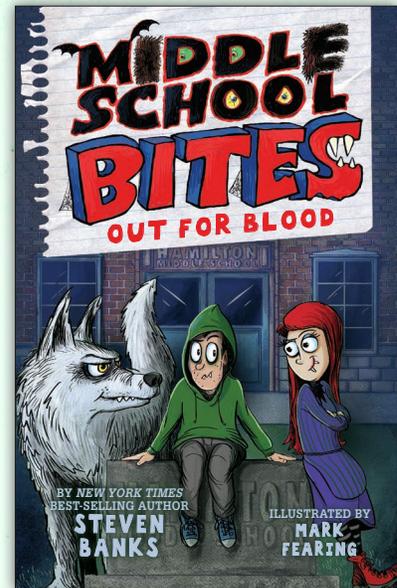
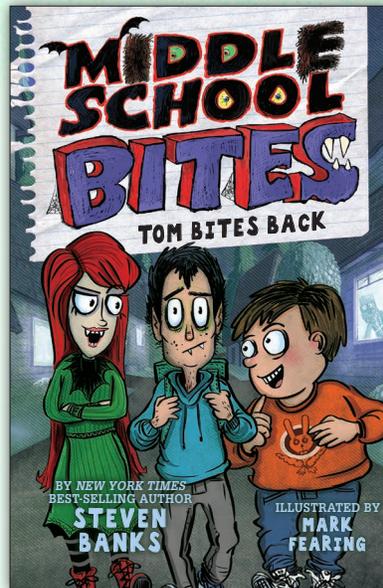
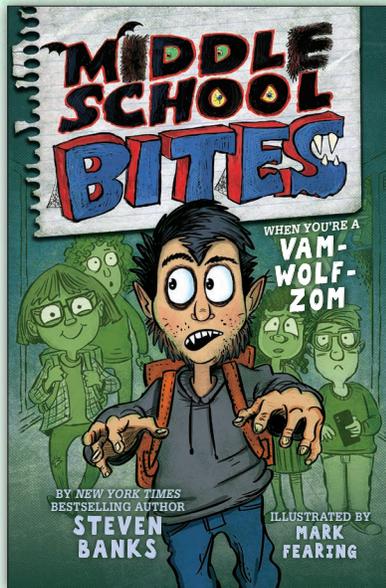


HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



MIDDLE SCHOOL BITES



by **Steven Banks** • illustrated by **Mark Fearing**

PRAISE FOR THE SERIES

“Fearing adds images of pop-eyed cartoon monsters and middle-schoolers to almost every spread, capped by a startling twist at the close to set up further misadventures. A fang-tastic kickoff.”—*Booklist on Middle School Bites*

“This new novel by the head writer of *SpongeBob SquarePants* combines typical middle school angst with a hilariously over-the-top monster movie premise. . . . With its enjoyable characters and wacky concept, this novel is sure to have wide appeal.”—*School Library Journal on Middle School Bites*

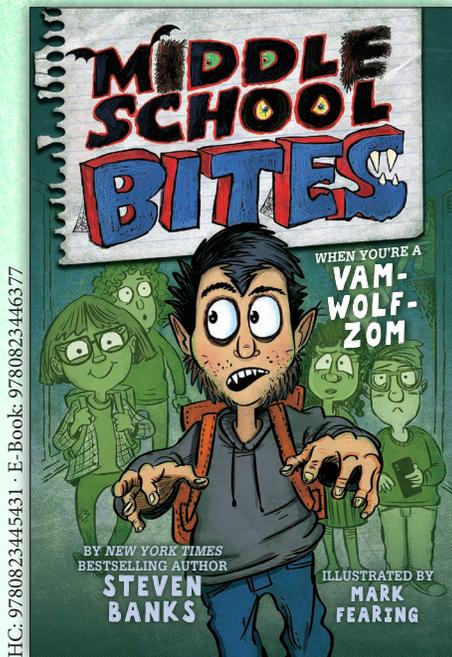
“Goofy grayscale spot illustrations further lighten the tone, showing Tom’s scruffy hair and freckles along with his fangs. . . . Another amusing entry.”—*Kirkus Reviews on Out for Blood*

ABOUT THE SERIES

After bites from a vampire, a werewolf, and a zombie, eleven-year-old Tom Marks becomes the first known Vam-Wolf-Zom. The worst part? He still has to go to middle school. At least he’ll be able to stand up to the sixth-grade bully. The question is, will the rest of Hamilton Middle School accept the Vam-Wolf-Zom too?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.





