



Fast Slide

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Book Summary

Clay would much rather work as a lifeguard at the beach than at Safari Splash, the new water park in town. He's certain the summer will drag along despite his position at the Boa, the park's fastest slide. The summer job starts to get interesting when he learns that someone has been wandering the park in a lynx costume, scaring the staff. When forty thousand dollars is stolen from the till and his friends are under suspicion for the theft, what was boring is now starting to look good. But Clay is certain that the mask and the thefts are connected, and he's determined to solve the crime.

Author Biography

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, **Melanie Jackson** grew up in Toronto's Bennington Heights neighborhood. Melanie is curious and rather pest-like, she claims, so she decided that the only natural career to go into was newspaper reporting. She started out at the *Toronto Star*, then moved on to freelance for such magazines as *Chatelaine* and *Vancouver*. And, always, she kept scribbling mystery stories.

Melanie isn't sure why she likes mysteries so much, except that it's part of being curious about life and its possibilities. She's convinced that people who like mysteries are optimists because they expect problems to be resolved. Melanie lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, with her husband, daughter and cowardly cat.

Melanie is on the Board of Directors of the Lower Mainland Branch of the International Reading Association (LOMCIRA) and is a creative writing volunteer mentor for the Vancouver School Board.

Connecting to the Text

Character

1. Clay is known for having a temper. In chapter 3, he “snapped” and shoved Judd against the wall because he thought Judd was the one scaring everyone using the lynx mask. Conduct a brainstorm to discuss Clay’s actions. What could he have done differently? (For example, asked Judd if he was the one in the mask or talked to Mr. Costello about what was going on). What examples are there of Clay letting his temper get the best of him, and also of controlling his temper?
2. In chapter 10, Clay says, “Mom had been right. I had learned to be more tolerant”. Ask students to reflect on what Clay learned through his experiences at Safari Splash. What did he learn about others? About himself? Encourage students to cite examples from *Fast Slide* in their responses.
3. Bradley was jealous of the attention Clay always received from Mr. Costello, and he confessed to Clay that he’d “make [him] pay.” Bradley also said that while they were growing up, Clay never gave him the time of day. Ask students to describe Bradley, citing examples from the novel. What are his motivations? Why did he steal from his father’s company? What did he hope to gain by setting Clay up?

Point of View

At the end of the novel, Clay tries to call Janice but she just hangs up. Ask students to imagine they’re in Janice’s place. What feelings does she have? Where are her allegiances? What are her concerns and wishes? Once she understands the full story, can she ever “forgive” Clay? What is unique about Janice’s point of view, compared to Clay’s or Detective Mulligan’s?

The Writer’s Craft

1. There are a number of examples of the author building suspense in the early chapters of *Fast Slide*. Ask students to identify one example and explain if and how it helped them engage with the novel’s characters or plot. A common technique for building suspense is foreshadowing. The author provides hints about characters and potential conflicts or threats that might occur. For example:
 - (ch. 1) *My folks kept urging me to curb my temper. They had a point.*
 - (ch. 1) *This time her gaze came to rest on Judd, at the top of the Boa. She turned to walk away—but not before I saw the glint of fear in her eyes.*
 - (ch. 2) *I didn’t think Bradley was right. I didn’t think Aggie had meant a stray animal.*

2. Metaphors and similes connect ideas, giving us “pictures” that expand our understanding of situations and characters. Read the following examples aloud to the large group, or write them on the board. After each, discuss the connection that is being made and how it deepens our understanding of the situation or character. Invite students to find examples of metaphors, similes and vivid images as they read the novel. Ask students to log them, and then share them in a large group discussion.

(ch. 5) *The firs were inking together, turning the mountain black.*

(ch. 9) *The lobby was a sea of red and white uniforms.*

(ch. 11) *I remembered Aggie’s pale, lifeless face; the wet, limp yellow hair straggling down like mop ends.*

(ch. 11) *The different Brads formed a circle and spun like a Ferris wheel.*

Connecting to the Curriculum

Art

Have students create individual art projects using images and quotations from *Fast Slide*. Ideas could include collage, sketching, pastel or paint, or dioramas. *Prompts:*

(ch. 1) *On either side of Safari Splash were the slopes of Grouse Mountain, the Douglas firs a vivid blue-green in the bright sun.*

(ch. 2) *His trophies lined the hallway of his house, shining like the Milky Way.*

