



## Eye Sore

Melanie Jackson

Reading level: 2.0

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### Book Summary

The last thing Chaz wants is to spend his summer working on his father's Eye, a Ferris wheel with glass-bottomed gondolas set up to view scenic North Vancouver. For one thing, Chaz would prefer to pursue his own passion: dance in the style of the late, great Gene Kelly. More important, Chaz suffers from vertigo, and even the thought of the Eye makes him want to lose his lunch. When a crowd of angry protestors and a mysterious vandal threaten his father's dream and the family's livelihood, Chaz is forced to overcome his own fears to help out.

### Author Biography

Scottish-born and mystery-minded, **Melanie Jackson** is the author of Orca's Dinah Galloway Mystery Series for middle readers, and three other books in the Orca Currents series: *High Wire*, *The Big Dip* and *Fast Slide*. Melanie, who lives in Vancouver with her family, is a business/advertising writer and editor—a Mad Woman! A book reviewer for the *Vancouver Sun*, she is also a member of the *Sun's* Book Club. Melanie volunteers as a writing mentor with the Vancouver School Board.

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

To engage students with the characters and themes of *Eye Sore*, use the following as group discussion topics, individual novel study or writing exercises:

- Chaz has vertigo, which causes dizziness and nausea, but he doesn't want to tell his dad. It's especially difficult for Chaz to be comfortable in the Eye Ferris Wheel.
  - Chaz and his dad seem close, and even Moe thinks Chaz should tell him. Why doesn't Chaz tell his dad about the vertigo? What does he fear will happen if his dad knows?
  - Find a strong quote to support your reason. For example, Chaz says, "I'd hidden it all these years. I couldn't let Dad down..." (ch. 1)
- Someone's trying to sabotage the Eye. Track the events using a storyboard or timeline. Include important plot points or dramatic scenes, such as Chaz meeting the birdwatcher in chapter 3.
 

**Prompt:** First, the newspaper had a negative story about the Eye, then the Eye was vandalized, and then the fence was cut open.
- In chapter 7, Mr. Higgins begins to understand Chaz's intentions more clearly. He says, "I owe you an apology, son. I've been closed minded. You are one creative performer. And funny!" How does this compare to how Jonas Bilk responds to Brody's singing?

***Building Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension***

The following words and terms are found in *Eye Sore*.

applause	dramatic	relationship
audience	ecosystem	rotating, rotation
business	perform	serious
disappointing	protestors, protest	somersault

Ask students to write sentences about the characters and plot using three of these words. Encourage students to utilize words in two contexts. For example,

- Like Gene Kelly, Chaz does a somersault as part of his dance routine.*
- Chaz's stomach does somersaults when he's on the Eye because of his vertigo.*

***The Writer's Craft***

- Writers are intentional with the language they use because they want to engage readers. Students will enjoy finding examples of "play on words" and puns using the word "eye" throughout the novel. How do these enhance our experience of the novel?
 

ch. 1 <i>Close the Eye</i>	ch. 5 <i>Black eye, evil Eye</i>
ch. 7 <i>Eye-catchers</i>	ch. 14 <i>Eye'd say</i>
ch. 15 <i>More to you than meets the eye</i>	

Ask students to write a sentence using a play on the word Eye. For example,

- ♦ *Chaz could have used Eye patches when he felt vertigo in the gondola.*
- ♦ *I know one game Chaz wouldn't like playing in the gondola: Eye Spy!*

2. Writers know how to provide readers with a “picture” of a character using only a few words. This sets up how we, as readers, feel about characters too, which helps build suspense and contribute to foreshadowing. For example,

ch. 2: Brody was a husky, blond football player...He had a goofy, likeable grin. From a distance he seemed like a decent guy.

Here, we learn about what Brody looks like—and also how Chaz feels about him initially. Later, we find out what's Brody's really like. Ask students to write descriptions for other characters.

- Chaz is \_\_\_\_\_
- Don Higgins, Chaz' dad, is \_\_\_\_\_
- Jonas Bilk is \_\_\_\_\_
- Lauren is \_\_\_\_\_

### *Creative Writing*

1. Invite students to choose a scene, quote or image from the novel that is interesting or meaningful to them. It could be humorous, interesting, descriptive, dramatic, etc. Use that scene or image as a “jumping off” point for creative writing, word art, journaling, poetry, etc. Ideas, to get students started:
  - ♦ Chaz said, “No matter how hard I tried, I kept disappointing Dad” (ch. 6). Write a letter to Mr. Higgins and tell him about Chaz's character. What kind of a guy is Chaz? Use examples from the novel.
  - ♦ Chaz described the portrait in the Bilk's home: “The first time I saw the painting, I'd thought how pretty the woman was—like Lauren. Now I noticed the dark trees around her. Dark, like a family secret” (ch. 8). Write a poem that compares Lauren (the beautiful woman) to Jonas and his secrets (the darkness that surrounds her).
  - ♦ In chapter 9, Chaz said, “In my dreams, I never had vertigo. I danced off the ground and into the air. I cartwheeled. I spun. I tap-danced on stars.” Break apart this quote and use phrases to spark creative writing: poems, song lyrics, etc.
    - *In my dreams...I steered a bright red gondola over the lush, green forest and then left it for the cardinals to build their nests in.*
2. Imagine that you are Lauren's great-grandmother as a little girl in 1920 North Vancouver, BC, where “the woods stretched for miles, unspoiled and undeveloped” (ch. 11). In the form of a diary entry, describe a “day in the life” for her. What does she do for fun?

