



Ace's Basement

Ted Staunton

Reading level: 3.8

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Book Summary

Following the demise of his first band, Ace has started a duo called *Two* with Lisa, his crush. As Ace and Lisa get serious about their music, Denny, Ace's hapless friend, tries to help out by filming their every move so that he can create the ultimate music video. Denny puts together a video, but unfortunately, it captures some embarrassing moments—moments Lisa doesn't want shared. Somehow, the video gets posted on YouTube. Lisa and Ace find themselves starring in the latest comedic viral video. Lisa is humiliated and refuses to talk to Ace—until their fame turns out to have positive results.

Author Biography

Ted Staunton divides his time between writing and a busy schedule as a speaker, workshop leader, storyteller and musical performer for children and adults. His previous books include the well-loved Green Applestreet Gang series, the Cyril and Maggie series, the Morgan series, *Puddleman*, *Simon's Surprise*, several titles in the Dreadful Truth series including the Canadian Children's Centre Our Choice selection *The Dreadful Truth: Confederation*, and the acclaimed *Hope Springs a Leak*, which was shortlisted for both a Silver Birch Award and a Hackmatack Award. Ted lives in Port Hope, Ontario.

Readers who enjoy the antics of Ace and Denny are sure to enjoy *Power Chord*, also in the Orca Currents series. In *Power Chord*, Ace and Denny are challenged again with comic results—both in meeting girls and in starting a band.

Connecting to the Text

Character Study

To engage students with the characters and plot in *Ace's Basement*, use the following as discussion topics, individual novel study or writing exercises:

1. Ace and Lisa spend a lot of time together writing music, singing, busking and mixing music on the computer. Although Ace is very comfortable with Lisa in these contexts, he can't bring himself to ask her out on a date. What's holding Ace back? What would it take for him to take the plunge?
2. When Denny videotaped Ace and Lisa in the playground, he recorded the moment when Lisa "popped her chicken cutlets" (ch. 7). Denny said, "How cool was that?" while Ace said, "If you ask me, I'd say she doesn't *need* cutlets." Ask students to imagine this scene from the three characters' points of view. For each, ask: How do I feel about this? What do I hope happens next, and what actually does?
3. In chapter 13, Ace reflects on Nadia and Alison's choice to upload the bloopers video, humiliating Lisa. He says, "And is this how girls fight with each other? I think that's kind of sick." From your experience, does this ring true? Is this how girls fight with each other? Are their actions cyber-bullying? What would happen to Nadia, Alison and Lisa if this event happened at your school?
4. In chapter 2, Ace says Chuck, his mom's boyfriend, is "actually an okay guy" although Ace rarely speaks with him. Ace and Chuck have a lot in common. Chuck used to be in a band called Razorburn and he's lending Ace his guitar and bass. Why do you think Chuck is building the "man cave" for Ace? Do you think Ace and Chuck could one day become close?

Novel Study

Use the following sentences from *Ace's Basement* for a guessing game or novel scavenger hunt. Can students "place" these sentences in the context of the novel? Who is talking, and when did this take place? Is this an important quote in terms of the plot?

- *I know this is a law of the universe—or of high school, at least. High school and the universe are the same thing when you're fourteen.* (ch. 2)
- *I'd rather do simple and good than tricky and sloppy.* (ch. 5)
- *It doesn't even matter if you really play.* (ch. 6)
- *He was the kind of guy who'd forget to load a tape in the camera.* (ch. 8)
- *Every second makes us look like idiots.* (ch. 10)
- *I'm a joke, the music is a joke, everything is a joke, except it isn't funny.* (ch. 12)
- *Maybe it would be okay if I thought people were laughing with me, not at me.* (ch. 14)

Vocabulary Enrichment

The following words are used in *Ace's Basement*.

accordion	breathing	guitar	overdub	recording	soundtrack
acoustic	busking	harmonica	overexpose	rhythm	track
amplifier	chords	harp rack	playback	shot, shoot	video
bass line	close-up	jazz riff	practice	solo	viral
boom box	editing	lyrics	raw footage	song-writing	vocals

Busking, song writing, bands and friendship are all themes in the novel. Ask students to choose a creative writing method which appeals to them (such as a skit, monologue, diary entry, slam poem or blog entry) and incorporate vocabulary words into their responses. Below are some examples to get students started.