Middle School Bites



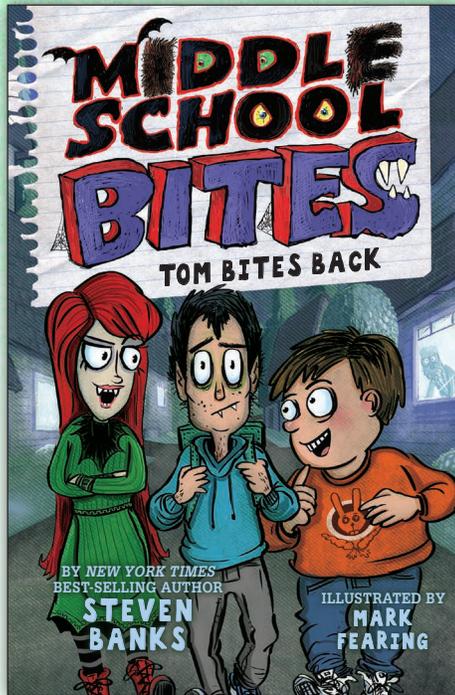
ABOUT THE BOOK

Thanks to a series of unfortunate bites, eleven-year-old Tom is a triple threat: he's a Vam-Wolf-Zom. And just in time for the first day of middle school. So much for his *Invisible Tom Plan*. He never thought to make a *What If I Turn Into a Vampire Werewolf Zombie Plan*. Maybe it's time for a *Run Away and Live Somewhere Else Plan*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Humor in novels is often revealed by what characters do and say. Point out the humor in this novel. Other than Tom, who are the humorous characters in the book? Cite scenes that are especially funny. How is this novel a humorous way of dealing with the trials and tribulations of middle school?
- Tom has an Invisible Tom Plan for sixth grade. Part of the plan includes what to wear on the first day of school. Why does he want to be invisible? How can clothing make one seem invisible or make one stick out in a crowd? Discuss how Abel's dress causes him to stand out. Tom is almost invisible in the picture that his mother takes on the first day of school. How is this symbolic of the way Tom wishes to feel?
- Tom develops lists and plans to help him deal with certain situations. He makes a list of four reasons not to be excited about middle school. Add to Tom's list with some of your own reasons to be apprehensive about middle school. Then make a list of reasons to be excited.
- Tom's sister tells him things about middle school that turn out to be false. How does this add to his apprehension? Name things that you were told about middle school that weren't true, if applicable. Why do some students who have already experienced middle school get joy out of alarming rising middle school students?
- The motto of Hamilton Middle school is "All Are Welcome." How does this motto establish a theme of acceptance? Discuss the significance of the quote from Dr. Seuss that Abel puts on a whiteboard in the locker: "Why fit in when you were born to stand out!" Debate whether a person must "fit in" in order to be welcomed. How do the students react to Tom, the Vam-Wolf-Zom? Does his situation cause him to "fit in" or to "stand out"?
- Abel Sherrill is an outsider. How is he comfortable with his status? Discuss how Abel is more accepting of others than others are of him. Explain Tom's reaction when he learns that he must share a locker with Abel. What does Tom learn from Abel? How does he grow to accept Abel?
- Discuss Tom's relationship with Gram. How does Tom react to Gram's humor? Tom doesn't tell his parents the bad things that happen, but he does tell Gram. What is it about Gram that causes Tom to confide in her? Gram tells him that he will have bad days. Discuss the bad days that he has at school. Gram gives him hope when she tells him that there is always tomorrow. How does sixth grade prepare him for those tomorrows?
- Every middle school has a bully. What is the best way to deal with bullies? How does Tanner Gantt bully Tom? Tom is excited that Tanner Gantt has moved away and won't be in middle school with him. Discuss Tom's feelings when Tanner gets on the bus the first day of school. Explain zero tolerance. Debate whether it's fair that Tom is suspended for bullying when he was sticking up for Abel.
- Foreshadowing is a literary device that authors use to give clues about what might happen next in the story. Guess how the bat appearing at Tom's window might foreshadow events that happen in the second book in the series.





