



In a Flash

Eric Walters

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 3.1

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Book Summary

The first flash mob Ian puts together himself is a sixty-plus person, four-minute pillow fight in a department store. His friend Oswald is thrilled with the event, but Julia, the one Ian really wants to impress, is still convinced that flash mobs are stupid. While Ian tries to prove Julia wrong by initiating flash mobs with political impact, Julia is busy waging war with the strict new principal at school. When Julia goes too far and gets suspended, Ian sees an opportunity for a relevant and persuasive flash mob.

Author Biography

Eric Walters is a best-selling author, teacher and social worker who also loves basketball. His many books for juveniles and young adults include these Orca titles: *Laggan Lard Butts* from the Orca Currents series, *Stuffed*, *Juice*, *Grind*, and *Overdrive* from the Orca Soundings series, *Caged Eagles* and *War of the Eagles* in the young adult category, and from the Basketball series, *Triple Threat*, *Underdog*, *Off Season*, *Full Court Press*, *Road Trip*, *Hoop Crazy!*, *Long Shot* and *Three on Three*.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Novel Study

1. Ian describes many flash mobs in *In a Flash*. Ian says, “Some were amazing, fantastic, gigantic” (p. 8). Choose a flash mob from the novel that appeals to you and imagine that you are Ian. It’s now the next day and you’re describing what happened. In the form of a letter or journal entry, tell the story of the event. Use evidence from the novel in your description.
2. Mr. Roberts told Ian he wanted “to talk to all the school leaders” (p. 39). Mr. Roberts, Julia and Ian are all leaders in *In a Flash*. Write a short description of each of these characters, indicating what makes them good (or poor) leaders. Is there a common leadership quality these characters share?
3. Ian described Julia as being “like a force of nature—strong, powerful, somewhat predictable and, if you weren’t careful, you could get hurt” (p. 42). Based on what you know from the novel, choose two characters and write powerful descriptive sentences about each.
4. Mr. Roberts tells the students and staff that they must work together to become the best school in the district. He says, “People who aren’t willing to work together are not welcome. No exceptions, no excuses, no reason to accept failure” (p. 49). Write a paragraph describing how Ian, Oswald and Julia each respond to Mr. Roberts’ leadership style.
5. The following words are used to describe characters’ expressions and feelings in *In a Flash*. Ask students to complete the following activities:
 - Divide into pairs, each taking half of the words. Then take turns acting out the emotions. With one person acting, can the other guess which emotion is being portrayed?
 - Now connect each emotion to a character in the novel. Can you guess which character is being described with each word? Give examples for each word. For example, *Julia felt anxious when the flash mob ended because she was worried they might get caught.*

Note: If students struggle with this exercise, provide the page numbers below to lend context to each word.

amused (p. 14)

confused (p. 14)

nervous (p. 64)

stunned (p. 14)

angry (p. 49)

embarrassed (p. 51)

scared (p. 14)

surprised (p. 49)

anxious (p. 16)

enraged (p. 68)

serious (p. 55)

worried (p. 63)

6. Use the quotations below to connect to the novel's characters, plot and themes. Ask students to write a paragraph, responding to each of the quotations. Who is speaking, and where does it fit in the novel's plot?

(p. 4) *"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."*

(p. 28) *"You put lots of strangers together without a leader and there's always potential for something bad to happen."*

(p. 48) *"Respect is one of the few things that is given, but that has to be earned. It's one of the few things that if you want to receive it, you have to give it."*

(p. 51) *"Just because something is popular doesn't make it right, and because something is right won't always make it popular."*

(p. 90) *"There are consequences for any action in life..."*

Option: Ask students to choose one of the quotations above to write a short story or skit. Some suggestions for story ideas are:

- Starting our Facebook page began as a joke, but then things went too far...
- It was fun organizing a surprise party for our friend. But we forgot one important thing...
- She didn't know what she was going to do after high school, but she had some dreams. So she met with her career counselor, who said...
- We thought planning the flash mob in the cafeteria at noon would be fun. Then things went wrong. If only we knew beforehand that...
- The person I respect the most is...and here's why...
- He wanted the other kids to respect him, but he went about it the wrong way...
- It seems crazy now, but the most popular thing to do that summer was to...
- He knew that this was one of those times he'd have to do the right thing, but it sure wasn't easy...

Vocabulary Enrichment

1. The following words are used in *In a Flash* in the context of Ian staging flash mobs. Invite students to choose from the short story writing exercises below.

Planning

consulting	organizer	planning	synchronize
coordination	participant	position	together
involved	persistence	success	unexpected

Using five or more of the words above,

- Write a paragraph describing Ian planning a flash mob in *In a Flash*.

- Write a paragraph describing how you would organize a fundraising event at your school.
- Create a crossword puzzle with a planning or flash mob theme. Add additional words from *In a Flash*, if you wish.

