



Maxed Out

Daphne Greer

Reading Level: 2.0

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AR Quiz # 150535

Book Summary

More than anything, twelve-year-old Max wants to play hockey like he used to. But since the death of his dad, his mom does more crying than mothering, and Max has to take his special-needs brother, Duncan, with him everywhere he goes. The team needs Max to win the upcoming game against the Red Eagles, but one practice with Duncan makes it evident that it's not safe to leave him unattended on the sidelines. With only a week to figure out how he can play in the big game, Max is feeling the pressure. Will he find a way to be a good teammate, a good brother and a good son, or is it too much for one kid?

Author Biography

Daphne Greer worked with individuals with special needs for sixteen years. *Maxed Out* is her first novel. Daphne lives in Newport, Nova Scotia.

Connecting to the Text

Character

Max sometimes gets frustrated with Duncan, and other times he appears angry. In chapter 2, when Max and Duncan talk to Ian at the ice pond, Max rolls his eyes at Duncan's behavior and says, "Do you really have to do that?" Later, after Max loses sight of Duncan at the Bucky Dwayne store, he says, "Stop embarrassing me!"

Ask students to reflect on how Max feels about Duncan. As a character study exercise, ask students to write a diary entry, pretending they're Max. They can choose any point in the story from which to start, but they should draw from the novel. Students may wish to consider the following:

- Although Max gets angry, he has been teaching Duncan how to ring the bell on the bus and respects all of Duncan's routines.
- Max sees Duncan's challenges but he also appreciates his gifts. In chapter 5, Max says, "It always amazes me how in some ways Duncan can be completely clueless and in others so smart."
- Is Max really angry with Duncan or is it more the whole situation?
- At the end of the novel, have Max's feelings about Duncan changed?

Theme

Some of the themes in *Maxed Out* include grieving, acceptance and asking for help. A fun way to explore themes is by creating a mind map. Using flip chart paper and colored markers, ask students to create mind maps by beginning with their chosen theme and then incorporating outstretched "branches" with ideas, reflections, questions to consider, and key words and quotes from the novel. (For instructions on creating mind maps, simply insert "mind map how to" in any search engine or on YouTube; just be sure to preview.) Below is an example. Like all mind maps, there is no "right" answer since it is a brainstorming method.

Theme is *acceptance*. "Branches" and details could include:

- *Max*: In chapter 9, Max says that Duncan "blabs off at the mouth to my friends and Mr. Cooper. He acts so retarded. I hate it." Is it Duncan that Max is having trouble accepting, or is it all the added responsibilities, including caring for Duncan? Has Max accepted his situation? Has Max accepted his mother's grief or his own? (Consider how Max felt about accepting change after he spoke to the Kid's Help Phone volunteer in chapter 14.)
- *People*: In chapter 3, Max says, "If Duncan was little, they would ignore us, but a teenager having a tantrum like this is not a common sight... We're the Saturday entertainment." Why does it make a difference to people's perceptions that Duncan is a teenager? Would they be more accepting if Duncan was a toddler? Who accepts Duncan as he is, and who doesn't?
- *Cody*: Cody calls Duncan "a dork" and a "freak." Why do you think Cody

does this? What is it Cody can't accept? Is it Duncan or something else?

- *Mr. Cooper:* In chapter 6, Mr. Cooper takes care of Duncan's arm and he is always kind and accepting toward Duncan. He also helps Mrs. O'Neill accept her situation.
- *Kids' Help Phone Volunteers...*
- *Lilly...*
- *Ian...*

The Writer's Craft

Daphne Greer provides hints about the characters Max, Duncan and their mom in chapter 1. Ask students to identify an example, answering these questions: What descriptions or aspects of the characters are you curious about? What do you think will happen with the characters later in *Maxed Out*? Then ask students to follow their examples throughout the novel. What did they guess their example was hinting at, and what actually happened? Examples could include:

- "It looks like time has stopped. Mom doesn't come in here much anymore. It used to be her favorite spot." *What's changed? Why does it feel like time's standing still?*
- "I don't tell her about making banana boats around the campfire like we used to do with Dad or how we stayed up late telling ghost stories. No one wanted to go home—especially me." *Why didn't Max want to come home?*
- "The next morning I'm in a rush. I'm not used to having to do everything by myself." *What has changed for Max? Why does he now have to do everything himself?*
- "Duncan stands perfectly still while I stand on my tiptoes to turn his shirt around." Duncan is much taller than Max so he is probably older. *Why does Max have to help him dress?*