Middle School Bites

Tom Bites Back



ABOUT THE BOOK

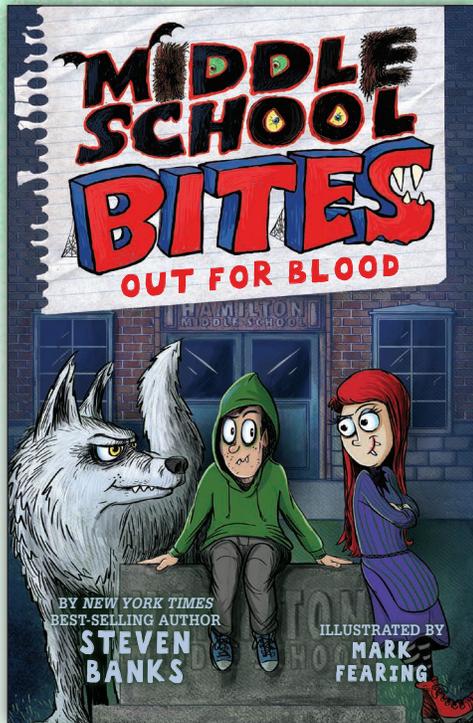
Tom the Vam-Wolf-Zom is back—and so is the vampire bat that bit him—in the second book in the monstrously funny series about a boy who’s dying to fit in.

When the bat that bit Tom shows up again and *speaks* to him, he knows it’s time for a new plan. Tom’s laugh-out-loud adventures continue as he navigates normal sixth grade stuff—singing in a band, dressing up for Halloween, tolerating his older sister—despite being the only Vam-Wolf-Zom known to humankind.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In the first Middle School Bites book, Tom is bitten by a vampire, a werewolf, and a zombie, which makes him a Vam-Wolf-Zom. How does this help him in middle school? How does it hinder him?
- Who is Martha Livingston? What is her role in the story? Martha makes Tom pledge to never tell anyone about her. Why is this important? Discuss what might happen to Tom if he breaks the oath. How does Zeke learn about Martha? Why does Tom even mention Martha’s name when he knows the consequences? How does he justify his mistake?
- Tom joins a band. Describe the first band practice. Who is the self-appointed leader of the band? Discuss the qualities of a good leader. Debate whether Annie has these qualities. The band doesn’t seem to have a clear direction. Why is it important for any group to have a stated agenda?
- What is Professor Beiersdorfer’s role in the novel? How does Tom’s family react when they learn that the Professor is helping Tom and Zeke with their science project? Emma calls the Professor a “mad scientist.” What do Tom and Zeke discover that supports Emma’s statement? Tom and Zeke spy on the Professor and seem surprised that he is reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. What other behaviors and habits do they learn about the Professor? Why are Tom and Zeke intent on stealing Professor Beiersdorfer’s notebook? What do they discover by reading his notebook?
- It’s Halloween, and Emma, Tom’s sister, takes him shopping for a costume. Why does he think she is the worst person to take in a Halloween store? Hamilton Middle School is having a costume contest. Explain why the principal bans vampire, werewolf, and zombie costumes. Annie likes to quote the First Amendment. What do you learn about this Amendment from Annie? She tells the principal that their costumes are protected under the First Amendment. How does the principal respond?
- Zeke is Tom’s best friend. Tom says that Zeke is generous and trusts everyone. How does he sometimes get in trouble because of these qualities? Describe the trouble Zeke causes for himself and Tom on Halloween night. How does Tom save the night and the candy?
- Tom is learning to turn into a bat. At what point does he reach his goal? Discuss what he feels when he flies outside for the first time. How does this new skill help Tom? He almost becomes one of the Professor’s science experiments. How does he escape? Emma thinks that Lucas, her boyfriend, is falling for another girl. Discuss her request that Tom turn into a bat and spy on Lucas. Why does Tom agree to this mission? What does he discover when he spies on Lucas?
- Explain what Tom means when he says, “It’s weird how sometimes it feels good to feel bad” (p. 239). Point out times in the novel when Tom feels bad. Debate whether these feelings make him feel good.
- Martha Livingston claims to have encountered Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia. She quotes him at various times in the book. Identify the quotes and discuss how they are pertinent to the plot of the novel. Explain how these quotes are like a warning or advice to Tom.
- Explain the title of the book.