Legal Issues

legal advice/opinion	arrested	escape	lawyer	prisoners
slander/libel	illegal	police	trespassing	discipline
breaking the law	evidence	vandalism	options	suspects
private/public property	charged	fighting	responsible	threatened
security guards officers	damage	guilty	robbery	

Using five or more of the words above,

- Describe Ian’s father’s point of view, when they are discussing flash mobs.
- Write a short story with a crime or law theme.
- Describe the possible problems that could arise with one of the flash mobs in *In a Flash*.

Videotaping

a nice vantage point	film director	scene	camera
timing was everything	wide-angle lens	go wide	digital tape
go down to the action	screen	paused the tape	
did a great job on camera	tape the event	wide-frame	

Using five or more of the words above,

- Describe Julia’s experience filming one of the flash mobs in *In a Flash*.
- Make a “video dictionary” which provides descriptions for jargon or terms from film and video. Include illustrations, where appropriate.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Popular Culture—Flash Mobs

To engage students with the theme of flash mobs, use the following as group discussion topics, individual novel study, research or writing exercises:

1. According to Wikipedia, the first flash mobs were in May and June, 2003, in Manhattan department stores. The events were coordinated by Bill Wasik, a senior editor of Harper’s Magazine. Research Bill Wasik’s story. Why did he organize flash mobs? What other flash mobs did he coordinate? Is he still organizing them?

2. Why do people like to participate in flash mobs? List three reasons and give examples. Prompts: flash mobs can present opportunities to meet new friends; they're fun and silly; they could be considered performance art; and they don't require a big time commitment.
3. What role do cell phones, text messaging, blogs and e-mail have in organizing flash mobs? Without those technologies, how would planning flash mobs be different?
4. Eric Walters, the author of *In a Flash*, writes, "I believe this generation of technologically literate people—people primarily under the age of twenty—will discover how to use this power to create social justice, spread information, break the monopolies of power interests and overthrow totalitarian governments" (see author's note).
5. Julia says to Ian, "With all the bad things going on in the world—racism, poverty, wars, hunger—you organized a pillow fight" (p. 22).
 - Considering what Eric Walters says in his author's note, and what Julia says to Ian, how can cell phones, text messaging, blogs or e-mail be used in a positive way? Think of an example that your class could participate in.

More Ideas for Discussion and Exploration

1. Julia and Mr. Roberts don't see eye-to-eye on the role of the student president. Julia says, "...as the president, I represent the students...I was democratically elected" (p. 50). Mr. Roberts responds, saying, "This is not a democracy...In the end, I'm going to do what I think is right, whether you agree or not" (p. 51). Examine each character's point of view. What are their interests, motivations and goals? Who would you rather have lead your school? Could both co-exist as leaders?
2. At his last school, Mr. Roberts banned the use of cell phones and iPods on school property and held random locker searches. Many schools have similar rules. Choose one issue and hold a class debate, with one side speaking on behalf of the students and the other the school administration. What is the opinion of each side? Is there a compromise both sides can agree to?
3. Ian tells Oswald and Julia about flash mobs that have taken place in New York, London, Madrid and Los Angeles. Research a flash mob that took place in a major world city. Prepare a presentation for your class, describing the event. What happened? Was it successful? (For example, was it run effectively? Did anyone get hurt? Was a social message part of the event's intention?)
4. Ian and Oswald stage their first flash mob in a department store. Imagine you are an interior designer and you have been commissioned to design a new 50 x 50

foot store. Create a plan for your department store, completing the following:

- Decide on a name, theme and product or service specialty for your store. For example, My store is called *The Candelabra*. I sell candles for home décor as well as candle-making and craft supplies. I offer candle-making workshops on Saturdays.
- Make a list of at least ten elements that must be a part of your store's floor plan. For example, front and delivery entrances, large windows to display products, emergency exit, cashier bay, change room, stock room, etc.
- Sketch the floor plan for your store. Then choose the furniture and fixtures.

Option: You may wish to have students design to scale. If so, create early draft floor plans using graph paper, where each square represents one foot or six inches.

- Present your store's floor plan to the class. Introduce your store, its name, theme and specialty, and then show your floor plan. Why did you choose to put the furniture and store elements where you did?
5. Ian uses e-mail to arrange a boycott of Frankie's restaurant, and Julia uses her Facebook page to arrange a boycott of the school. After Julia posted her message, "less than twelve hours had passed and everybody seemed to know. That was the power and danger of the Internet" (p. 84). Discuss the power and danger of the Internet. Are there rules for Internet use in your school?
 6. *In a Flash* uses many terms taken from the Internet or text messaging. Julia calls it "Geek Speak," and Ian says it is "almost a whole new language" (p. 6). One example in *In a Flash* is "approximeet," which describes meeting in a general area and communicating coordinates by text messaging. Ask students to complete the following.
 - Make a list of five words or terms from *In a Flash* which fall into this category. For each, provide a description. When is each used? Examples: e-mail blast, fan-out, Facebook friend, icon, online profile, posted item.
 - Make a list of ten new or emerging terms used in online or text messaging and describe each. For example, abbreviations such as "ttyl" (talk to you later) or "ttn" (ta ta for now) are used in online chatting to condense text and allow for speedy and spontaneous communication.