

# Backseat Driver

W.M. Akers



It's important to make your big brother angry. As far as Sandy was concerned, that wasn't just her job, it was her calling. Greg was 15 years old, a skinny kid who seemed to get an inch taller every month and a little bit more stuck-up every day. Sandy's mission in life was to keep him from getting too big of a head. She had to make him as angry as possible, as often as possible.

What else are little sisters for?

She hid his schoolbooks. She flicked rubber bands at him while he was talking on the phone. When his friends came over, she was extremely nice to them, so they always asked her to hang out and play video games. This drove Greg crazier than anything else.

"Don't you guys get it?!" he would yell. "She's such a little brat!"

“Nah, Greg, you’re nuts,” one of his friends would say. “Sandy’s all right. She’s way better than my little sister. She drives me crazy.”

When none of his friends were looking, Sandy would stick her tongue out at Greg. This would make him even angrier.

But now that Greg was almost 16, there was something even more important to him than the approval of his buddies. More than anything else, Greg wanted to learn to drive a car. He wanted to be the best in the city, the best in the state. He wanted his driver’s license so badly, the tips of his fingers sometimes hurt from thinking about holding it. Sandy knew how important it was to him, and she was going to make sure he never got it.

He’d just finished Driver’s Ed, but Dad insisted Greg practice driving with him a few times before trying for his test.

“Driving with an instructor is one thing,” Dad said, “but until you’re comfortable driving with a few people, I’m never letting you touch my car. We’re going to your aunt’s for dinner. Why don’t you drive the whole family?”

“Sure thing,” said Greg, his eyes shimmering with anticipation.

This would be Sandy’s big chance.

After the family climbed into the car, Greg took a few minutes to get ready. He adjusted his seat, fiddled with his mirrors, and familiarized himself with the air-

conditioner and windshield wipers, even though it wasn't hot outside or raining. For all of his confidence, he was starting to look nervous. He was about to turn on the car when Sandy made her first attack.

"Do you have your learner's permit?" she asked from the back seat.

"Of course," said Greg.

"Maybe you should check your wallet."

Greg looked at her for a few seconds longer than he needed to before reaching into his back pocket and hauling out his wallet.

"It's not here."

"Well you can't drive without it," said Dad.

"That's right," said Sandy. "It's the law."

"It was in there this morning!"

"Sure it was."

"Be quiet, Sandy."

"Don't worry about it," said Dad. "I'll drive."

"No! I'm driving. Just wait here."

Greg threw open the car door and tore into his bedroom. He upended his sheets and all the papers on his bed. He yanked his bedside table drawer so hard it almost flew

onto the floor. He checked the pockets of the pants he wore the day before, and he looked in all his shirts. The permit was nowhere to be found.

Outside, Sandy hummed happily to herself. Everything was going as planned.

Greg returned flushed, but smiling, the permit displayed proudly in his hand.

“Where did you find it?” asked Sandy, trying to conceal her nervousness.

“The strangest place. It was in the medicine cabinet...in your bathroom.”

“How odd,” said Dad, as Greg pulled out of the driveway.

Sandy’s first attempt had failed, but she was not defeated yet. She had been reading about safe driving online and spent the whole ride giving Greg unasked-for pointers about the speed limit, turn signals, and when it was safe to merge lanes.

“Remember to keep your hands at ten and two,” she said.

“I know where to put my hands!”

“There’s no need to yell.”

“Just be quiet, please. You don’t even know how to drive.”

“By the looks of it, neither do you.”

Despite her sabotage, Greg kept his head. They were nearly at their aunt’s house when Sandy was forced to resort to her final trick. She grabbed her stomach and lurched forward in her seat.

“Oh no,” she said. “My tummy.”

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” asked Dad.

“I don’t feel well. I think Greg’s driving is upsetting my stomach. He’s all over the road!”

“Pull over, Greg.”

“But Dad—”

“Pull over! Your sister is going to be sick. I’ll drive the rest of the way.”

Sandy smiled as the car stopped, and her father stepped out. Greg turned to look at her, his mouth pulled back in a tight little snarl.

