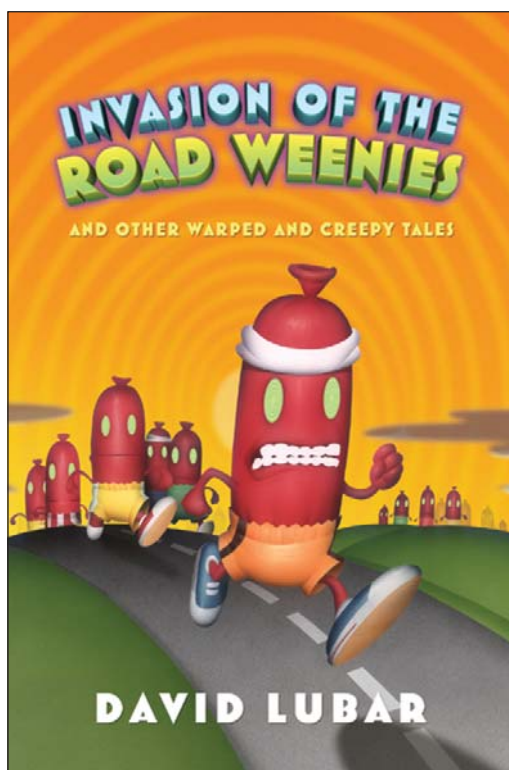




David Lubar

Invasion of the Road Weenies



192 pages • 0-765-31447-9

“Lubar strikes again....
Another winning roundup.”

—BOOKLIST

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PHOTO: JOELLE LUBAR

David Lubar grew up in Morristown, New Jersey. He loves writing scary stories and he hates jogging, though he always makes sure to smile and wave at the road weenies as they stagger past him on the streets near his house. His books include *Hidden Talents*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults; *Flip*, a VOYA Best Book of the Year; and *In the Land of the Lawn Weenies*, his previous collection of spooky-funny tales. You can visit him on the web at www.davidlubar.com.

ABOUT *INVASION OF THE ROAD WEENIES*

From a girl whose wanderings change her world to a boy who discovers the reason joggers never smile, the thirty-five short stories in this deliciously creepy collection explore a wealth of weird circumstances and wide-ranging questions. Author David Lubar employs his singular imagination, sense of humor, and talent for quirky wordplay to create a volume that is not simply scary but a thought-provoking model of first-class short story writing. At the end of the book, he reveals the ideas that inspired each tale. This unique glimpse behind the curtain of Lubar's creative mind will surely prompt young writers to explore their own talents for wondering: *What if...?*

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The information, activities and discussion questions which follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Invasion of the Road Weenies*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. THE SHORT STORY

A. Edgar Allan Poe first defined the short story as a narrative work that can be read in one sitting. What other features, such as a limited number of characters, or one powerful central idea, are typical of the short story? Go to your local library or online to learn more about the short story, its definition, and its history as a literary form. Create an informative poster detailing your findings.

B. Explore the scary short story. Read short stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Stephen King, Katherine Mansfield, H. G. Wells, or other well-known horror story writers. Select a favorite. Then write a report consisting of a plot summary, a brief biography of the author, and a paragraph describing what you found especially scary or thought-provoking about this tale.

C. Design and draw the cover you would like to see if the story you chose in exercise IB were to be published as a book. Add your cover design to your story report, above. If possible, combine your report with the reports of friends or classmates to create a group display of favorite scary stories.

II. FEARS, RUMORS, WONDERS...

A. What scares you? Create a survey to find out what dreams, images, and situations scare people the most. Have family members, classmates, or friends complete your survey. Then write a summary of your findings, including a paragraph that details the way your own fears fit into the survey results.

B. Have you ever heard a creepy rumor at school or in your neighborhood, such as the story of “The Green Man”? Write a 2-4 paragraph essay describing the rumor, your reaction, and the truth behind the story if you know it. Do you still have fears, worries, or bad dreams as a result of the rumor? What, if anything, did you learn from the rumor experience?

C. Turn your rumor essay from exercise IIB into the script for a scary television show. Write speaking parts for several characters and draw a storyboard depicting the setting and special effects. Invite friends or classmates to read your script aloud.

D. Create a chart categorizing the stories in this collection by their main themes, settings, and other categories of your choice. Chart headings might include rumors, superstitions, wishes-coming-true, nighttime dreams, and the wilderness. Write each story title under the appropriate heading(s). What conclusions might you make from reviewing the chart? What settings do you find most frightening? What ideas do you find most intriguing? What makes a short story scary?

III. TURNING “BAD” IDEAS INTO GOOD STORIES

A. Many of the stories in *Invasion of the Road Weenies* follow a protagonist’s fear, superstition, or bad idea to its extreme conclusion. For example, in “Bed Tings,” the superstition that bad things happen in threes is twisted into an eerie tale. In “The Dead Can’t Hurt You,” the truth of this phrase is revealed, providing both comfort and terror to the main character. Think of a “bad” idea you have had, such as a nightmare or a superstition. On a sheet of paper, or in discussion with friends, brainstorm ways to turn your “bad” idea into a scary story. Does working to turn your idea into a story make it more or less scary for you in real life? Why or why not?

B. Find several stories in this collection that deal with paths, roadways, or traveling. On a sheet of paper, sketch a winding path. Fill the space around the path with words describing the possible meanings, values, and frightening elements of the pathways in the stories. Then use these words to write a poem expressing your own thoughts about this motif. The poem can be scary, thoughtful, or even humorous.

