



Bungee Jump

Pam Withers

Reading Level: 2.8

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Book Summary

Thirteen-year-old Chris and his family are setting up a bungee jump in his backyard. It's a real large-scale bungee jump off a bridge that connects his backyard to a small island owned by his family. Not only is it going to be the coolest attraction around, but it also provides Chris with an opportunity to watch a real engineer in action. Chris would be excited about it if things didn't keep going wrong. The rumors of hauntings on the island, once the site of a hospital for children with leprosy, are getting out of control. And there are mysterious mishaps on the bridge. Chris worries that all of these problems will keep customers away. And if the bungee jump isn't a success, his family will lose everything.

Author Biography

Award-winning author **Pam Withers** has written numerous bestselling sports and adventure books for teens, including two other titles in the Orca Currents series: *Camp Wild* and *Daredevil Club*. Pam is a former outdoor guide, journalist, editor and associate publisher. She tours North America extensively, and lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, with her husband.

Connecting to the Text***Character and Novel Study***

To engage students with the main characters in *Bungee Jump*, use the following as large group discussion topics, individual novel study or paragraph-writing exercises.

1. The kids at school bully Chris in one moment and congratulate him in the next. They tease him about running from ghosts: “Even my friend Tom and some of our gang have smeared their faces with paint” (ch. 2). Yet, when the science fair is over, his friends say, “Way to go,” and “Knew you’d do something great” (ch. 3). And later, after the field trip, Tom warns Chris, “A couple of kids are saying it’s your fault Anya got sick” (ch. 9).
 - ◆ Does this ring true for you? Can kids at school sometimes be this fickle?
 - ◆ If you were Chris, how would you feel about your friends?
 - ◆ Compare Chris’ experience with his friends to the way he treats Caitlin. (Sometimes he avoids her and other times he supports her.)
2. In chapter 9, Mrs. Dubin confronts Chris about Thorn Island. She yanks him through a doorway and pushes him into a chair. Then she threatens Chris: “I warned you, over and over. That island is theirs, no matter what you think. When someone troubles them, they make trouble.” She also slams her ruler on the table in front of Chris.
 - ◆ Was this behavior appropriate for a teacher? Why do you think Chris “let it go”?
 - ◆ Imagine if Chris had reported her behavior and Mrs. Dubin had been reprimanded. How would the story have changed? **Prompt:** Likely Craven would still play a role.
 - ◆ If this happened in your school, what could Chris have done about it?

The Writer’s Craft***Metaphor and Simile***

Writers use metaphors and simile to make scenes come alive for readers. This is done by making interesting comparisons which spark our imagination. There are excellent examples of this in chapter 13, when Chris takes his first bungee jump. Ask students to reflect on the figurative language used. What are the comparison being made, and how do they help us understand the scene—and Chris’ experience? Examples:

- *My heart is doing flip-flops from stomach to throat.*
- *My knees are threatening to buckle.*
- *It feels like I’m leaping out of an airplane door.*
- *I hang limply. A puppet on a string.*
- *[Being pulled back up] is like a ski lift or a glass elevator.*

Adjectives

The author uses descriptive illustrative adjectives throughout the novel. Use these exercises to illustrate the power of adjectives.

- Collect adjectives that describe the hospital. How do they help us visualize the scene? Examples: haunted, spooky, contaminated, tumbledown, rusty, pretty, moldy, rotted, dangerous.
- Collect adjectives that illustrate the characters of Chris, Caitlin, Gord, Mrs. Dubin and Craven. How do these help readers understand the characters?

Chris: burning face, hiccupy cough, sweaty

Caitlin: muffled voice, tear-stained face, loud, bossy, glum, frightened

Gord: skinny man, red hair, belly laugh, sloppy, cheap, shoddy, greedy, conniving

Mrs. Dubin: knobby finger, fierce, pointy black boots, ominous smile, ugly face, sour

Craven: crazy fisherman, tall barrel-chested man, grumpy, big body

Connecting to the Curriculum*Language Arts*

1. The following sentences from *Bungee Jump* can be used to spark ideas for short stories, an email home, blog posts, raps, skits, etc. **Challenge**: Can students place these sentences in the context of the novel? Who is talking, and when did this take place?

ch. 1 *I hate dark, enclosed spaces.*

ch. 5 *And you should never, ever visit Thorn Island. It disturbs the children's spirits.*

ch. 7 *And the numbers on each bracelet. Those bracelets were their identity tags.*

ch. 9 *You woke them up...When someone troubles them, they make trouble.*

ch. 12 *All phenomena can be explained by science.*

ch. 12 *I feel released from a weight of shame and misery.*

2. Chris tells Caitlin he needs her help to write the bungee-jumping website (ch. 7). Invite students to block out a homepage for the website, including space for links, contests, photos, etc., and write the corresponding text. Narrow focus by asking students to use the website to market the business exclusively to kids in middle school or high school.

