Pirate Hotdogs

By Scott Coon

Curriculum developed by Kate Kesner



OVERVIEW

Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 14-16/ 9th-10th grade
Genre/s	* Short story
Length	* 4,130 words (21 minute read)
Content Advisories	*Mild swearing *Implicit mention of sex
One-Sentence Summary	A cop from an agricultural space colony transferred to the city realizes his new department works in an unusual way.
Lesson Planning	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	**Topics**: * Corporatism, plutocracy * Artificial intelligence * Collective action * Policing * Lab-grown meat

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	Themes: * The absurdity of modern institutions * Human decision-making versus AI * Corporate influence on government * The ethics of lab-grown meat versus that made from animals * The power of grassroots (from the people) movements
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	* 1834 Lowell Mill Girls Strike * 1912 Bread and Roses Strike * 1925 Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters founded * 1958 Dolores Huerta founds the Agricultural Workers' Association * 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom * 1969 – 1971: The American Indian Movement occupies Alcatraz * 2023 SAG-AFTRA Strike
Complementary Texts	* Novel: *Severance* by Ling Ma
Author	**Scott Coon** is an award-winning short story writer and former U.S. Army Intelligence Analyst.
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	Grades 9th-10th Common Core Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3

Author Biography

Scott Coon is an award-winning short story writer and former U.S. Army Intelligence Analyst. He served six years, rising to the rank of Sergeant. His service included a tour in Kuwait where he received a First Army Combat Patch and the Joint Service Achievement Award. Now a software developer for a major bank, Scott brings his computer and military experience into his work, along with a sense of spectacle. His afterlife/fantasy/sci-fi novel *Godless Armageddon* was published by Hypatia Press in 2024. His debut novel *Lost Helix*, a sci-fi adventure/mystery, is available now. He also contributed "Tangled Fate" to It Came from Her Purse, published by Hiraeth SFF Publishing in 2021. “Satellite Archaeology” appeared in the LA NaNoWriMo Anthology in the fall of 2022.

SYNOPSIS

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Deputy Applegate has joined a new police department in the big city, ready to be a hero. However, he soon learns that everything he and his captain, Nathans, do is mandated by CHIEF, an artificial intelligence. Applegate struggles with this new and bizarre world, trying to find opportunities to do what he expects of his job amidst the chaos.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic

Journaling:

In a 15-minute journal entry, explore the following prompt:

Reflect on a time you didn't understand the "rules" of a new group or society. This could be when you moved cities, countries, or schools, had a teacher who always seemed frustrated with you, or joined a new friend group. How did it feel? Do you think the rules were fair or rational? Why or why not? If they were irrational or unfair, why do you think they were created?

Main Ideas

Small-Group Discussion:

What roles do companies play in society? Do you think they play too large or small a role? What are the consequences of their involvement or noninvolvement in politics?

Practice arguing for both sides, even if you are strongly opinionated on this. Discuss in small groups.

Passage-Specific Themes

Small-Group and Class Discussion:

Read the following passages from "Pirate Hotdogs." Discuss the questions below in small groups, then share your ideas with the class:

"Your mission target is the Pirate Hotdogs unlicensed food dispensary," said the voice. "Pirate Hotdogs?" Applegate blinked. "A food truck? Like literally?"

"Yup, a food truck." Nathans tapped both accelerator pedals, easing them forward. The other vehicles fell in behind. "Them Mercury executives have decided the most important thing in the universe is stopping illegal food trucks."

Why is Applegate surprised they're going after an unlicensed food truck? Are there times you've felt as if your parents, teachers, other adults in the community were focused on the wrong things? What would you focus on if you were in charge of your school, town, or another institution you belong to?

"Alright, CHIEF," Nathans said, "tell us where you are if you want our help."

"The CHIEF server location is classified."

"But someone's breaking into your location," Applegate said. "We need to know where you are so we can help you."

"Your mission target is the Pirate Hotdogs unlicensed food dispensary," said the CHIEF.

Nathans nodded. "Saving him is only rated a 99, not a 100."

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How does this situation reveal further dysfunction in Mercury Ore and Refining's management of the police department? Do you think Nathans knew CHIEF would prioritize Pirate Hotdogs over its own continuation?

