About the Author

Alexandra Robbins (b. 1976) is a journalist and bestselling author. She has written for several newspapers and magazines, including the *Los Angeles Times,* the *Washington Post,* and the *Atlantic.* Robbins's journalism is highly regarded; she was a recipient of the John Bartlow Martin Award. Her most recent work, *The Nurses: A Year of Secrets, Drama, and Miracles With the Heroes of the Hospital*, has been praised for its investigative merit and captivating narrative of the nursing profession.

Revenge of the Geeks

Concept Vocabulary

As you perform your first read of "Revenge of the Geeks," you will encounter these words.

marginalize	pariah	bigotry

Context Clues If these words are unfamiliar, try using **context clues**—other words and phrases that appear nearby in the text—to help you determine their meanings. There are different types of context clues.

Definition: In some cases, **psychologists** and **sociologists** do related work. The former study individual behavior, whereas the latter study group behavior.
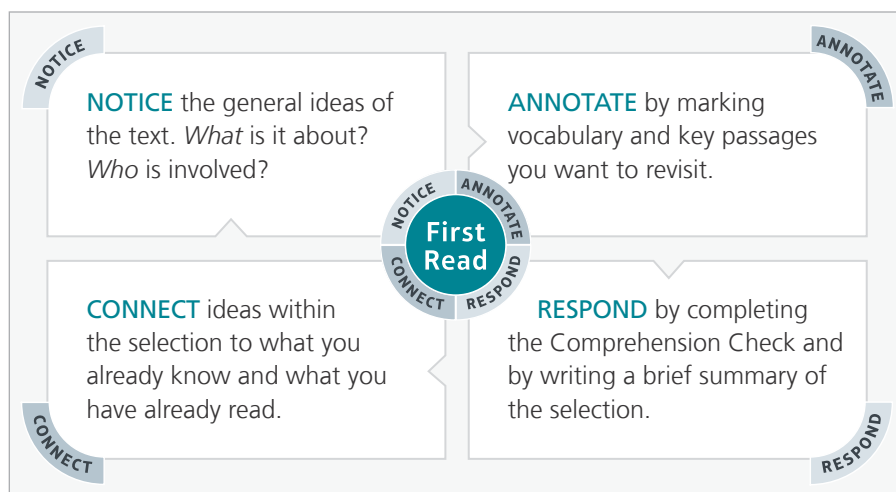
Elaborating Details: She was once a loner, but is now a media **tycoon** and one of the richest women in the world.

Antonym, or Contrast of Ideas: Some members of the group are sadly **indolent**, but others work extremely hard.

Apply your knowledge of context clues and other vocabulary strategies to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words you encounter during your first read. Use a resource such as a dictionary or a thesaurus to verify your definitions.

First Read NONFICTION

Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete a close read after your first read.

NOTICE the general ideas of the text. *What* is it about? *Who* is involved?

ANNOTATE by marking vocabulary and key passages you want to revisit.

First Read

CONNECT ideas within the selection to what you already know and what you have already read.

RESPOND by completing the Comprehension Check and by writing a brief summary of the selection.

Revenge of the Geeks

Alexandra Robbins

BACKGROUND

The word *geek* has a long history—one of its earliest appearances was as *gecke* in the works of Shakespeare, as a word for "fool." It became *geek* in the late nineteenth century, and by the middle of the twentieth century it had come to be used as a generic, all-purpose insult. In the 1970s, however, *geek* came to mean, specifically, "an overly eager student," especially one interested in computers.

SCAN FOR MULTIMEDIA

NOTES

1   Many popular students approach graduation day with bittersweet nostalgia: Excitement for the future is tempered by fear of lost status. But as cap-and-gown season nears, let's also stop to consider the outcasts, students for whom finishing high school feels like liberation from a state-imposed sentence.

2   In seven years of reporting from American middle and high schools, I've seen repeatedly that the differences that cause a student to be excluded in high school are often the same traits or skills that will serve him or her well after graduation.

3   Examples abound: Taylor Swift's classmates left the lunch table as soon as she sat down because they disdained her taste for country music. Last year, the Grammy winner was the nation's top-selling recording artist.

4   Students mocked Tim Gunn's love of making things; now he is a fashion icon with the recognizable catchphrase "Make it work."

5   J. K. Rowling, author of the bestselling "Harry Potter" series, has described herself as a bullied child "who lived mostly in books and daydreams." It's no wonder she went on to write books populated with kids she describes as "outcasts and comfortable with being so."

6   For many, says Sacred Heart University psychology professor Kathryn LaFontana, high school is the "first foray[1] into the adult world where [kids] have to think about their own status." And for

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1. **foray** *n.* attempt to do something.

teenagers, says LaFontana, who studies adolescent peer relationships and social status, "the worst thing in the world is to be different from other people; that's what makes someone unpopular."

