



Power Chord

Ted Staunton

Reading Level: 2.5

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AR Quiz # 147355

Book Summary

At a Battle of the Bands event, Ace and his best friend Denny notice that girls like musicians, no matter how dorky the dudes might be. Having been severely challenged when it comes to meeting girls, they decide to start a band. Ace discovers that he loves playing guitar and electric bass. While Denny tweets their every move and their clean-freak drummer, Pigpen, polishes everything in sight, Ace tries to write a song that will win at the next local teen songwriting contest. It's more difficult than he thought it would be. When Denny brings a great tune to rehearsal, Ace is devastated that Denny, who rarely practices, is a better songwriter than he is. The contest is only days away when Ace discovers that Denny stole the song. Ace has to decide if winning is worth the lie.

Author Biography

Ted Staunton divides his time between writing and a busy schedule as a speaker, workshop leader, storyteller and musical performer for children and adults. His previous books include the well-loved Green Applestreet Gang series, the Cyril and Maggie series, the Morgan series, *Puddleman*, *Simon's Surprise*, several titles in the Dreadful Truth series, including the Canadian Children's Centre Our Choice selection *The Dreadful Truth: Confederation*, and the acclaimed *Hope Springs a Leak*, which was shortlisted for both a Silver Birch Award and a Hackmactack Award.

Connecting to the Text**Character**

1. As a way to engage students with the characters, Ace, Pigpen and Denny, ask students to choose two quotations from early in the novel that illustrate the characters' personalities. Then ask students to share their choices with the group, explaining why they chose what they did. Where there is opportunity, encourage students to consider how the characters interact with each other and why.

Ideas to get the students started:

- ♦ After Denny and Ace sneak on the bus without paying, “everyone stares at us, which I don’t like. Denny grins bigger than ever” (chapter 2). This illustrates that Ace is shy and Denny is outgoing. How do Ace and Denny each feel about cheating?
 - ♦ “In between ideas, Denny has been known to lie” (chapter 1). This illustrates Denny well because he stole Chuck’s song and lied about writing it himself. What do you think makes Denny attractive to Ace, for a friend?
 - ♦ Jared’s nickname is Pigpen. Ace says, “His nickname is kind of a joke because he’s a neat freak. He has a buzz cut and always tucks in his shirt... Even his locker is organized” (chapter 2). This illustrates Pigpen’s personality because he is tidy and hardworking. Why do you think Pigpen chose air cadets over staying with the band?
2. Ask students to imagine occupations or careers for Ace, Denny and Pigpen, based on what they know about the characters. Ideas to get students started:
 - ♦ Denny seems more interested in getting the attention of fans than being a “real” musician. He has lots of ideas about how to do this: Twitter, MySpace, a band video, texting and T-shirts. Denny might want to look at a career in marketing, promotions or band management.
 - ♦ Ace knows how to use words to create images, and he describes his feelings well. He describes the bass: “After the guitar, the neck is like a tree. The strings feel thick as snakes... The strings slither under my fingers” (chapter 4). He also writes a pretty good song, even though “it’s harder than it looks.” Ace might want to try writing stories, poems or songs.

Theme

Ace and Denny attend a Battle of the Bands in the school gym where Twisted Hazard is playing. They notice that the band gets a lot of attention from girls: “They are nerds, and yet those girls are all over them. We’re not nerds...but we’re invisible to girls” (chapter 1). They decide to start their own band so girls will pay attention to them.

As a way to engage in the themes of *Power Chord*, invite students to participate in a discussion prompted by these (or similar) quotations. Encourage students to draw on evidence from the novel in their responses.

- Denny says, “It’s your band’s style that counts” (ch. 1). Is that all it takes to be a band?
- Ace says, of Denny’s playing, “It’s not music, but it gets your attention” (ch. 3). What’s important to Denny? Celebrity or musical skill?
- When Ace and Denny find out the contest at the youth center requires that bands play original songs, Denny says, “So we’ll write some. C’mon. How hard can it be?” (ch. 8). Do you think Denny respects musicians or understands what it takes to be a musician?

The Writer’s Craft

Metaphors and similes connect ideas, giving us images that expand our understanding of situations and characters. Read the following examples aloud, or write them on the board. Discuss the connection that is being made for each, and how it lends meaning to the text. How does it expand our understanding of this situation?

