

# “The Menace from Earth” Lesson Plans

By  
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## **Introduction:**

“The Menace from Earth” is one of Robert Heinlein’s most inventive, best-told tales. His portrayal of a young woman is perhaps his finest depiction of a female character in all of his canon, if not most of science fiction. Bright, capable, and committed to the fullness of humanity, Holly Jones remains an indelible creation of the grandmaster of science fiction.

We hope you find the following lesson plans helpful, and that you will choose “The Menace from Earth” or another Heinlein work to use in your classrooms. We would like to hear from you about your own experiences using Heinlein’s works. Please email us!

## **Edition Used:**

The Baen edition of *The Menace from Earth* was used as the most common edition, but it can also be found on the Heinlein Society Educator’s CD.

## **Date of Publication / Dedication:**

“The Menace from Earth” was written in June of 1956, and published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in August 1957.

## **Summary / Discussion Notes:**

Each chapter will be summarized, and pertinent details and issues explicated. Any of the details might be turned into extra credit questions, which require the student to do research on the internet or in a library. Heinlein often inserted historical, scientific, and literary references into his novels, as a way of gently urging the reader to explore these references. Vocabulary words which students may have difficulty with will be suggested, with particular attention paid to words Heinlein invented (which, unless we’ve adopted the word, won’t be found in a dictionary).

I strongly urge that students learn vocabulary not by checking the dictionary, but by the following procedure: 1) say the word aloud (this begins to fix the word in long-term memory); 2) look for roots (Spanish speakers often have an advantage here, since the longer Latinate words in English often have a simple Spanish root, as in the word “facilitate”; 3) use context to make TWO guesses as to what the word means; 4) then, and only then, check the dictionary. Students need to be reminded to learn new vocabulary words, because they will often choose to simply skip the word they don’t know, or in running to the dictionary, will fail to permanently learn the new word as they only place the definition into short-term memory. I require my students to learn at least seven new words a week; in this, Heinlein is very helpful, because he actually used a more sophisticated vocabulary in his juveniles than in his adult fiction. If teachers do not

encourage students to acquire the new vocabulary, students often have a hard time with Heinlein's juveniles for precisely that reason: they are more difficult than today's more controlled, simplistic vocabulary in most young adult novels.

#### SUMMARY:

Fifteen, bright, an "underdone angel." This is Holly Jones. Immediately, we are thrown into a radically different future world: Luna City, third generation, eight hundred feet down below the surface. She has school, dreams, a plan, a partner (Jeff Hardesty) and a job (guiding groundhogs around). Interestingly, the ship she guides tourists from Earth is the *Gripsholm*, named after the ship that rescued Heinlein's former sister-in-law and nephews from the Japanese in the Philippines at the beginning of WWII. Holly is the best your guide about, but her real future is as a spaceship designer.

The opening is one of the best Heinlein ever crafted, in its capacity to create a radically different future, and a character, in just a few deft strokes of sense of wonder.

The enemy then shows up: Ms. Brentwood, beautiful socialite groundhog. Holly feels pangs of jealousy, then denies them, since "groundhogs don't count." Holly gets things moving quickly, explaining that guides are necessary in Luna City, because maps are impossible for an underground city. Holly offers a variety of destinations, from the Hall of the Mountain King to the hydroponics gardens to the Bats' Cave. They go to her hotel instead.

They ride down a personnel lift that scares Ms. Brentwood, but when a fat woman rides down first, nothing will stop her. Holly has been to Earth; she hated it. She was supposed to go to boarding school, and she hated Earth so much her father let her come home. Ms. Brentwood stares at the Earth's beauty, but all Holly can think about is how miserable it was. She wants to go outside. Holly doesn't do that, but her partner Jeff Hardesty is (they are going to design spaceships).