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Research and Reading Skills*

Chaz and his dad know a lot about George Ferris, the engineer of the Ferris Wheel. Chaz describes Ferris' history in chapters 1, 6 and 9. Using *Eye Sore* and further research, ask students to find out more about George Ferris.

- Ferris was an engineer. Before he designed the Ferris Wheel, what did he build? (*Tunnels, bridges, railways*)
- What prompted Ferris to design something so special? (*Daniel H. Burnham, the director of works for the 1893 Worlds Fair in Chicago, challenged US civil engineers to create something greater than the Eiffel Tower.*)
- Why were people afraid to ride the Ferris Wheel? (*They thought it would spin off its base—ch. 6*)
- Find pictures of the 1893 Ferris Wheel and a modern “Eye,” such as the London Eye, the Singapore Flyer, Star of Nanchang or High Roller in Las Vegas. Find two ways that the 1893 and current day Ferris Wheels are similar, and two ways that they're different.

### *Dance, Theater*

Chaz loves to dance and he enjoys the unique dance style of Gene Kelly. Invite students to view short videos online of Gene Kelly singing and dancing, or watch *Singing in the Rain*. A skilled dancer and teacher, Kelly brought ballet moves to tap dancing, and was famous for his graceful performances.

Ask students to try some dance moves Chaz and/or Gene Kelly use, as described in the novel or through video clips. **Prompt:** Chaz tells how to do a two-step in chapter 5.

Warner Brothers have clips on YouTube, including “Gotta Dance” from *Singing in the Rain*. Students will recognize that this is Chaz' ringtone (ch. 8). YouTube also has clips of Gene Kelly saying, “Dignity—always dignity.” The full quote is, *I've had one motto which I've always lived by: Dignity. Always dignity.*

### *Art*

Don Higgins, Chaz's dad, wants people to be comfortable in the gondolas. Rather than crowding them into seats, he wants them to “appreciate the beauty of the scenery” (ch. 1). Using descriptions from the novel and research on Vancouver, invite students to imagine and illustrate the view riders see from the Eye. Ideas include:

- Grouse Mountain at night, with its lights illuminating the ski slopes
- A view through binoculars of the woods with pale wildflowers, dark ferns, red cardinals
- The skyscrapers of Vancouver juxtaposed against Burrard Inlet
- Shouting protesters with signs, pushing at the chain link fence below

**Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Discussion**

1. In chapter 7, Chaz visits the Bilks' home so he and Brody can smooth things over. Chaz is alarmed to hear the sound of a woman screaming, something neighbors noticed but did nothing about: "The screamer from upstairs wasn't an exotic pet. It was a person. I'd heard her beg for help." He also overhears Jonas Bilk say, "Every family has its secrets."

This situation concerned Chaz and yet he didn't call the police to find out if the woman was in danger. Ask students to reflect on this. Why did Chaz wait? If you suspected someone was the victim of domestic violence, what could you do? If s/he were a student at your school, who could s/he talk with to get help?

2. Chaz loves dance: "To me, dance was everything" (ch. 1). While his dad would prefer his son spends the summer selling tickets for the Eye and being practical, he still supports Chaz's love of dance. Conversely, Brody's dad does not support his singing: "His parents had made him feel singing was something to be ashamed of" (ch. 15).

Sometimes it's difficult when our wishes and passions are not supported by parents or friends. What are some ways Brody can enjoy singing without making things difficult at home?

**Prompts:**

- ◆ Arrange for a practice time when the majority of the family will be out of the house.
  - ◆ Find time to watch musical performances as a family.
3. Chaz, upon seeing the TV crew aim their cameras at Brody's bullying, said, "There is nothing the folks at home enjoy more than watching someone getting humiliated" (ch. 3). Ask students to reflect on this scene.
    - ◆ If you were part of the TV crew, would you film the altercation between Brody and Chaz? If yes, what would be your motivation? How do you feel when you see scenes like this on TV?
    - ◆ Brody teased and bullied Chaz in front of the protestors, calling him a loser and a monkey. To retaliate, Chaz started dancing and sprayed a "huge cloud of sand" in Brody's face. Do you think either of the boys' behavior was justified? Is humiliating someone else (in public or otherwise) ever okay?

**More Novels in the Orca Currents Series**

These novels by Melanie Jackson share similar themes, and like *Eye Sore* they're also set in the Vancouver, British Columbia, area.

- *Fast Slide*: Clay gets a summer job at Safari Splash, the new water park in town. Things start to get interesting when he learns that someone has been wandering the park in a lynx costume, scaring the staff. Forty thousand dollars is stolen from the till, and his friends are under suspicion for the theft. Clay is certain the mask and thefts are connected, and he's determined to solve the crime.

- *The Big Dip*: Joe and his friend Skip enjoy the thrill of the Big Dip, a famous rollercoaster, until they learn the old man in front of them has been shot. He mutters with his dying breath something about getting a Margaret Rose to the police. Someone is desperate for the Margaret Rose and thinks Joe has it. When his sister is kidnapped, Joe is in a race against time to solve the puzzle.