



Caught in the Act

Deb Loughead

Reading level: 3.4

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Book Summary

Dylan and his friends attract the attention of the police when a summer bonfire gets out of control. Dylan almost loses a job opportunity at a local inn because of his antics, but he is saved by the lies of Heather, an employee of the inn. When he is caught on camera stealing towels from a summer cottage after a skinny-dipping prank, Dylan and his friends become suspects in a number of cottage robberies. Dylan learns everything he can about the robberies, with the hope of clearing his name, and finds himself in more than one sticky situation in the process.

Author Biography

Deb Loughead completed an English degree at the University of Toronto before working as a copy editor. She turned to creative writing after deciding to stay home to raise her three sons. Deb's books have been translated into seven languages, and her award-winning poetry and adult fiction have appeared in a variety of Canadian publications. In addition to having extensive experience with educational writing, Deb has conducted workshops and held readings at schools, festivals and conferences across the country. She has written and directed children's plays and taught creative writing classes for adults in Toronto. Deb likes to spend her non-writing time reading, knitting or hanging around horses as a therapeutic riding volunteer. Deb is the author of more than twenty-five books for children and young adults, including two other novels in the Orca Currents series: *Struck* and *The Snowball Effect* (also with Dylan and his friend Cory). She lives with her family in Toronto, Ontario.

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

Ask students to respond to one or more of the quotations below to connect to the character of Dylan and the novel's plot and themes. Who is speaking, and where does it fit in the novel's plot? Prompts for further discussion follow each quote.

(ch. 1) *I watched, my heart thudding hard, as leaves began to blacken and curl. Sure, the lake was close by, but we didn't even have a pail if this bonfire got out of control.*

- What if Dylan had brought fire extinguishers and pails of water, and had stopped the bonfire before it got out of hand? How do you think the other kids would have reacted? How would you have reacted?
- Dylan always seems to be in a jam. How would this scene (and the plot of the novel) be different if Dylan's mom wasn't friends with Officer Nicole Vance? If she didn't always recognize Dylan—either in person or in photographs?

(ch. 5) *There was no way I planned on ratting out Garrett. He was one guy I didn't want mad at me.*

- How would the story be different if Dylan told Officer Vance that Garrett and his friends pitched the clothes up in the trees, forcing Dylan and his friends to “borrow” the towels?

(ch. 6) *I couldn't tear my eyes off the gray T-shirt the guy was wearing...I didn't know anyone who had a T-shirt like that. Except for me—until last night.*

- Recognizing his “totally unique” T-shirt may not have helped Dylan solve the mystery of who was robbing the cottages, but he did learn something about Hayden Hillier. What was it?

Theme and Building Vocabulary

Use the following vocabulary words to connect students to the themes of *Caught in the Act*. Use the prompts below or ask students to write a descriptive paragraph using three or more of the vocabulary words for each topic.

Growing Up:

employee	mature	proud	working
freedom	polite	responsible	
initiative	priority	summer job	

- ♦ At the start of the novel, Dylan wants one more summer “of freedom.” He doesn't want to find a job, much less have one. Why did his feelings about this change?

The Great Paper Blaze:

annual	celebrate	matches	tradition
blaze	chaos	ritual	
caught	funeral pyre	smoke	

- ♦ The Great Paper Blaze has become a tradition for the start of summer. Discuss one positive and one negative aspect of this event.

Summer in Bridgewood:

city people	farmer's market	population	seasonal workers
cottages	festivals	resorts	
cuisine	lake	scenery	

- ♦ The community of Bridgewood changes a lot at the start of summer. What are two things that Dylan notices? Do you think Dylan likes summer in Bridgewood?

The Writer's Craft

There are many powerful examples of simile and metaphor in *Caught in the Act*. Ask students to find examples in the novel. How does this descriptive language enrich our understanding of the text? Examples:

- (ch. 1) *Everyone shouted as the fire danced higher...Flaming tendrils whorled toward the maple branches that dangled over the clearing.*
- (ch. 3) *The evening seemed to stretch ahead like a colossal yawn.*
- (ch. 3) *At the bottom, we stood on a gleaming crescent of sand and let the lapping waves lick our toes.*
- (ch. 6) *A finger of guilt began to prod me.*
- (ch. 7) *The night blazed with explosions of color that lit the sky and reflected across the bay.*

Connecting to the Curriculum***Creative Writing***

Dylan's Gran always seems to be checking up on him, and he avoids her so he won't get in trouble. Ask students to invent a character analysis/summary for Gran, bringing in ideas from the novel while adding their own creative flare. Ask students to make up a past for Gran. Create two stories about Gran's life that Dylan has no idea about. For example:

- On his first day, Dylan notices how much food is wasted by guests: "Half-empty yogurt cups, half-eaten omelets and slices of toast...Gran would have been mortified" (ch. 7). Why would Gran react this way? *Perhaps she lived through the Great Depression when food was scarce.*
- Why is Gran always at home, checking up on Dylan and asking him so many questions? Why does she have that "killer glare"? *Perhaps she's in the Witness Protection Program or was a highly skilled secret agent!*

- In your character analysis, choose three adjectives to describe Gran, and explain why each is an appropriate choice.

Art

Dylan lives in Bridgewood, a small community that depends on tourism. Many people who live in the city spend their summer in cottages. When this happens, “Bridgewood is transformed from a ghost town into a holiday hub” (ch. 1). Use the following as art project ideas:

- Consider the two spaces: ghost town and holiday hub. How are they different? What is the “mood” of each? What textures or colors would match their moods?
- Dylan uses powerful language to describe the The Great Paper Blaze (ch. 1). Paint, pastel or collage the imagery of the “licking and leaping orange flames” and the spiraling smoke.
- The “nature-crazy cottagers” enjoy photographing wolves, bears and deer. Create a photo essay of wildlife around your school or neighborhood parks. If you sit still long enough, what can you see?