- “The Hazard bass player is a hobbit in red plaid pajama pants” (ch. 1)
- “After the guitar, the neck [of the bass] is like a tree. The strings feel thick as snakes... The strings slither under my fingers” (ch. 4)
- “Getting on by the back doors is like swimming upstream to Niagara Falls” (ch. 5)

Encourage students to choose a scene from *Power Chord* and write their own descriptive sentences using similes or metaphors. Ideas to get students started:

- It’s almost time to go on stage. Ace is nervous and feels sick, but Denny is happy and excited.
- Ace spent a lot of time practicing guitar and his fingers became very sore, but it was worth it because he met Lisa Picks.
- Ace’s cat Arch doesn’t like it when the band practices. Arch yowls, runs away and barfs!

Connecting to the Curriculum

Current Events

An online article in the *Toronto Star* on November 28, 2011, reported that, according to a survey conducted by the ChildFund Alliance, “almost half of children in the developing world want to be teachers or doctors...but in developed countries...they want to be professional athletes, actors, singers or fashion designers” (See Web Resources below for source). Encourage students to read the article and reflect on their feelings and reactions to it, drawing comparisons to Ace, Denny and Pigpen where possible.

Ideas for journaling or discussion:

- One of the questions in the survey was, “If you could grow up to be anything you wanted, what would you be?” How would you respond to this question? How do you think Ace, Denny and Pigpen would respond? How do you know?
- Do the survey findings ring true for you? Do you think 50% of the kids in your school would choose to be an athlete, actor or singer over being a teacher or doctor? How do you know? Why do you think that might be?

Language Arts

1. In chapter 5, Ace, Denny and Pigpen are sitting on Ace's front porch. Ace comments, "It's cool to sit here like real musicians and toss around names of bands we want to sound like." As Ace learns, being a "real" musician is a lot harder than it looks.
 - ♦ Ask students to recall a time when they realized that something they admired (and perhaps looked easy) was more difficult than it seemed. As a writing exercise or group discussion, ask students to reflect on this theme, drawing comparisons to *Power Chord*. What did they learn from their experience?
2. Ace and Denny have a lot of fun thinking up names for the band. In chapter 5, they consider the names Corruption, The Spank, Spitfires and Surface to Air. Many famous bands have an interesting story behind how they chose their name. Perhaps it was an inside joke, an event or a reference to another band. As a creative writing exercise, invite students to write a short story, diary entry or speech about a fictional band and how it got its name.

To get students started, here are some ideas for fictional band names and stories:

 - ♦ *Rainy Day Blues*: It had been raining for a week straight. When Carlos, Aaron and Max tired of videos and gaming, it was time for something new. They were in band class together, so at first they practiced for the upcoming school concert. Then they started playing blues riffs. They sounded great and who knew Max could sing the blues so well?
 - ♦ *Lunch Lady and the JBC*: The sign on the cafeteria wall said the kitchen staff were on strike. For some kids, this was an excuse to start trouble. The choral jazz group looked at each other. They knew they had to do something. Cheyenne started it off by singing, "Lunch Lady is away / Don't let that wreck your day / J! B! C! Just Be Cool." Pretty soon the whole cafeteria was singing along: "JBC! Just be cool!"
 - ♦ *Expressions and Equations*: Ryan, Kaitlin and Santos were all struggling with math. They agreed to meet at Santos' place on Saturdays to study but more often than not, they started jamming, then laying down tracks. One day, Kaitlin said, "Shouldn't we be learning expressions and equations?" That was it—Expressions and Equations stuck!

Option: Have students research a band, learn how it got its name, and make a short presentation for the class (see Web Resources below). Encourage students to share a song or video from the band. Remind students to share only what's appropriate for your class.

Drama and Planning

While Denny steals a song from Chuck's CD, Ace puts a lot of effort into writing an original song for the contest. Denny's attitude is illustrated when he says, "So we'll write some. C'mon, how hard can it be?" (chapter 8). Ace learns it's much harder than it looks.

- Ask students to work in small groups to write a song, rap or cheer and perform it in front of the large group. Encourage each group to determine a step-by-step process for working together, including setting a goal, making a plan, and assigning roles and tasks for each person in the group.
- After students' performances, ask each small group to debrief their process. Was writing a song harder than it looked? Why, or why not? Ask students to also reflect on their plan and process. Was it helpful, and what would they do differently next time?

Web Resources

A student-produced list of the stories behind famous bands' names. Please preview before sharing with your class to ensure content is suitable for all students.

<http://library.thinkquest.org/4626/rock.htm>

Toronto Star article about ChildFund Alliance survey.

www.thestar.com/business/article/1093705—canadian-children-want-to-be-famous-kids-in-developing-nations-want-to-help-others?bn=1