



bookbox

The Scholastic Reading Club Blog

FEBRUARY 4, 2014

TEACHER TUESDAYS



How I Survived Can Help Struggling Readers

by Guest Author

Recently we were contacted by Mike Lewis, one of our Teacher Advisors, who wanted to share his thoughts on the I Survived series and how it can be beneficial for struggling readers.

I work with kids who feel like they're getting dragged through the reading curriculum. Much of what's read in class is so unappealing to reluctant readers that they approach any book that's not a

graphic novel with skepticism. The gap between interest and readability presents a tremendous obstacle to these vulnerable students. They're given texts that they can decode but they don't find appealing, perpetuating their distaste for books and reading. I recently discovered that the I Survived series is an invaluable resource for these upper middle grade readers.

Doing justice to high-interest, accessible text might

be the most challenging feat for a writer. Lauren Tarshis has become a master of the high-interest book and she's set an entirely new bar for what writing for an audience of reluctant readers can look like.

I Survived the Nazi Invasion, 1944 begins with an intense, action-filled scene. While an engaging opening is a powerful strategy, many reluctant readers still haven't built the stamina or trust to work through the crucial events that will deepen their appreciation for the action. This author has figured out a way to pace the backstory to keep readers hooked.

Chapter after chapter, readers are thrown into a scene that gets them curious. They receive just enough context to want more, and they're rewarded with a bit more story before the segment ends on an eye-widening cliffhanger. Tarshis plays with time to ensure that both the story and historical context continue to escalate. To pace the book this way does more than just keep readers flipping pages; kids become invested in the subject matter through the story.

As a teacher, it's great to see how the *I Survived* series breaks so many of our preconceived notions about text level characteristics. Tarshis presents compelling subject matter (that often isn't introduced until upward of fifth grade) with a readability that even third graders can access. Whether the student's gap is in understanding



structure, language, or content, this is a series that teachers everywhere should be using to engage their reluctant readers. It certainly has all of the elements we look for to teach components of both high-quality fiction and nonfiction texts.

Earlier this year I gave a fourth grader who confessed he didn't like to read one of the *I Survived* books. He devoured it, passed it to a friend, devoured another, and passed it along, repeating this until he had the majority of the fourth grade hooked on the series. As a treat, I put my advance copy of *I Survived the Nazi Invasion, 1944* in a manila envelope and told him that as a thank-you for spreading the word, I wanted him to be the first student to see the new book. When he brought it back to me the next day, he told me it was the first book he ever read in one night and then asked for more books about the Nazis.



About the Author: Growing up, Mike Lewis didn't think comics and the sports page counted as reading, so he never saw himself as a reader. Eventually he discovered that some books were actually just as good as comics and sports writing. Mike spent six of his seven years teaching fourth and fifth grade for the Cohasset Public Schools advocating for boys' rights to literacy instruction. He created summer book clubs, wrote grants to bring in authors, and organized fund-raisers for the purchase of guy-friendly texts.