- Busking can be fun but it's also hard work; and, as Ace notes, sometimes people don't want (or don't stay long enough) to see the artist's "serious" work. Describe the pros and cons of busking as a way for a band to start out. Do you have buskers in your neighborhood?
- In chapter 9, Ace describes Denny's video as "every bad homemade band video you've ever seen rolled into one." What went wrong? In terms of creating a top notch video, what could they have done differently? What if Nadia and Alison weren't in the picture?
- Imagine Ted Staunton has written a novel where Razorburn reunites and goes on the road. Ace comes along as a roadie, and Denny comes along to shoot video. What is their first adventure? Can you see Denny and Gonzo hitting it off?
- Create a crossword puzzle with clues incorporating a music or video theme.
- Create a dictionary of terms, including short descriptions for each word.

Connecting to the Curriculum***Language Arts***

Ask students to consider that the title of a novel is carefully chosen. It should be interesting, inviting and reflect the novel's content. In *Ace's Basement*, Ace and Denny spend a lot of time in the future "man cave"; it's where much of the action takes place.

Ask students to create alternate titles for the novel, both serious and silly. Would these titles work? Why, or why not?

- *Busking for Fun and Profit*
- *Chicken Cutlet Menu Ideas*
- *Chuck's Guide to Home Renovations*
- *Coming Apart at the Dreams*
- *Doom Master, Video Star*
- *I Could Trip, I Could Fall*

History

1. Ace and Lisa make money busking in their neighborhood. Street performers—musicians, magicians, jugglers or dancers—are found in many cultures throughout history. Ask students to research street performers from a different period and culture. What did they perform? Was it a good living? Name two things that are interesting about the street performer you chose.
 - ♦ Chindonya (Japan)
 - ♦ Mariachis (Mexico)
 - ♦ Romani (Europe)
 - ♦ Troubadours (France)
2. Lisa and Ace use terms like *riff*, *trash it!* and *rock out!* in the novel. Ask students to research historical musical slang terms. Students may be surprised to learn that many terms they use originated from their parents or grandparents' generations.

Option: Ask students to create a musical slang dictionary using terms from the novel. Examples to get students started:

- ♦ 1970s: *boogie*, *hip to the groove*, *get down*, *jiggy*, *sweet!*
- ♦ 1980s: *chillin'*, *goth*, *headbanger*, *jams*, *shredding*

Music

1. Students will have fun listening to and watching Ted Staunton performing. With his permission, encourage students to find videos online of Ted and his friends. What instruments does Ted play? Can you imagine Ted as a young man, busking?
2. Lisa and Ace are great at writing songs. Their songs have simple, rhyming lyrics but they're full of meaning: *What's up? I'm down / When you're not around and I could trip, I could fall / Would you hear if I called*. There are more examples in chapter 10. Ask students to try writing lyrics, using the structure of Lisa and Ace's songs.

Try short lines and simple rhymes:

- *I could smile or I could frown / but I'm not your circus clown*
- *The morning of another day / I'm so sad you went away*

Try using words in unexpected ways or use double meanings:

- *People talking, tick tocking, but they're only makin' time*
- *Love is an ocean and I'm waving you "Goodbye"*

Creative Writing

In chapter 2, Chuck tells Ace, “When I was in Razonburn, we tried to make a video. Remind me to tell you about it sometime.” Ask students to imagine they are Chuck. He was in a band but things changed and now he sells real estate like Ace’s mom. Ask students to write an interview transcript that tells us about Chuck and the choices he’s made. Encourage students to be creative—no idea is “wrong.” Encourage students to use the vocabulary words from the Vocabulary Enrichment section. Ideas are below:

- Chuck gave it all up because the band just couldn’t get along. They had creative differences and were too competitive. It all came out when the videographer asked “So who’s the leader of Razorburn?”
- Chuck was pushed into performing but it didn’t last. He was pretty good at guitar and bass but his heart wasn’t in it. His passion was carpentry and his media was wood. He liked creating but only on his terms.
- The day Razorburn was to make the video, they rented the studio space and things were going well. Everyone knew their parts and the video crew were ready to go. Things went sideways when the power went out and Chuck tripped over the electrical cord to the video camera on the tripod and the expensive lights.