Universal Themes

What laws do you think are helpful to people and communities? What laws are not? Should some or all laws be enforced, and if so, how? Discuss in small groups, then share out your group's thoughts to the classroom.

To what communities do you feel connected to? Do you see value in having communities based on location/neighborhood in addition to communities based on interests and identities? Why or why not? What leads to a sense of connection, and are there ways to proactively cultivate it?

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
cargo bay	monotone	interceptor
jutting	debris	undisclosed
paddy wagon	fiat	accomplice

Vocabulary Activity Options

1. Look up "fiat" (from Latin *fieri*, or "to be") in a dictionary. What does it mean? Given that definition, what does it mean in the context of CHIEF ("Corporate High Intelligence Enforcing Fiats?") Write your answer down.

   Follow-up Discussion: How do you use AI? In what ways can it be helpful? When can it be harmful?

2. Start a short story using the words "accomplice" and "interceptor." Write for 10 minutes.
    1. Optional – Share your short story with a partner.

3. Using the dictionary, define monotone. What might be some (classroom-appropriate) funny things to say in a monotone voice? Write down a list of 5-7. Next, deliver these lines to your small group.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. How does our, and Applegate's, understanding of Nathans change over time?
2. How does Applegate change over the course of the story? How does he stay the same?

Text-Dependent Question Options

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1. Find two ways in which Nathans talks distinctly from Applegate. Why do you think Scott Coon has him talk that way?
2. Where does the story take place? How does the setting contribute to the tone of the piece?

Read the following excerpt from *Severance* by Ling Ma:

"All day, I kept putting off doing something I dreaded. The Gemstone Bible, marketed toward preteen girls, was to be packaged with a keepsake semiprecious gemstone on a sterling alloy chain. The Bibles were already printed, but the jewelry hadn't arrived, so they couldn't assemble and shrink-wrap the bundles. Earlier that day, the Hong Kong office had emailed with bad news. The gemstone supplier that Spectra had initially contracted for the job had unexpectedly closed. Several of their workers had developed various forms of lung diseases. A class-action lawsuit had been filed on behalf of the workers, leading to the closure of the supplier.

I Googled pneumoconiosis and drew up images of lungs in formaldehyde, lungs that had been X-rayed, lungs shriveled up into morel mushrooms. With the force of the images in front of me, I picked up the phone and called the production editor at New Gate Publishing, based in Atlanta. I took a deep breath and explained the situation.

What's pneumoconiosis? she asked, on the other end of the line.

Pneumoconiosis is an umbrella term for a group of lung diseases, I said. The workers who grind and polish semiprecious stones, they've been breathing in this dust and developing lung diseases, without their knowledge, for months, even years. Apparently, from what Hong Kong is telling me, the lawsuit claims that the workers have been working in rooms without ventilation systems or any sort of respirator equipment…

I mean, they're dying, I clarified. The supplier is putting all its contract jobs on hold. Hello?

Finally she spoke, slowly and stiffly. I don't want to sound like we don't care, because obviously we do, but this is disappointing news.

I understand, I conceded, then almost couldn't help myself: But the workers are dying, I repeated, as if I knew.

I mean, the thing is this. There's nothing else like the Gemstone Bible on the market, and we think a title like this is going to do very, very well. So I want you to tell me where we can go from here, as far as the Gemstone Bible is concerned. Can your Hong Kong office find another supplier?

I had to tread gently. We could try, yes, but this is now an industry-wide problem. It's not just one gemstone supplier. This isn't an atypical issue in Guangdong.

Guangdong? Her voice grew incrementally more exasperated.

It's a province in China, where all the gemstone suppliers are centered. This isn't an isolated incident. Almost all suppliers are suffering from the same problems and are also suspending production to evade lawsuits.

Almost all, she repeated.

Yes, almost all, I confirmed, then tried a different tack. We could package the Bible with faux gemstone charms instead. We know a plastic supplier—I could almost hear her shaking her head. No. No. We're committed to the Gemstone Bible. We placed the order with you guys as the Gemstone Bible. We're not reconceiving this entire project on the basis of one supplier failing. She was speaking very quickly, her words stumbling over one another. Obviously, it doesn't reflect well on Spectra that you guys placed this job with a shoddy supplier.

