisible Tom Plan* for sixth grade. Part of the plan includes what to wear on the first day of school. Why does he want to be invisible? How can clothing make one seem invisible or make one stick out in a crowd? Discuss how Abel's dress causes him to stand out. Tom is almost invisible in the picture that his mother takes on the first day of school. How is this symbolic of the way Tom wishes to feel?
- Tom develops lists and plans to help him deal with certain situations. He makes a list of four reasons not to be excited about middle school. Add to Tom's list with some of your own reasons to be apprehensive about middle school. Then make a list of reasons to be excited.



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- Tom’s sister tells him things about middle school that turn out to be false. How does this add to his apprehension? Name things that you were told about middle school that weren’t true, if applicable. Why do some students who have already experienced middle school get joy out of alarming rising middle school students?
- The motto of Hamilton Middle school is “All Are Welcome.” How does this motto establish a theme of acceptance? Discuss the significance of the quote from Dr. Seuss that Abel puts on a whiteboard in the locker: “Why fit in when you were born to stand out!” Debate whether a person must “fit in” in order to be welcomed. How do the students react to Tom, the Vam-Wolf-Zom? Does his situation cause him to “fit in” or to “stand out”?
- Abel Sherrill is an outsider. How is he comfortable with his status? Discuss how Abel is more accepting of others than others are of him. Explain Tom’s reaction when he learns that he must share a locker with Abel. What does Tom learn from Abel? How does he grow to accept Abel?
- Discuss Tom’s relationship with Gram. How does Tom react to Gram’s humor? Tom doesn’t tell his parents the bad things that happen, but he does tell Gram. What is it about Gram that causes Tom to confide in her? Gram tells him that he will have bad days. Discuss the bad days that he has at school. Gram gives him hope when she tells him that there is always tomorrow. How does sixth grade prepare him for those tomorrows?
- Every middle school has a bully. What is the best way to deal with bullies? How does Tanner Gantt bully Tom? Tom is excited that Tanner Gantt has moved away and won’t be in middle school with him. Discuss Tom’s feelings when Tanner gets on the bus the first day of school. Explain zero tolerance. Debate whether it’s fair that Tom is suspended for bullying when he was sticking up for Abel.
- *Foreshadowing* is a literary device that authors use to give clues about what might happen next in the story. Guess how the bat appearing at Tom’s window might foreshadow events that happen in the second book in the series.

## ABOUT THE CREATORS



Photo Credit: Cyd Weeks

**STEVEN BANKS** is the author of the Middle School Bites series. He received an Emmy nomination as head writer on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, wrote for *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron and CatDog*, has appeared on TV shows like *Penn & Teller: Fool Us*, attended Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College, wrote a book called *King of the Creeps*, co-created the international theater sensation *Shadowland*, and lives in California with his wife. He was once bitten by a donkey, but did not turn into a Donkey Man.

**MARK FEARING** has never been bitten by a werewolf, a zombie, or a vampire. But he was bitten by the creative bug, which is far more dangerous. Books he’s illustrated include *The Three Little Aliens and the Big Bad Robot*, by Margaret McNamara, and *Ben Franklin’s in My Bathroom!*, by Candace Fleming, as well as *The Great Thanksgiving Escape*, which he also wrote. He lives in Oregon with his family.

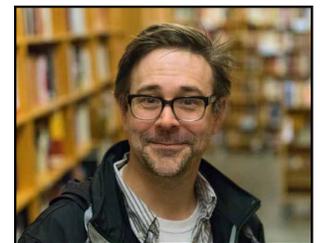


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