



## **Payback**

Deb Loughead

Reading level: 4.2

978-1-4598-1469-1 PB

### **Book Summary**

Dylan O'Connor is in trouble again. While riding his bike home after dark, he has a run-in with a truck but doesn't give it a second thought until police show up at his door the next day. CCTV cameras put Dylan at the scene of a crime, and when the police question him, Dylan realizes he was an inadvertent witness. But he doesn't tell them the driver of the truck was Jeff Walker, a nasty piece of work. Dylan knows it's in his best interests to keep his mouth shut. Then he starts getting stalked by Jeff's weirdo sidekick, Eliot Barnes, a classmate of Dylan's. Is Eliot trying to protect Dylan, or is he making sure he stays silent?

This is the fourth story featuring Dylan O'Connor after *The Snowball Effect*, *Caught in the Act*, and *Rise of the Zombie Scarecrows*.

### **Author Biography**

**Deb Loughead** is the author of more than thirty-five books for children and young adults. Her books have been translated into seven languages. She has also written and directed children's plays and taught creative writing classes. Deb lives in Toronto, Ontario.

## Connecting to the Text

### *Plot and Novel Study*

The plot tells us the story. Each situation or event that occurs affects what happens next, until the conclusion. Ask students to investigate key events in *Payback*. How does one event affect what happens next? How do Dylan's decisions influence the plot progression?

Then imagine Dylan made different decisions. How would this change the plot? Considering what you know about the characters, what would happen next? Examples:

- Nicole wanted to find out what Dylan saw the night he almost got hit by the pickup truck. Dylan suspected who the driver was and made a “judgement call” (ch.2).  
*What if Dylan had told Officer Nicole Vance he knew who was in the truck?*
- A lot of kids saw a black pickup truck practically sideswipe Aiden, but it was Dylan who noticed the muddy license plate and tinted windows (ch. 3-4).  
*What if Dylan had told Nicole he didn't see the truck or anything special about it?*
- Eliot hung around Dylan's place and Dylan wanted him to leave. Gran came home and invited Eliot to come in for cookies and hot chocolate. Dylan got to know Eliot a bit (ch. 5-6).  
*What if Gran hadn't come home just then, and Eliot had taken off?*
- Dylan went to Eliot's place to get new tires for his bike. When he went to the bathroom, he opened the wrong door and saw the stash of stolen property (ch. 8).  
*What if Dylan had never seen the stolen property?*

### *The Writer's Craft*

Foreshadowing is a literary device where the writer suggests things early that later escalate or are resolved. This keeps readers interested and wanting to know more. Ask students to find examples—hints from chapter 1 about what might come later. Did they pique your curiosity? What questions did you have?

- When Dylan first sees the black pickup truck, he notices “the license plate was filthy [but] the rest of the car was clean.” *Does that seem odd?*
- When Nicole drops by Dylan's place, he shivers. *Why would he do that?*
- Nicole said, “I only hope I don't have to *arrest* you.” *What happened?*

### *Character Study*

Use the following questions about Eliot for discussion, individual study or writing exercises.

1. Dylan thought Eliot was “one of the weirdest, sketchiest guys in town” (ch. 6) and he avoided him. Even after Dylan got to know Eliot a bit (over cookies and hot chocolate), he still assumed Eliot took Gran's wallet. What was Dylan's impression of Eliot based on? Why did his opinion of Eliot change?
2. Read the scene in chapter 6, where Eliot hangs out with Dylan and Gran. What does Gran see in Eliot that Dylan doesn't?
3. Imagine you are Dylan and you're in the scene where Dylan sees all the stashed property, and you realize that Jeff is manipulating Eliot (ch. 8). How do you feel about Eliot? What advice would you give Eliot, since Jeff “has all kinds of dirt” on him?

4. At the end of the novel, Gran says, "It's a shame [Eliot] has no friends. Isn't it, Dylan?" Dylan helps Eliot get a summer job scooping ice cream. Do you think Dylan and Eliot will become friends? What will Eliot's life be like when he's working at the Scoop?