Connecting to the Curriculum

Art

There are many image-rich, descriptive and evocative scenes in *Maxed Out*. Ask students to choose one to incorporate into an art project, using water color, pastel, pencil crayon, collage of images searched online, etc. Encourage students to incorporate the quote they chose into their art projects. Ideas include:

- (ch. 1) *In my mind I hear the scrape of the skates as we darted across the pond and the sound of his belly laugh when we reached the other side.*
- (ch. 4) *I glide onto the pond. I feel like I'm floating as my skates cut through the ice.*
- (ch. 11) *I lug my hockey gear to the school. The ice on the pond glistens in the morning sunlight. I can't wait to play this afternoon.*
- (ch. 16) *Everything glows in the moonlight. The sky looks lit up. The trees rustle slightly in the breeze. Our boots crunch over the crisp snow. Even Duncan seems caught up in the magic of the night.*

Drama

Ask students to find an excerpt from *Maxed Out* to use as an improvisation prompt (or they may choose one from the list below). Students can incorporate their quotes into a monologue or short skit if working in pairs or teams. If students appear reluctant, it may help to suggest that they use their quote for their first line, to be humorous and silly, or to act out the related scene from *Maxed Out*.

(ch. 1) *[At the ice pond] I get swallowed up in a memory.*

(ch. 2) *[At the ice pond] The sound of laughter echoes through the woods.*

(ch. 3) *Back in my room I flop on my bed and pound my fists into the pillow.*

(ch. 6) *She's always mad now, and everything that goes wrong is my fault!*

(ch. 9) *I'm just like Duncan—blurting out things I should keep inside.*

Health Sciences

Although Daphne Greer does not indicate the condition Duncan has, it is clear that he has special needs because of an event that happened when he was younger. In chapter 3, Mrs. O'Neill says, "Sometimes I wonder what he'd be like now if he hadn't had that awful fever...Daddy and I were so worried he wasn't going to make it."

It is likely that Duncan has an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), which means that his brain was damaged after he was born, as opposed to a congenital or genetic condition. As a research project, challenge students to find out more about ABI by doing one of the following:

- Write a three-paragraph report that describes the difference between an ABI, a congenital and a genetic condition. Be sure to include an example for each.
- An ABI can happen to kids in other ways than the way Duncan acquired it. One example is being involved in an accident when not wearing a helmet. Design a safety poster for your classroom that raises awareness about wearing helmets when ice skating, biking, skateboarding and rollerblading.

Vocabulary

Ask students to write creative, descriptive paragraphs using four or more of the vocabulary words and terms below. These are used in *Maxed Out* in the context of Max and Ian playing hockey but many could be used for other sports as well.

bounces	goalie	puck	skates
edge	hockey	retrieve	stick
five on five	lineup	scores	take charge
gloves	practice	signature	whacks

Some ideas to get students started are included below.

- Describe how Max felt when he saw Ian in the line to get Sidney Crosby's autograph. If things had been different, Max could have brought something for Sidney to sign. What do you think he would have chosen? What did Ian bring?

- Skating on the ice pond brings back a lot of memories for Max. What does he miss about his life before his dad died?
- Describe Max's experience in chapter 12 when he and Ian are playing against the Red Eagles. Max says, "It's like I'm playing for an Olympic gold medal and everything rides on this game."

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

1. Max has a lot to deal with. His father died and his mother is not coping very well. She's left many responsibilities to Max, including caring for his brother Duncan who has special needs. In chapter 1, Max says, "I'm still not used to having to do everything by myself." If you were Max's friend, what advice would you give him? What resources are available to students in your school who are feeling overwhelmed and alone, like Max?
2. When Max considers calling the Kids' Help Phone in chapter 8, he reflects, "I wonder how many kids see the number and want to call, but never do." Research the online and toll-free resources that exist for kids who are having trouble or struggling at home or at school. Create eye-catching posters for your school and classroom that advertise the services and reasons to call. Be sure to include tear-away tabs with the phone numbers!

Web Resources

www.boystown.org

www.yourlifeyourvoice.org

www.kidshelpphone.ca