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Middle School Bites Out For Blood



ABOUT THE BOOK

In book three, Tom is now being hunted down by the werewolf that bit him.

Should Tom join a wolf pack? On the one hand, he could give up school and homework forever. On the other hand, he'd miss his band, his friends, and Annie, his maybe-possibly-someday girlfriend. Then the vampire that bit him returns with a warning: the werewolf is dangerous. Perhaps Tom should stick with sixth grade—even if it is mostly talent show disappointments, detention, and chicken-turkey-salami-roast beef sandwiches.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In *Tom Bites Back*, Martha Livingston warns Tom about Darcourt. Describe Tom's thoughts when he first meets the evil werewolf. Discuss why Tom engages in conversation with the werewolf after Martha issued the warning. Darcourt belongs to a pack called The Howlers. Why does Darcourt ask Tom to join the pack? Tom makes a list of the pros and cons of joining the pack (p. 8 & 9). Why doesn't Darcourt answer Tom's questions?
- Discuss why Tom says that "Honesty is not always the best policy" (p. 25). Cite times in the novel when Tom thinks it best not to be truthful. Debate whether there are times when he is honest with himself, but not with others.
- In *Tom Bites Back*, Tom finally masters turning into a bat. How does this skill prove useful to his family? How does it get him into trouble with his friends?
- Discuss the rules at Hamilton Middle School. How are they similar to rules in most schools? Why aren't students allowed to distribute or display flyers at school? Annie takes issue with this rule by quoting the First Amendment. How does this get her in trouble with Principal Gonzales?
- Like Danny the Detective, Tom makes some stupid mistakes. Why does Martha Livingston feel it is her duty to watch over him? Chart his mistakes and regrets as the novel progresses. Debate whether Tom learns from his mistakes. Which mistakes contribute to the humor in the novel?
- Explain the following quote from Benjamin Franklin: "Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every day find you a better man" (p. 139). What are Tom's vices? Who are the neighbors he must be peaceful toward? Debate whether Tom is a better person by the end of the novel.
- Annie writes a song titled "Spying." How was Tom the inspiration for the song? Explain what Tom did that angered Annie. Cite evidence that he misses Annie. Discuss his effort to make up with her. How do they finally become friends again?
- Tom feels that Tanner Gantt, the school bully, gets away with everything. Debate whether Tom's assessment is true. What does Tom learn about Tanner's homelife? How might this explain Tanner's behavior? Discuss whether Mrs. Gantt knows what her son is like.
- Study Tom's New Year's Resolutions (p. 228). Which resolutions should be the easiest to accomplish? Why does Tom want to transform into smoke? How is his resolution about Tanner a wise approach? Discuss whether these resolutions offer a hint for the conflict of a fourth book in the series.
- A cliffhanger is a literary device that teases the reader and makes them want to know more of the story. Point out the cliffhangers at the end of each chapter.



HOLIDAY HOUSE



MIDDLE SCHOOL BITES

SERIES CREATORS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: Cyd Weeks

Steven Banks is a *New York Times* bestselling writer who received an Emmy nomination as head writer on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, wrote for *The Adventures of Jimmy Neutron* and *CatDog*, has appeared on TV shows like *Penn & Teller's Fool Us*, attended Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Clown College, wrote a book called *King of the Creeps*, co-created the international theater sensation *Shadowland*, and lives in California with his wife. He was once bitten by a donkey, but did not turn into a Donkey Man.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



Photo credit: John Hull

Mark Fearing has never been bitten by a werewolf, a zombie, or a vampire. But he was bitten by the creative bug, which is far more dangerous. Books he's illustrated include the uproariously funny *Middle School Bites* series by Steven Banks, *Ben Franklin's in My Bathroom!* by Candace Fleming, and *The Great Thanksgiving Escape*, which he also wrote. Mark lives in Oregon with his family.