“Why did you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Why are you trying to mess up my driver’s license? Come on, Sandy! This is really, just...you know how important this is to me.”

Sandy looked at him, more upset than he’d been in years—not angry, even, just sad—and her stomach flooded with that rancid feeling that told her she’d done something awful.

“I don’t know,” she said. “I just...when you get your driver’s license, you’re going to be gone all the time. You’ll never want to hang out with me.”

Dad knocked on the car window, waiting for Greg to get out.

“One sec, Dad!” Greg paused for a moment, intent on his sister. “When you get your driver’s license, where’s the first place you’ll go?”

“I don’t know...the ice cream place, the mall, the movies.”

Greg got out of the car and let his father in. When Greg was settled into the passenger seat, he said, “Dad—when I get my license, the first place I’m going is the ice cream place. Then the mall, then the movies, then the ice cream place again. And I’m taking Sandy with me.”

Huh, thought Sandy. Maybe her brother wasn’t such a bad driver after all.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does Sandy consider her calling?

- A making her brother angry
- B learning how to drive
- C preventing her brother from getting his license
- D being nice to her brother's friends

2. What are the results of Sandy's actions during the car ride to her aunt's house?

- A Sandy's brother does not get his driver's license.
- B Sandy's brother crashes the car.
- C Sandy's brother gets upset with her.
- D Sandy's brother is not allowed to drive home.

3. Sandy purposefully hid Greg's learner's permit. What evidence from the story supports this conclusion?

- A "Greg returned flushed, but smiling, the permit displayed proudly in his hand."
- B "Greg threw open the car door and tore into his bedroom."
- C "'Well you can't drive without it,' said Dad."
- D "Outside, Sandy hummed happily to herself. Everything was going as planned."

4. Read the following sentence: "Sandy looked at him, more upset than he'd been in years—not angry, even, just sad—and her stomach flooded with that rancid feeling that told her she'd done something awful."

How does Sandy likely feel about her actions?

- A successful
- B regretful
- C annoyed
- D unapologetic

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A a girl who tries to stop her brother from getting his driver's license
- B why little sisters always annoy their big brothers
- C safety tips to follow when learning to drive a car
- D the relationship between a father and his son and daughter

6. Read the following sentences: "Greg was 15 years old, a skinny kid who seemed to get an inch taller every month and a little bit more stuck-up every day. Sandy's mission in life was to keep him from **getting too big of a head.**"

What does the phrase "**getting too big of a head**" mean?

- A having very low self-esteem
- B believing in unrealistic scenarios
- C thinking too highly of yourself
- D having a head that grows too much

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

\_\_\_\_\_ Greg thinks that Sandy is a brat, Greg's friends think Sandy is all right.

- A Finally
- B Although
- C Specifically
- D Initially

8. What does Greg want more than anything else?

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9. Explain how Sandy tries to sabotage Greg on the car ride to their aunt's house.

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10. Sandy's actions do not represent her feelings towards her brother. Explain whether this statement is accurate or not based on information in the passage.

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 670

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7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

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- A Finally
- B **Although**
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8. What does Greg want more than anything else?

**Suggested answer:** More than anything else, Greg wants to learn how to drive and get his driver's license.

9. Explain how Sandy tries to sabotage Greg on the car ride to their aunt's house.

**Suggested answer:** First, Sandy hides her brother's learner's permit. Then she gives him unasked-for driving tips to annoy him. Lastly she pretends that his driving is making her sick so that he has to pull over.

10. Sandy's actions do not represent her feelings towards her brother. Explain whether this statement is accurate or not based on information in the passage.

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary as long as they are supported by the passage. For example, students may argue that Sandy's actions do not represent her feelings towards her brother because she reveals that the main reason that she doesn't want him to get his driver's license is because he'll never want to hang out with Sandy again. Thus, despite her determination to anger him she in fact indicates that she has positive, loving feelings for him.

Conversely, students may argue that Sandy's actions do represent her feelings towards her because she is intent on angering him and that's what she seeks to do by preventing him from getting his driver's license.