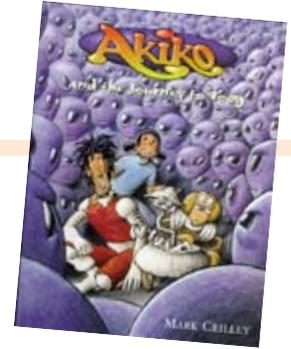


## Akiko and the Journey to Toog

by Mark Crilly



### Introduce *Akiko and the Journey to Toog*

Most of the time, Akiko's just an ordinary fifth grader—until she takes off to other galaxies, pilots rocket ships, and battles aliens with her gang of extraterrestrials. Their mission this time—save the planet Toog.

Get kids curious about *Akiko and the Journey to Toog*. Ask *Do you know what science fiction is? Have you ever seen Star Trek, Star Wars, or Time Warp Trio? What did you like about the show? Who was your favorite character? Why?*

### Discuss *Akiko and the Journey to Toog*

This chapter book is one in a series of Akiko books. There are several ways you can read the book: (1) as the featured book for an entire 7- to 9-week club or (2) as an exciting introduction to the science fiction (sci-fi) genre. See tips for each option below.

**Option 1:** Read 2 or 3 chapters during each book club meeting. (Chapters take an average of 8 minutes to read.) Begin each club meeting by quickly reviewing (or having the kids recount) the story so far. After reading new chapters, use the discussion questions below to talk about what you read. Add your own discussion questions as desired.

**Option 2:** Tell the kids you will read an excerpt from a science fiction story. Read the first few chapters to get kids interested in the genre. Then discuss the chapters, using the questions below. Have kids pick this or another sci-fi book from the list below to read at home. You may want to use some of the more general discussion questions below to explore the books kids read at home during future club meetings.

After reading *Akiko and the Journey to Toog* aloud, help kids understand the plot and connect with the characters by asking:

#### Chapters 1–3

1. Does anyone know what sci-fi is? (*short for science fiction*)
2. Akiko calls herself an average fifth grader. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. According to Akiko, people always think she is exaggerating. Do you know someone who makes up incredible stories? What do they say? What do you think is the difference between exaggerating and lying?
4. Akiko's replacement robot looks like her and must act like her. What would your robot replacement have to do to convince people it is you?

#### Chapters 4–6

1. Akiko and her friends have been attacked by drone mines, crashed on the planet Toog, and taken prisoner. Would you like to go on a space adventure? Where would you go? What would you do? What real-life, exciting adventures have you had?
2. How are the space crew's adventures similar or different from other sci-fi stories you know?
3. What would you do if you saw an alien? Would you try to run and hide? Would you try to communicate with the alien? What would you say?

### Chapters 7–9

1. Aliens in stories often have special powers. Toogolians can do brainmelts. What other powers do aliens have in books, on TV, and in movies?
2. What do you think the *DOO-KAAK* sound is that Akiko and Gax hear while they are in the open-air prison?
3. The thramblewood tree has tentacles. What other plants or animals do you know that have tentacles? (*octopus, squid, jellyfish*)

### Chapters 10–12

1. Poog came back to help the space adventurers. He is still their friend. What do you think makes a good friend?
2. Sometimes science fiction is based on real science. For instance, there really are robots. What do you know about them? Are there robot replacements? What real-life inventions do drone mines and core eaters remind you of? (*guided missiles and oil rigs*)
3. There are lots of interesting names in this book. Spuckler has a friend named Fluggly Ragstubble; then there are Mr. Bebba, Poog, and Akiko. Can you make up an unusual name?

### Chapters 13–15

1. Why do you think Spuckler and Fluggly Ragstubble are such good friends? How are they alike? How are they different?
2. Ragstubble eats slimy, green, live things. What's the most unusual thing you ever ate, or saw someone eat? What did it taste like?
3. Poog doesn't trust Ragstubble because he is a Tri-Yarm. Do you think he is justified in not trusting him? Why? Why not? Would you trust him?

### Chapters 16–18

1. After reading chapter 17 ask, *Now you know that the Tri-Yarms are the "bad guys," do you still think the space crew should trust Ragstubble? Why or why not?*
2. What does Ragstubble do to prove his loyalty? Do you think it was a difficult decision for him? Why? What would you do in similar circumstances?
3. Everyone is shocked to find out that Poog's uncle Zeem is not dead. Why do you think Zeem betrayed his own people?

### Chapters 19–22

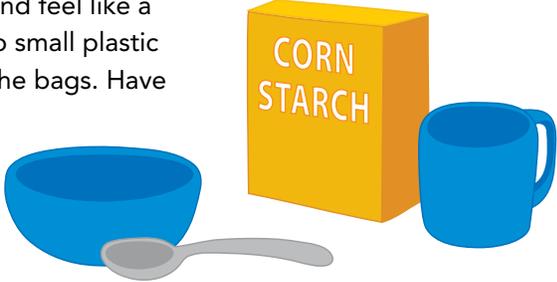
1. What does uncle Zeem's tongue-leech remind you of from the TV show *Star Trek*? (*Star Trek's universal language translator—a device that provides instantaneous translation of alien languages.*)
2. Now that Akiko has saved the day, she has to go back to her normal life. What do you think it will be like for her to be an ordinary fifth grader again? Why?
3. What do you think will happen next to Akiko?

