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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



MARC ARONSON (www.marcaronson.com) is an accomplished author, editor, reviewer, and speaker. He is the recipient of the 2006 ALAN Award, which honors outstanding contributions to the field of adolescent literature and the winner of the first-ever Robert F. Sibert Award for children’s nonfiction. Mr. Aronson also writes a blog, “Nonfiction Matters,” for www.schoollibraryjournal.com. He lives in New Jersey with his wife, author Marina Budhos, and their two sons.



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DISCUSSION GUIDE



UP*close:* **BILL GATES** *TYCOON*

a twentieth-century life by **MARC ARONSON**

While reading **Up Close: Bill Gates**, ask your students to think about the following questions. Answers can either be written individually or discussed in groups to make for an interesting and thought-provoking classroom conversation.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- The first line of the book's introduction is "Bill Gates's story is the story of the making of the world we live in." What do you think the author means by this? What do you already know about Bill Gates?
- How did Bill's family influence his character and attitude?
- What was Bill's adolescence like? How did his appearance, personality, and interests affect his education and his social life?
- How does a computer process and transmit information? What is BASIC?
- Why were the Lakeside boys asked to work with C-Cubed? What did they gain from doing so?
- Discuss the answers Bill gives when asked about breakthrough areas for teenagers today. Can you think of any more?
- Explain Moore's Law. Why is it important?
- When was the turning point for Bill's and Paul's lives? Why? What did the development of the Altair 8800 signify for the future of the computer?
- What were the similarities and differences between Bill's and Paul's work styles when creating the program for the 8080 chip? How did this eventually affect their partnership?
- Which term in the contract between Microsoft and MITS did the two companies clash over? How was it resolved?
- Who is Karoly Simonyi? Explain Bravo, GUI, and their impact on computers today.
- Why did Apple lose business to IBM and other personal computer (PC) makers? How did Apple employees and fans feel about Microsoft? What does Bill's story about the stolen TV set demonstrate about his views on the matter?
- What is the difference between a programming language and an operating system? Why did Karoly/Charles counsel Bill he needed to become the dominant creator of operating systems?
- Think about the atmosphere inside the Microsoft corporation. Do you think employees liked working there? Why or why not?
- Why was Bill promoting Microsoft so aggressively in the mid-1980s? What was the result?
- Define *monopoly*. How did Microsoft ultimately avoid penalty from US anti-monopoly laws?

- Who first predicted the Internet? Why wasn't it developed in the 1960s? Where was it finally created, and by whom? What role did Sergey Brin and Larry Page play in helping the Internet take off?
- What does the example of the success of Wikipedia over Encarta suggest about computer users today?
- Who is Melinda French? What are the goals of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation? How is Bill especially able to help the Foundation?

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

- In chapter 3, the author describes Bill's adolescence and education. What characteristics about Bill become evident here? Which, if any, still describe him as an adult? Have these behavioral traits helped him or hurt him? Is he an innovative technical genius, a shrewd businessman, a greedy monopolist, or a generous philanthropist? List some examples from the text to illustrate your points.
- Aronson often refers to Microsoft throughout the story because it is so closely tied to Bill Gates's life. What are some of the perceptions people have of Microsoft, and how have these perceptions changed over time? Which attitudes do you agree with? Why? Debate the pros and cons of topics such as monopoly companies, software innovation, or the privatization of information technology with your classmates. Is there a clear right or wrong answer to these issues?
- Discuss the role of publicity in the success of Microsoft's products and services. How did "selling" come to be more crucial than developing the product? In pairs or small groups, choose a small company or local store and imagine a marketing and publicity campaign for the "client." Create a company slogan, an advertisement, and/or write a press release to promote your client. Then, share your project with the rest of the class and examine each group's work. What did you accomplish by sharing the information as you did with the "public"? What strategies or creative pieces seemed to have a larger impact than others? Why?
- It is believed that the most successful business ventures arise out of a true need for a product or service. After finishing *Up Close: Bill Gates*, work with a team to brainstorm a company or innovation of your own. Can you think of something that you, your peers, or the greater public truly needs? How did you come up with this idea? Using Gates and Microsoft as examples, devise a strategy for creating, growing, and selling your business. Which tactics of Gates's would you mimic and which might you stay away from? Share your group's plans with the other groups in your class and ask their opinions. Do you appreciate their constructive criticism and feedback? Would you hire any of your classmates to serve on an advisory board for your company?