7   In the rabidly conformist school environment, the qualities that make people different make them targets. In adulthood, however, the qualities that make people different make them compelling.

8   Some students are vaguely aware of this reality. An eighth-grade boy in Indiana told me: "I'm always single, so it's tough. Never can get a girl. The smart thing repels girls. I like being smart because I breeze through school. . . . That's the good thing, but the girl thing is killing me."

9   It's hard to know when you're in high school that "the smart thing" is likely to translate into later success, or that "the girl thing" is bound to improve. That's why it's up to adults to convey constantly to teenagers that the characteristics that **marginalize** them can pay off after graduation.

10   Geeks profit from their technological knowhow. Emos benefit from being empathetic and unafraid to display emotion. Skaters, punks, and others who pursue their arts with fervor benefit from the creativity they've honed. Gamers have learned both problem-solving skills and the ability to collaborate through collective intelligence.

11   In the adult world, being out is in. "Geek chic" and "nerd merch" are on the rise. Nerdcore hip-hop artists have penetrated mainstream consciousness. And the nerd prom known as Comic Con draws high-profile celebrities and throngs of smitten fans. They're all part of what Jerry Holkins, creator of the Penny Arcade webcomic and video game conference, calls "the social **pariah** outcast aesthetic."

12   Adults tend to be mature enough to recognize that there would be no progress—cures for diseases, ways to harness new energy sources—without people who are different. Successful scientists think distinctively.

13   So what happens to high school's popular students? Research shows that they are more likely than outsiders to conform, which can also mean they're less likely to innovate. They are more likely to be both targets and instigators of aggression—whether physical or relational, which includes rumors, gossip, and backstabbing. They are more likely to drink and engage in other risky behaviors. Students who are popular and involved in aggression are less likely to do well in school. Psychologists point out that high-status cliques teach the exclusionary behavior that may be the foundation for eventual racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, and other forms of **bigotry**.

14   That's not to say, of course, that popularity in high school necessarily leads to mediocrity or worse in adulthood. But neither is there necessarily something wrong with a student merely because he is excluded by classmates. We don't view a saxophonist as musically challenged if he can't play the violin. He's just a different kind of musician. A sprinter is still an athlete even if she can't play basketball. She's a different kind of athlete. Similarly, we might acknowledge

Mark context clues or indicate another strategy you used that helped you determine meaning.

marginalize (MAHR juh nuh lyz) *v.*

MEANING:

pariah (puh RY uh) *n.*

MEANING:

bigotry (BIHG uh tree) *n.*

MEANING:

that students who don't follow the popular crowd's lead aren't any less socially successful; they're just a different kind of social.

15   The education landscape would be so much more bearable if students could understand this. And if schools found better ways to nurture kids who reject the in-crowd image.

16   The worst aspect of the treatment of student outsiders isn't the name-calling. It isn't the loneliness. It isn't even the demise of attitudes and programs that are important for fostering creativity and independence. The most heartbreaking consequence of this treatment is that tens of thousands of students—imaginative, interesting, impressionable people—think that they have done or felt something wrong.

17   It's not enough to merely tell them that in the real world, "it gets better." They need to know before graduation that being different is not a problem but a strength. ❧

Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read. Review and clarify details with your group.

1. According to the author, why did Taylor Swift's classmates leave the lunch table as soon as Swift sat down?

2. According to psychology professor Kathryn LaFontana, what is the worst thing in the world for teenagers?

3. What does Robbins believe that adults should constantly convey to teenagers?

4. How do successful scientists think, according to Robbins?

5. 📓 **Notebook** Confirm your understanding by writing a summary of the text.

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RESEARCH

Research to Clarify Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the argument?

REVENGE OF THE GEEKS

Close Read the Text

With your group, revisit sections of the text you marked during your first read. **Annotate** details that you notice. What **questions** do you have? What can you **conclude**?

Close Read — ANNOTATE · QUESTION · CONCLUDE
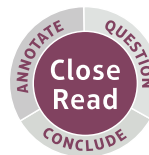
Analyze the Text

CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE to support your answers.

📓 **Notebook** Complete the activities.

1. **Review and Clarify** Reread the first five paragraphs of the selection. Where does the author state her claim, or main idea, in this argument? Restate the claim in your own words. What three examples does Robbins cite in this section of the text to support this claim?

2. **Present and Discuss** Now, work with your group to share the passages from the selection that you found especially important. Take turns presenting your passages. Discuss what you notice in the selection, what questions you asked, and what conclusions you reached.