Encourage students to work in pairs or small groups and be creative and collaborative. Students should consider:

- ♦ What do website visitors want? What should be on the homepage? What shouldn't?
- ♦ Would the history of Thorn Island be appealing? Consider that Chris said, "There are bungee jumps all over the world. But how many are on a historic island?"
- ♦ Will you include photos/videos? If so, what kind would get kids interested?
- ♦ Incorporate some of the science behind the suspension bridge. What makes it special?
- ♦ What advantage would there be to having links to videos, Facebook, Instagram, etc.?

History and Science

1. Chris' grandfather bought Thorn Island 70 years ago because of its history: It was once the home of a hospital for children with leprosy. Leprosy is now curable with medication. Find out more about leprosy (also known as Hansen's Disease). Topic ideas include:
 - ◆ What causes leprosy? How is it spread?
 - ◆ Describe two symptoms of leprosy.
 - ◆ Since 1995, the World Health Organization (WHO) has played an important role in helping people with leprosy. How do they help, and what impact have they had?
 - ◆ Leper colonies have existed for hundreds of years. Why were they formed, and why were they situated on islands or in other remote locations?
 - ◆ Find out more about a leper colony, such as the Kalaupapa Leprosy Settlement in Hawaii or the Louisiana Leper Home in Carville, Louisiana. What was life in a leper colony like?
2. When Chris shows his model suspension bridge, Mr. Roth says he's "a natural born engineer" (ch. 2).
 - ◆ Invite students to find three pictures of suspension bridges, such as the Golden Gate Bridge or the Brooklyn Bridge. What makes these bridges unique?
 - ◆ Ask students to relate their pictures to the terminology used by Mr. Roth, such as, "You achieved the balance between dead load, live load and dynamic load right."
 - ◆ Challenge students to make a suspension bridge using straws, masking tape and string. How does a suspension bridge work? *Scientific American* has an excellent exercise. See the web link in the **Resources**.
3. Bungee jumping is popular around the world. Invite students to find out more, answering the questions below.
 - ◆ Bungee jumping involves a lot of careful planning. What considerations go into selecting a potential bungee jumping site?
 - ◆ Bungee jumpers take precautions to keep themselves safe. Describe this, making connections to Chuck's role in chapter 11 and Chris' jump in chapter 13.
 - ◆ Do bungee jumpers always jump from a suspension bridge, like at Thorn Island, or are there other variations? Describe these, providing an example for each.
 - ◆ If you were going to do a bungee jump, what location would appeal to you most? (British Columbia, New Zealand, Thailand, Vanuatu, Zimbabwe, etc.)

Art

In chapter 10, Chris and Chuck first wear the bungee jump's T-shirt. Invite students to create the T-shirt designs. They are primarily advertisements, so the design should make people want to come to the island. At the same time, you may want to pay respect to the patients who had leprosy, and their caregivers. Can you accomplish both?

Health Sciences

Early in the novel, Chris' biggest fear is revealed: He "hates dark, enclosed spaces." Later, when Chris tells Mr. Roth about it, Mr. Roth explains that, "all phenomena can

be explained by science” (ch. 12). Ask students to find out more about claustrophobia, making connections to the novel.

- Claustrophobia can sometimes be linked to a frightening event occurring in childhood, which is known as a conditioning experience. What happened to Chris?
- Aside from inside the pipe, where might Chris experience claustrophobia in his everyday life? **Prompts:** in a small room, elevator, bathroom stall, tunnel.
- Mr. Roth noted two cures. How did Chris use this advice in chapter 14? Do you have a phobia? Would these cures work for you?
- The context of the novel could present other phobias for characters. Find at least two. **Prompts:** acrophobia, or fear of heights; basiphobia, or fear of falling; gephyrophobia, the fear of bridges; aquaphobia, a fear of water; phasmophobia, fear of ghosts.

Connecting to the Wider World—Ideas for Exploration

A theme in the novel is the tension between wanting to honor and preserve history while also making money from it. The Biggs need to make a living and the bungee jumping business is a good solution. They also want to be respectful to the people who lived on Thorn Island as patients with leprosy. Do you think the Bigg family accomplished this? Ask students to also consider that, and these real-life examples.

- In 1912, 1500 people died when the *Titanic* sank in the Atlantic Ocean. People make money from this, through museums, movies, TV programs, novels, etc. Some people want to bring the ship to the surface, while others consider it a grave site.
- In 2014, a company sold Kent State University sweatshirts with images of blood and bullet holes on them. There was a shooting in 1970 which killed four students.
- In 2001, four terrorist attacks were made on the US (the 9/11 attacks). Nearly 3000 people were killed and another 6000 injured. Yet the tragedy appears in advertisements, and in campaigns, such as preserving forests and anti-smoking.

Web Resources

www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs101/en

www.scientificamerican.com/article/bring-science-home-suspension-bridge