(ch. 5) *The water rushing into the pool gleamed diamond-bright in the slanting sun. Soon this part of the mountain would be shady.*

(ch. 5) *I had the peculiar sensation of not being alone, and yet being very, very alone.*

(ch. 11) *Maybe the dead made their presence felt. Maybe Aggie’s ghost had lingered, trying to warn me. Watch out, Clay...*

Current Events

1. In chapter 1, Clay said the Boa was closed briefly because someone who hadn’t followed the rules hit their head. And when the Boa reopened, “it was even more popular than before. People loved the idea of risk.” Ask students to research current events involving risky behaviors in youth, and report their findings to the large group. Ask students to identify the risky behavior, what occurred, who was involved and the outcome.

2. In chapter 11, Clay said he felt pity for Bradley: “Brad had been shut out by me, by his father, by almost everyone, all those years.” Sadly, there are many true stories of youth who, like Bradley, act out their “revenge” through violence. Invite students to research the resources available in their school or community to assist students who have anger issues, or who are being bullied or are struggling socially. Ask students to create posters advertising these resources (1-800 numbers, websites, counseling services, etc.) and hang them prominently in hallways and classrooms.

Option: Have students prepare short presentations or “commercials” to present in front of other classes.

History

Fast Slide takes place in North Vancouver, British Columbia, one of the sites of the 2010 Winter Olympics. As a research project, invite students to choose a Winter Olympic sport, such as snowboarding, luge, biathlon, ice hockey or curling, and find out where that Olympic event took place in 2010. What made that particular site and venue appropriate for the chosen sport? What had to be constructed for the Olympic event to occur?

Language Arts

In chapter 1, Aggie begs Clay not to ignore her, but Clay finds Aggie “clingy.” He said, “it was like I’d become her obsession.” Ask students to imagine that they have a friend who, like Aggie, is unattractive because they come across as too clingy or needy. In a letter, give some practical advice to this friend. What can s/he do to create a friendship while still giving the other person the space they need?

Science

A prominent image in *Fast Slide* is the lynx. As a research project, invite students to find out about the lynx of British Columbia. Bradley said that generally lynxes prefer deep forests rather than coastal areas. And Clay described a lynx as quiet and stealthy. Are these facts true? What is the lynx’s habitat? How long do they live? What do they eat? What are their main predators?

Vocabulary

The words and terms below are used in *Fast Slide* in the context of Clay solving the mysteries that occurred at Safari Splash: What happened to Aggie, and why was she acting so strangely? Who wore the lynx mask? Who stole the money from the cash register? Ask students to create their own short mystery story using some or all of the words below.

cash register
combination
confrontation
crashed

dangerous
detective
fingerprints
involved

mastermind
passenger
platform
safety belt

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

1. Clay is a trained lifeguard, so he knows how to perform CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). He received his certification from the Lifesaving Society, an organization devoted to reducing water-related deaths and training lifeguards. If you are interested in training to become a lifeguard, where could you go in your community? How long does it take? What jobs are available once you receive certification?
2. Clay knows his temper can sometimes get out of hand. In chapter 4, Clay said his coach always told him “not to panic in a crisis. Stop, rest and think. Cool your brain off so it can work again.” As a competitive swimmer and lifeguard, being able control strong emotional responses would be an important skill to master. Ask students to share experiences when they needed to maintain focus in a stressful moment. What techniques worked for them?
3. At first, Detective Mulligan suspected Mr. Costello of taking the money from the cash register. He said, “owners sometimes steal from their companies, then file an insurance claim” (ch. 5). Insurance fraud comes in different forms, including medical, automobile or property insurance fraud. There are two kinds of insurance fraud, “soft” or “hard.” As a research project, invite students to find out about insurance fraud. Why is it a crime? Who does it hurt?
4. Bradley appears to be a very unhappy person. He is jealous of Clay and manipulates others to commit serious crimes. At the end of the novel, what do you think will happen to Bradley? Will he get help, or will he be punished? What do you think will happen, and what do you hope will happen?

Web Resources

www.lifesaving.ca/main.php?lang=english&cat=international&sub=commonwealth

www.discoveryeducation.com/teachers/free-lesson-plans/big-decisions.cfm

www.olympic.org/vancouver-2010-winter-olympics

www.lifesaving.bc.ca

www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?id=84