Holly is shocked when Jeff is attracted to Ms. Brentwood – a groundhog! Holly proceeds to explain the stupidity of males trapped by hormones, profusely and effectively. Holly starts to get worried about Ms. Boardman – and for good reason. After that, Jeff is constantly in the enemy's company. Holly is angry because their work on their starship, the *Prometheus*, is being abandoned. Holly's father has told her he expects power plants that can drive starships will be developed soon; he is a physics professor, so he should know. Her mother is a chemist. (Heinlein's characters tend to be very, very smart and accomplished).

Jeff is ignoring her and their work to spend time with "Ariel." He even misses their flying on Thursdays (Heinlein keeps dropping the word "flying" – which should be impossible in an airless environment like the moon). Holly is getting upset. Her father notices.

Holly can't believe she might be jealous of a groundhog.

And we can't believe the incredible invention of the Bats' Cave, with the wonderful wings that they use to fly with. Low gravity, a huge air tank, and strong muscles equals the fulfillment of the greatest human dream: personal flight, like the birds themselves. Heinlein lavishes page after page of description on flying.

Holly's best friend Mary joins her. Mary says Jeff is looking for her. They bicker about Jeff. Mary leaves. Jeff joins her, and asks her to help Ariel learn how to fly. Holly agrees, although she doesn't want to. Ariel learns well, and wants to use real wings. Jeff

tries to stop her, and Holly goes on. She teaches Ariel how to climb up. Jeff keeps trying to interfere. Holly looks away for a moment, then back – and Ariel is falling. Holly saves her life.

Both of Holly's arms are broken. But Ariel is alive, and comes and thanks her. Ariel tells Holly she is leaving, and Jeff loves her. Ariel tells her she is old enough to be her mother. Jeff loves Holly, not Ariel: he went to her, not Ariel, when they landed. So they will just have to form Hardesty and Hardesty instead. Jeff kisses her.

### **Chapter Tests / Quizzes:**

Personally, I do not care for many published textbook tests/quizzes, as I often find them to not fit what we have actually discussed in class, or what the students have themselves found in the text. I therefore tend to make up my own quizzes and tests, and I also rely heavily on questions about relationships, more than I do questions about specific details of the books. I teach very poor readers, and I am far more concerned that they understand what is happening between the characters, than I am in what color shirt a particular character is wearing, or some other pithy little detail that teachers dealing with very good readers might ask to make sure that their students have read. I check to make sure they've read by insisting that they answer the following kinds of questions using specific details (and by always asking a question about the end of the chapter), but I allow them to choose the details themselves to fit the question. I train them to answer questions this way by giving them several sample questions, then answering them on the board, using their input to craft a model response. I hope that the following questions are useful for quizzes and tests, as well as for classroom discussion. Again, I expect students to use specific details from the novel to answer these questions. If the extra credit questions seem appropriate for your class, you can add them to the quizzes, or use them as extra credit homework assignments.

1. What do people in the moon call people from Earth?
2. What is Holly's dream?
3. How does Ms. Boardman threaten that dream?
4. How does Holly cope with Jeff being preoccupied?
5. Which Biblical figure does Holly compare herself to?
6. What does Holly teach Ariel to do?
7. What happens then?
8. Where does the boy-girl-girl plot end up?

**Extra Credit Questions:**

1. Explain what a frost giant from *Das Rheingold* would look like, by researching the ways in which various productions have depicted these characters.
2. Why does Holly's father called the Fermi Lecturer? Why is his university called the Goddard Institute?
3. Who was Lise Meitner?
4. Why does Holly feel like Lucifer?

**Vocabulary Words** (these are all words I've had students ask me about):

- p. 127: insipid; gaggle  
p. 128: loathsomely; apprehensive  
p. 130: chivvying  
p. 134: liquidated; wrangling  
p. 138: sculled

**Essay Questions and Projects:**

1. Research the use of gliders and hang gliders, and compare Heinlein's wings with them.
2. Research the current state of plans to return to the moon. What would it take to get back to the moon, and establish a colony?