C. Try writing your own scary short story, applying some of the observations you have made from studying this literary form. Consider one of the questions David Lubar poses in the final chapter of *Invasion of the Road Weenies*, or address something strange about which you have wondered. Select a setting for your story and brainstorm plot ideas. Write a tale about 4-6 pages in length. Read your finished story to friends or classmates.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What fear does Jennifer conquer in “The Last Halloween”? By what means is her fear conquered? What themes or ideas from this first story carry through some or all of the other tales in *Invasion of the Road Weenies*?
2. What classic superstition plays a role in “Bed Tings”? Do you believe in such notions as “bad things come in threes” or “black cats bring bad luck”? Has superstition ever influenced your actions or thoughts? Explain.
3. Several stories in this collection, such as “The Green Man,” deal with scary rumors spread around schools and neighborhoods. How do you think these rumors start? Has such a rumor ever spread through your community? Do you believe the scary stories other kids tell on the playground? Why or why not?
4. “Precious Memories” and “We Interrupt This Program” explore strange interactions between kids and technology. What is your reaction to these stories? Do you ever have frightening thoughts about the high-tech devices in your home? Describe these ideas.
5. Are “Goose Eggs” and “Anything You Want” stories about greed? Why or why not? What might the author be saying about wealth and wishes? What other stories in the collection explore this or related themes?
6. Several stories deal with the interaction between people and nature. What do you think the author fears, appreciates, or worries about nature and the way people treat their world? Do you share any of these concerns?
7. Look back through the collection to find stories in which kids disappear. Compare and contrast these tales. Why do you think the author includes such a selection of disappearance stories?
8. “Unseen,” “Invasion of the Road Weenies,” and “The Shortcut” all involve taking roads or pathways. What other elements do these stories share? How is the notion of traveling along a path an important motif in this story collection? Explain your answer.
9. In the last section of the book, David Lubar describes how he came to write the stories in this collection. Were any of his thoughts surprising? Did you ever experience similar “wonders”? For which of his musings might you have come up with an entirely different story? Briefly describe the story you would tell.

10. Short story master Edgar Allan Poe once said: “They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night.” What does this statement mean to you? How might it apply to *Invasion of the Road Weenies*, to author David Lubar, and to any dreamers you might know?

A WORD OR TWO ABOUT THESE STORIES BY DAVID LUBAR

“Where do you get your ideas?” This is probably the most common question every writer gets asked. For me, there’s not one simple answer. Every story takes a different path. Some ideas appear in a flash. Others grow slowly. Here’s a look behind the scenes at the various ways I got the ideas for some of the stories in this collection.

Bed Tings

My grandmother talked with an accent. One day, I was thinking about the phrase “Bad Things Come in Threes” and the word “three” spawned a memory of the way she said, “Tree.” She was a cool grandmother. She watched wrestling, played poker, and dressed up and wore white gloves when she went to the supermarket. As far as I know, she didn’t climb trees.

The Dead Won’t Hurt You

I started with the opening scene, and had no idea what would happen. I just wanted to put a creeped-out kid in the middle of a cemetery at midnight. I figured something interesting would pop up. When I was younger, I felt spooked by cemeteries, but they don’t bother me now. At least, not as much.

Willard’s Oppositional Notebook

There’s a long tradition of stories where a powerful object brings disaster to its owner. I’d been thinking of various objects that might grant wishes. First, I thought of a pencil. That led me to notebooks. But I didn’t want it to just grant wishes, so I kept thinking until I came up with a satisfying twist.

Mr. Lambini’s Haunted House

There’s one person in every neighborhood who goes all out on Halloween and creates a haunted house. I’ve watched kids who are too scared to enter, and others who make a big show of how brave they are. This gave rise to wondering what would happen if there were more to the house than anyone knew.

Baby Talk

I started out thinking what it would be like for a kid if her baby brother became famous. That, of course, led me to wonder, famous for what? This is a good example of how one idea can lead to another.

Every Autumn

I was thinking about piles of leaves by the curb, and the way kids walk through them. This is another example of something ordinary (at least if you live where there are deciduous trees) becoming something strange.

The Whole Nine Yards

After seeing lots of concrete with initials and other writing, I started thinking about what else you might see. Footprints came to mind. This is a good example of a technique I use a lot. I'll set up a problem or puzzle, and then write a story to explain it. This way, both I and the reader are in for a surprise.

The Green Man

When I was in elementary school, everyone was talking about the Green Man. We were truly spooked about him, and I remember looking over my shoulder when I walked anywhere. They said he had a collie with him. He was spotted on the roof of the school once. It was a strange sort of dread. I knew he couldn't be real, but he still haunted me. I tried to capture that feeling in this story.

The Tank

My house has a septic tank. I try not to think about it too much, but as you can see, I can't always control the directions my mind takes. And I can't help noticing the ripples in the water.

Lines

I was visiting an elementary school and noticed how kids are always moving from place to place in a line. From there, it was easy to wonder "what if someone stepped out of line." The most commonplace things can spark a story if you look at them with fresh eyes.

Invasion of the Road Weenies

Like the character in the story, I noticed that adult joggers never smile. As I started wondering about this, I realized that something must be making them jog. This was the best explanation I could come up with.

We Interrupt this Program

I think I was playing with the remote when I got this idea. There were actually a couple of buttons hidden under a sliding panel. There was nothing as exciting as "insert." It was just stuff like a sleep timer (which I never figured out how to use, or even had any desire to use). Mundane or not, those buttons gave me the idea.

The Shortcut

I remember getting caught in a major rain storm when I was a kid. When I started writing this story, all I had in mind was a couple of very wet kids. Once they walked into the hospital, it was easy to know where to send them. I try to end every collection with a really scary story. I hope this one did the trick.