



FaceSpace

Adrian Chamberlain

Reading level: 2.0

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Book Summary

Danny McBride is not the coolest kid in school, not in his wildest dreams. And if the other kids knew he spent his Saturday nights playing Parcheesi with his mom and working on a city made of Lego, he'd be even less cool. Danny wants more than anything to be popular. He creates a fictional British rocker named James and befriends him publicly online, hoping his make-believe friend's cool will rub off. It works. Danny starts making friends and feeling like part of the crowd—until people start wanting to meet the imaginary friend, and Danny's plan starts to unravel.

Author Biography

Adrian Chamberlain has always wanted to be a rock star. While holding down a day job as an entertainment writer for the *Victoria Times Colonist*, he indulges his fantasies (albeit on a reduced scale) by playing organ and piano for The Soul Shakers, a Victoria, British Columbia, rhythm-and-blues band. *FaceSpace* is his first contribution to the Orca Currents series. He is also the author of *Rock Star* in the Orca Soundings series.

Connecting to the Text***Character and Novel Study***

1. To engage students with the main character Danny, use the following as large group discussion topics, individual novel study or writing exercises:

- ♦ Danny compares himself to Brad, noting that Brad has 763 friends on FaceSpace while he has only 53. Brad is a “really good guy” and they’ve been best friends since they were eight. So why would Danny Photoshop Brad’s FaceSpace photos to make him look bad? As Danny said, “Who does this to a friend?” (ch. 3)
- ♦ Danny says that fictional James Bradbury’s many FaceSpace friends are shallow, yet Danny enjoys his newfound attention at school. He goes from feeling “invisible” to being a “somebody...somebody important even” (ch. 5). Do you think Danny is shallow too, or does he really want true friendship from others?
- ♦ Danny appears to have a lot of anger about not having a girlfriend, being popular or getting invited to parties. He says, “Why didn’t anyone invite me? That’s what I’d like to know” (ch. 1). All things considered, do you think Danny tries to make friends and uses opportunities to join in groups? Is Danny a friend you’d like to have? Why, or why not?

2. Use the quotations below to connect students to Danny and the novel’s themes. Ask students to write a paragraph, responding to each of the quotations. What is happening for Danny, and what themes emerge in *FaceSpace*?

Option: As a creative writing exercise, ask students to choose one of the quotations below to write a short story, diary entry or skit. Potential story ideas follow each quotation. Where possible, ask students to compare their story to *FaceSpace*. How might they share themes?

ch. 2 *If I could take it all back, would I? You bet. But sometimes we do stuff we regret, almost without thinking. It’s like something takes over. You know what I mean?*

- Creative writing example: When we were all in primary school, we were tight: sleepovers, birthday parties, gaming and hanging around at the 7-11 every day after school. Now we’re in high school and everyone has joined cliques. Dylan, who was our friend, is now the butt of everyone’s joke because he’s overweight. It’s gotten out of hand...

ch. 3 *If only I could be, I don’t know, someone else. Someone who’s always cool, who always knows what to do and say, someone popular.*

- Creative writing example: I want to be popular, but the truth is I’m not good looking or good at sports, and I never seem to know what to say to kids at school. But online I have a lot of followers and they all say I’m really funny. It was great until the online group started organizing a meet up at a teen comedy club...

- ch. 5 *When you're making stuff up, you've got to be careful you don't tell one person one thing and another person something different.*
- Creative writing example: We all snuck out last night to hang around downtown. None of our parents suspected a thing because we all told our parents something different. Then Joey started showing off at school that he'd seen the big car crash at midnight by the train station. The principal called us down to the office and the police want to get witness statements. How do we get out of this?
- ch. 6 *Have you ever done something you think is a good idea, and then the next day it seems like a really stupid idea?*
- Creative writing example: Setting up a FaceSpace profile to collect money for a phony charity was supposed to be an April Fools' Day joke. We called the charity "Sk8-Much" because Chloe broke her long board and we were making fun of her. We didn't realize people would actually take it seriously and send money!