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I'm very sorry, I said mechanically. The working conditions—

I know. She sighed. Everyone says placing jobs in China is a risk. There are no rules, no enforcement. But that's why we used an intermediary like Spectra, because you guys are supposed to eliminate the risk. Otherwise, we could've just dealt directly with the suppliers ourselves.

I started, Let's try—

So what I need you to do, Candace, she continued, is to replace the supplier, find another gemstone source. It can't be that hard. You need to pull every string you can, call in every favor. Because, honestly, if you can't produce this, then we're going to look elsewhere, maybe even in India. Maybe we'll start working directly with suppliers.

She hung up before I could respond.

It took me a second before I put the receiver down. Then I picked it up and put it down, picked it up and put it down, picked it up and threw it, the receiver unleashing a loud, repeating signal in protest. With both hands, I took the phone and yanked its cords out of the wall, dumping the whole thing into the wastebasket. With my heels on, I jammed my foot into the basket, until I heard plastic crack. I took my foot out, assessed the damage. I took the phone back out of the basket, swabbed it with some antibacterial wipes, reassembled it, and plugged it back in.

I picked up the phone and called Hong Kong. It was six in the morning there, but I knew there would be someone who'd come in early to work. There was always someone. I had been to Spectra's Hong Kong office. Through the sweeping windows, you could see the sun rising over the shops along Causeway Bay, the Tian Tan Buddha, the Hong Kong Cricket Club, Victoria Park, so named after the colonizing English queen herself, over the mountains and over the sea, rising and rising, an unstoppable force, bringing in a new day of work."

3. Tension rises over the course of this phone conversation. Where do you read each person expressing disagreement?

4. In what ways do both "Pirate Hotdogs" and this excerpt from *Severance* question the priorities of companies or government institutions?

Below is an excerpt from the screenplay of *Sorry to Bother You*, written and directed by Boots Riley. In screenplays, the words in all caps represent someone new talking. V.O. stands for voiceover and O.S. stands for off-screen.

Cassius turns on the TV and sits back down. A commercial starts up.

MAN ON TV (V.O.)
Everyone is talking about the Worryfree solution! Worryfree is the revolutionary new business and lifestyle model taking the world by storm!

DETROIT (O.S.)
What are they paying you?

Cassius is transfixed on the TV.

MAN ON TV (V.O.)
When you sign a Worryfree contract, you're guaranteed employment AND housing for life! Stop worrying, get Worryfree! The Worryfree living quarters are state of the art,

TV shows a chic looking room with 6 bunk beds, like a prison done up by a hip interior decorator.

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MAN ON TV (V.O.)
The Worryfree food is to die for,

TV shows a gigantic dining room with thousands of people in uniforms at long tables with chandeliers hanging overhead.

MAN ON TV (V.O.) (CONT'D)
and Worryfree careers are fulfilling and satisfying!

3. In what ways do Scott Coon and Boots Riley introduce disturbing technologies or concepts into their worlds? Why are they so disturbing?

Writing Exercises

Narrative

"Pirate Hotdogs," *Severance*, and *Sorry to Bother You* all criticize corporate control, but through different styles of writing. Take an issue you care about and write two versions of a story in which someone confronts that issue, one with a funny, fast-paced tone, and another with a slower, more descriptive, style.

Descriptive

Captain Nathans has a distinctive character "voice," or manner of speaking or thinking. Make up a character and write a unique inner monologue (thoughts) or dialogue for them, thinking of how where they live, how old they are, and more would influence how they speak. Please make an effort to avoid negative stereotypes.

Activity Options

Classroom Activity
Access UCLA Special Collections and listen to a first person account from someone involved in the 1980s – 2000s L.A.-based Justice for Janitors movement. Then discuss your account with others in your small group and class.

Guest Speaker

Invite novelist and short story writer Scott Coon to talk about his experience storytelling and hosting critique groups to build writers' communities.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE
This story and its exercises are appropriate for 9th grade and above. 9th- and 10th-grade standards are cited.

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C: Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B: Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, oc(extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.A: Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). (See grade 9–10 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B: Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.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.

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