## Activities

Doing a hands-on activity that connects to the story makes the experience more personal and memorable for kids. Choose one (or more) of the activities below, or make up one of your own.

- 1. Create a sci-fi story.** Sci-fi often involves space travel, the future, people with special powers (like the ability to read minds or change shapes), and new technology or inventions. Tell kids they have been asked to come up with the plot of a new book, movie, or TV show. Ask them to create a story “pitch.” They should answer the following questions: Where and in what time period does the story take place? What is the setting? Who are the major characters? What is the story about?
- 2. Draw a scene for a graphic novel.** Graphic novels are another great way to introduce sci-fi to kids (see More Suggested Books below.) Tell kids they are a graphic novelist (*someone who tells stories through pictures*). Have them draw a scene to illustrate the storylines they created above, or use these storylines:
  - A squadron of alien spaceships from Triton attacks Earth
  - The alien monster Monchuk changes from alien to human or alien to (what?) to escape detection
  - Superheroes battle the dark forces of Mavern
  - In the year 4527 the planet Earth looks like . . . (kids decide)

*Optional:* Have kids check out the alien art gallery at [www.sciencenewsforkids.org/pages/scifizone/artgallery.asp](http://www.sciencenewsforkids.org/pages/scifizone/artgallery.asp) and submit their drawings to [scifizone@snkids.com](mailto:scifizone@snkids.com). Or they can mail their drawings to Julie E. Czerneda, Science News for Kids, 1719 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036.

- 3. Make a supernatural substance . . . naturally.** Mix well 1 pound of cornstarch with 1 1/2 cups of water in a bowl. (The final mixture may look and feel like a liquid on top and a solid on the bottom.) Spoon the mixture into small plastic bags, enough for each pair of kids, press out the air, and close the bags. Have kids take turns gently poking or touching the material in the bag. Then have them poke it hard. What do they notice? *(When touched gently the substance acts like a liquid. When poked hard, it acts like a solid. This is because it is an amorphous substance. Under pressure the particles in the cornstarch come together and act like a solid. When you release the pressure, the particles move apart, which causes the material to lose its structure and flow like a liquid.)* Note: Although much messier, the results are even more dramatic if kids squeeze the substance (without the bag) in their hands, then open their hands. Ask *Did the different ways the substance reacted surprise you? Does it seem possible that a substance can be soft and hard?* Ask them to name their “supernatural” substance. Tell the kids what the substance is made of. Dispose of the cornstarch mixture in the trash.
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- 4. Create an alien language.** In pairs, ask kids to create the rudiments of an alien language. They might create a new alphabet, specific words, or an adaptation of English (for example, Pig Latin). Have them make up a phrase or sentence, then share the code and their message with another group. Did the groups figure out each other’s messages? What did they say?
  - 5. Meet the aliens.** Have kids role play the first encounter between humans and aliens.
  - 6. Program your robot.** Have kids draw a robot and write a description of what it would do. If you want to extend the activity, kids can program a robot online to pick up hazardous waste at [tryscience.com/experiments/experiments\\_robot\\_online.html](http://tryscience.com/experiments/experiments_robot_online.html)

## Get Involved

Many kids love to hear stories about aliens, spaceships, and space adventures. **Take your role play of the first encounter between humans and aliens on the road.** Kids can write a short skit, practice it, create sets and costumes, and perform it for local schools and afterschool programs. Or, have them **read an age-appropriate sci-fi story** to younger kids.

## Web Explorations

Visit one or more of these sites to further explore the themes and topics from the book.

[pbskidsgo.org/cyberchase/games/functions/functions.html](http://pbskidsgo.org/cyberchase/games/functions/functions.html)

**Stop that Creature!** Kids use math to stop the machine that is making clones to destroy Poddleville.

[pbskidsgo.org/arthur/games/alien/](http://pbskidsgo.org/arthur/games/alien/)

What do aliens look like? Kids can decide by using parts to build one at **Alien: Assembly Required.**

[pbskidsgo.org/cgi-registry/zoom/ubbidubbi.cgi](http://pbskidsgo.org/cgi-registry/zoom/ubbidubbi.cgi)

Kids decode **Ubbi Dubbi**, the secret language of ZOOM®.

[pbskidsgo.org/dragonflytv/knowhow/knowhow\\_alien\\_clue.html](http://pbskidsgo.org/dragonflytv/knowhow/knowhow_alien_clue.html)

**How can you tell if aliens are trying to contact Earth?** Solve this science mystery by answering a riddle, then hear more from an expert.

## More Suggested Books

Read science fiction:

*Akiko* (series) by Mark Crilley

*Moondogs* by Daniel Kirk

*Captain Underpants* (series) by Dav Pilkey

*Ned Feldman, Space Pirate* by Daniel Pinkwater

*Time Warp Trio* (series) by Jon Scieszka

*Stinker from Space* by Pamela F. Service

*Aliens for Dinner* (series includes *Aliens for Breakfast* and *Aliens for Lunch*)  
by Stephanie Spinner

*Moog-Moog, Space Barber* by Mark Teague

Read graphic novels:

*Akiko* (series) by Mark Crilley

*Rose* by Jeff Smith and Charles Vess

Read whether it's science or sci-fi:

*Megapowers: Can Science Fact Defeat Science Fiction?* by Jack Weyland

*Muse* (magazine) published by Carus Publishing Co., Cricket Magazine Group

*Odyssey: Adventures in Science* published by Carus Publishing Co.