The Writer's Craft

Danny has two nightmares in the novel. In both cases, the dreams reflect what is happening inside Danny, magnifying his feelings and anxieties for readers. Discuss each dream in the large group, in the context of the novel's plot. How does seeing Danny's dreams help us to understand what he is thinking and feeling?

- In chapter 5, Danny dreams of being captured and interrogated by combat soldiers in Vietnam. This is right after Danny creates the imaginary profile of James Bradbury on FaceSpace. Could Danny have a guilty conscience? Is he afraid of being caught in his lie?
- In chapter 8, Danny dreams of being chased while he's lost in an old-fashioned mansion. He says, "Something's after me, but I can't see who or what it is. That makes [the dream] even worse." This occurs right after Danny has made a date with Megan and James, and he knows the situation is out of hand. Danny has a dark secret and it's about to be exposed. Could he feel lost and scared, as though the "truth" is out to get him?

Option: Challenge students to keep a dream journal for a week (educators may wish to do this exercise as well). Ask students to record their dreams—even if they can only remember an image or feeling. Tracking dreams can be fun and enlightening. Ask students to compare their dreams to their daytime "reality." Are there connections to be made, as with Danny and his dreams?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

The convention of an alter ego character is common in literature and popular culture. In a large group, ask students to find examples in comic book series, TV shows, singers or movies. Ideas to get students started: Clark Kent/Superman, Bruce Banner/The Incredible Hulk, Eminem/Slim Shady, Beyonce/Sasha Fierce, Hannah Stewart/Hannah Montana.

Discussion topics:

- As a performer or author, what might be attractive about creating an alter ego for yourself or a character? What could present a risk or be dangerous?
- Do you think James Bradbury is an alter ego for Danny McBride? James seems to have a lot of the characteristics Danny lacks but wants, such as great looks, a Jaguar, lots of followers on FaceSpace, and instant popularity.
- If you could wave a magic wand and create an alter ego for yourself, what would s/he be like? Describe your alter ego's personality, talents, abilities, etc. How is your alter ego different from yourself, and why did you choose the characteristics you did?

Personal Planning, Leadership

Brad, Danny's best friend, sees things in Danny that he doesn't see in himself. For example, Danny describes himself in the novel as a knob, loser, jerk and dork. He agonizes because he doesn't get invited to parties and doesn't have many friends—either at school or on FaceSpace. But Brad says, “You're a smart guy. You're funny. You're a cool dude. A crazy dude, but still cool” (ch. 10).

In a large group discussion, ask students to describe Danny as he sees himself, for example as a loser with no friends whose exciting life includes playing cards with his mom. Then ask students to describe Danny in a more positive light. Danny has the courage to come clean with Brad and Megan. That takes guts!

- Use this exercise to demonstrate the art of reframing. To get students started, ask them to compare these descriptions of Danny:
 - ◆ Danny has no idea about fashion. He doesn't know what's going on at all.
 - *Danny really knows a lot about music and music history. He knows all about Nirvana, the Pixies and the Breeders, who are seminal musicians from the 1990s. They influenced a lot of other bands.*
 - ◆ Danny has a lame hobby—he still plays with Lego!
 - *Danny thinks like an architect or a city planner. He's really skilled at modeling. The world needs inventive and creative thinkers.*
 - ◆ Danny is a dork with no friends who faked a friend on FaceSpace to get attention. What a poser!
 - *Danny is really good at thinking on his feet, and he made a pretty convincing character in James Bradbury. He just needs to channel that energy differently. He should think about writing stories or even movie scripts.*
 - *Danny has an opportunity now to demonstrate courage and grow as a person. He will gain more than he loses from this experience.*
- Following this discussion, ask students to write (in private) a note describing something that is happening for them (or about them) that they perceive negatively. Then encourage them to “reframe” their situation in a more positive light. Encourage students to consider both the negative and positive as valid feelings and perceptions. But doesn't the positive reframing present more opportunities and potential?