### ***Building Vocabulary***

The following words are used in the context of "weird stuff" happening in Bridgewood.

accident	hospital	question
ambulance	information	scene
concussion	nervous	siren
cruiser	officer	threat
explain	pickup	victim
freaked out	police	witness

Ask students to choose a topic below (or their own) and write two short paragraphs, one that answers the question, and one that's zany. Include three vocab words. For example,

- What happened when Aiden rode his unicycle on Main Street in chapter 3?  
*Jeff sideswiped Aiden and he hit the curb. He went to the hospital by ambulance. Jeff left the scene without leaving information even though there were witnesses.*
- *Right in the middle of an ice cream bucket, Dylan saw a police cruiser the size of a piece of Lego, and he freaked out. It was like a scene from a movie. He was afraid to scoop in case the officer got a concussion! How would he ever explain this?*
- How did Dylan feel after he talked to Jeff at the end of chapter 4?
- In chapter 5, why didn't Dylan tell his friends what happened with Eliot and Jeff?
- What happened after Dylan hid under the tarp in Jeff's truck in chapter 9?

### **Connecting to the Students**

Use the following topics for interactive exercises such as debates, skits or interviews, or for group discussion or individual novel study.

1. Deb Loughead has written numerous novels for kids, including four that feature Dylan and his friends and family. Ask students to consider Dylan's comments about boys and girls. Do they ring true? How do they compare to your experiences? For example:
  - ch. 1 "Girls aren't as okay with chilling in front of a screen playing video games all night the way guys are. They actually like to talk. Face-to-face."
  - ch. 3 Dylan thinks the promposals are silly and a "vile task." He thinks the girls want them so they can "wind up with a cool promposal story to brag about."

2. Dylan reflects on growing up, which is not always easy. Invite students to offer him advice. What could Dylan do differently, or should he just chill?
  - ♦ Dylan says that living with his mom and grandmother is getting harder the older he gets. He has to live by Gran and Mom's rules, including curfew.
  - ♦ He sometimes says the wrong thing. "Oh, *crap*. I had no idea if the right or wrong words would come out of my mouth from one minute to the next" (ch. 5).

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Social Studies*

1. Dylan can't tell Officer Vance what's really going on. He's afraid of "Retribution. Retaliation. Payback for being a snitch" (ch. 2). And Eliot is in a similar situation. Ask students to imagine this is at your school. Kids are in danger, being persecuted, and fear retribution. What resources are available? Make posters and cards and display and distribute them in bathrooms, hallways, cafeteria, etc. (kids help line, counselor, etc.)
 

**Option:** Create a similar campaign for kids like Eliot, who are in a cycle of abuse (ch. 10).
2. Games for kids have changed a lot in the last 50 years. Dylan and his pals have a "retro" board-game night on Thursdays. Invite students to interview three people from different generations, and ask them what games they played as kids. How have games changed?

Explore various themes: indoor/outdoor; analogic/digital; board game/on-screen; players physically together/connected by internet; free/costly; readily availability/pre-order; etc.

### *Art*

Ask students to create a pitch for a creative, humorous or zany promposal for a fictional character, celebrity, sports figure, politician, educator, etc., of their choice. Write and illustrate the idea, and share with the group/class.

You may wish to ask students to first discuss some of the promposals in *Payback*: Romeo and Juliet, heart-shaped pizza, caricature and word puzzle, horse and banner, unicycle riding juggler, chicken wings spelling out an invitation, carving in wood.

### Connecting to the Wider World

Promposals have become popular in recent years. As a research project, ask students to learn about this trend, looking at examples in pop culture and social media. Are promposals a fun form of self-expression, an unrealistic expectation that adds a lot of stress, or, as Mr. Kennedy says, "ridiculous stunts" (ch. 3)?

Invite students to work in pairs or triads to research and discuss. Consider various factors, positive and negative: self-expression, fun, creativity, romance, expense, exclusivity, stress, safety; and—could they go too far? How far would be too far?

Once complete, ask pairs to report out on their findings to the large group.

**More Novels in the Orca Currents Series**

Dylan sometimes finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. This spells trouble for Dylan and fun for readers! Students who enjoy the antics of Dylan, Cory, Monica, Gran and Officer Vance will enjoy these titles by Deb Loughead:

- *Caught in the Act*: When he's caught on camera stealing towels from a 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.
- *Rise of the Zombie Scarecrows*: Dylan's making a movie, *The Rise of the Zombie Scarecrows*, with Cory and Monica. Everything goes well until zombie scarecrows prank a local neighborhood, causing a man to have a heart attack. The police shut down Dylan's project but he's determined to see it through, no matter what the cost.
- *The Snowball Effect*: Dylan and his friends' snowball prank causes a car accident. His friends flee but Dylan makes sure the driver is okay. He is sighted and, rather than being punished, is lauded as a hero. Dylan's lies pile up—and so does his guilt.