3. **Essential Question:** *Do people need to belong?* What has this text taught you about outsiders and outcasts? Discuss with your group.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Concept Vocabulary

marginalize   pariah   bigotry

Why These Words? The three concept vocabulary words are related. With your group, determine what the words have in common. How do these word choices enhance the impact of the text?

Practice

📓 **Notebook** Confirm your understanding of these words by using them in sentences. Include context clues that hint at each word's meaning.

Word Study

📓 **Notebook** **Denotation and Connotation** The **denotation** of a word is its literal definition that you would find in a dictionary. A word's **connotations** are its emotional overtones or nuances. For example, the word *pariah* literally means "outcast." Its connotations are overwhelmingly negative. This word came into English from Tamil, an Indian language, where it signified someone from the lowest social caste, or group.

Use a dictionary to research the denotations and connotations of the following words from the selection: *nostalgia, disdain, conformist, smitten, distinctively*. Then, use each word in a sentence that clearly indicates both its denotation and its connotation.

🔗 WORD NETWORK

Add interesting words related to outsiders from the text to your Word Network.

☰ STANDARDS

RI.9–10.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

L.9–10.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 9–10 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

L.9–10.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

L.9–10.5.b Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

Analyze Craft and Structure

Reasoning and Evidence "Revenge of the Geeks" is an **argument,** a type of nonfiction in which a writer states a **claim,** or position on a debatable issue, and then defends that claim with sound reasoning and evidence. **Evidence** includes facts, data, information, explanations, anecdotes, quotations, examples, and any other details that support the writer's reasons or main claim.

When reading an argument, it is important to evaluate both the writer's reasoning and the quality of the evidence he or she uses to support it. Strong reasoning should have clear, logical connections. Strong evidence should have the following qualities:

- **Variety:** A writer should include different types of evidence, such as facts, data, and quotations. It should come from a range of sources.
- **Credibility:** Evidence should be drawn from reliable, authoritative sources. A credible source may present a distinct perspective, but it should not display bias, unfounded judgments, or sweeping generalizations.
- **Relevance:** Evidence should be current and connect logically to the writer's ideas.

Practice

CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE to support your answers.

📓 **Notebook** Work on your own to answer the questions. Then, share and discuss your responses with your group.

1. How does Robbins support her claim that the qualities that make students outcasts in high school are those that make them successful in adulthood?

2. How does Robbins develop her argument that being popular in high school may actually work against people when they enter the adult world?

3. Use the chart to identify the types of evidence Robbins uses and to evaluate its credibility and relevance.

CLAIM	EVIDENCE	CREDIBILITY	RELEVANCE

4. Write a paragraph in which you evaluate the validity of Robbins's argument. Cite evidence from your chart as examples.

REVENGE OF THE GEEKS

Author's Style

Parallel Structure Parallelism, or **parallel structure,** is the use of similar grammatical forms or patterns to express ideas of equal significance. Effective use of parallelism creates rhythm and balance and clarifies the relationships among ideas. When writing lacks parallelism, it presents equally significant ideas in an unnecessary mix of grammatical forms. This inconsistency can be awkward, confusing, or distracting for readers.

This chart shows examples of nonparallel and parallel structure.

SENTENCE ELEMENTS	NONPARALLEL	PARALLEL
words	Planning, drafting and **revision** are three steps in the writing process.	Planning, drafting, and **revising** are three steps in the writing process.
phrases	I could not wait to hop on that plane to leave the country, and **for some world exploration**.	I could not wait to hop on that plane, to leave the country, and **to explore the world**.
clauses	Ari likes his new school: The teachers are good, the students are nice, and he **likes the new building**.	Ari likes his new school: The teachers are good, the students are nice, and **the building is new**.

Read It

Mark the parallel sentence elements in each of these passages from "Revenge of the Geeks." Parallel elements may appear in a single sentence or in mutiple sentences.

1. In the rabidly conformist school environment, the qualities that make people different make them targets. In adulthood, however, the qualities that make people different make them compelling.

2. Geeks profit from their technological knowhow. Emos benefit from being empathetic and unafraid to display emotion. Skaters, punks, and others . . . benefit from the skills and the ability to collaborate through collective intelligence.

3. Research shows that they are more likely . . . to conform, which can also mean they're less likely to innovate.

4. Psychologists point out that high-status cliques teach the exclusionary behavior that may be the foundation for eventual racism, anti-Semitism, sexism and other forms of bigotry.

Write It

 Notebook Write a paragraph about "Revenge of the Geeks." Include at least one example of parallel structure. Mark your examples.

 STANDARDS

L.9–10.1.a Use parallel structure.

L.9–10.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.