



Powerslide

Jeff Ross

Reading level: 3.0

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Book Summary

Casey Finnegan is a talented skateboarder. He lives to skate. At the end of his final year of high school, Casey is wondering what to do with his life. He hasn't applied to any colleges, and other than skateboarding he doesn't believe he's good at much of anything. When a young movie star contacts Casey and offers him a job as a stunt double in an upcoming skateboarding movie, Casey is stoked. It's his dream job, and Casey jumps at the opportunity. But when word gets out about Casey's new gig, a local skater has other ideas about who would make the best stunt double. What price will Casey pay to realize his dream?

Prereading Ideas

- What do you know about extreme sports? Are you a fan? Are you a participant?
- What do you know about skateboarding? Have you ever been to a skate park or inside a half-pipe?
- How is it freeing to participate in an activity that much of society frowns upon?
- Do you ever completely lose yourself in an activity? Where the rest of the world just...drops away?
- How far would you go to prove yourself to be the best at something?

Connecting to the Text

Plot

- Teach students about plot elements (see web link in Resources, below). These include *exposition*, *rising action*, *conflicts*, *climax*, *falling action* and *resolution*. Working in pairs, have students map out the plot using these elements to guide their writing. Have each pair create a poster showing the plot elements of *Powerslide*.
- Discuss with students the idea of a book's premise. The premise is a one-sentence summary of the main idea of the story. It's a statement of what happens to the characters as a result of the actions in the story. It's a bit different than plot, which is a listing of the events in the story. It takes a bit of practice to figure out the premise of a story. You might want to start by discussing the premise of some familiar stories, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Toy Story* or *Cinderella*. Divide students into pairs and see whether they can develop a clear statement of the premise of *Powerslide*.
- Make an overhead of the following list. Discuss with students some of the things that make a good story:
 - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
 - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
 - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading
 - ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems
 - ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there
 - ◆ a variety of settings
 - ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
 - ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
 - ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve

Using these criteria, have students write a critical review of *Powerslide* (see Resources below for a great link that walks students through the process of writing a review). Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment.

Character

- Provide students with a graphic organizer that will guide them in creating a character sketch for one of the main characters in *Powerslide*. Have students augment their character sketches by writing a short passage explaining which character in the story they would most like to spend the day with.

- Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It's what makes things interesting! Typically, story plot follows one of four basic patterns of conflict:
 - ◆ *Person against nature.* Tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
 - ◆ *Person against person.* Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
 - ◆ *Person against society.* Tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
 - ◆ *Person against self.* Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.
 Guide students in a discussion of the kind of conflict pattern in *Powerslide*. Are there more than one, depending on which part of the story you look at? Which one predominates?
- Part of making your characters believable is writing realistic dialogue for them. If a character says things that you know nobody would say in the real world, then the story just won't work. Divide students into pairs and have them search through the text for several examples of realistic dialogue. Can they find any examples of words or phrases that teenagers wouldn't use in real life?
- In chapter 15, Casey and Jack realize that Goat has been lying to them all this time; he's being paid by Casey's agent to stir up trouble! Have students think of other stories they have read (or seen) where the characters' lives are shaken up by the realization that they can no longer trust someone in their midst.
- Toward the end of the book, the relationships between some of the characters have changed. Have students choose two characters and explain how their relationship evolves over the course of the story.

Theme

Like plot, setting and characters, *theme* is an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *Powerslide*.

Literary Devices

A simile is a comparison using the words "like" or "as." Similes are an effective way to show action or mood in a story. Ask students to consider the following simile about how the crowd reacts to Jack Coagen's celebrity status: *He got about two steps away before he was engulfed by a crowd of girls. They all had pieces of paper, Sharpies in their hands and a look in their eyes as if someone was handing out free puppies.* What makes this a good simile? Have students find four more examples of similes in the story.

Vocabulary

Skateboarding has its own unique vocabulary. Have students read the definitions for the following words. Assign students to choose a number of words and use them in a sentence. Can they use five of the following terms in a short paragraph about skateboarding?

180°, 360°, 540°, 720°: spinning tricks. These are described in relation to how many times the skateboarder rotates in the air. One hundred and eighty degrees is half a spin, where as seven hundred and twenty is two complete revolutions.

backside 360°: grabbing the board behind your back while completing a full rotation

coping: a piece of tubing at the top of a half-pipe that helps the skateboarder launch into the air or perform grinding and sliding tricks

fakie: landing backwards after performing a trick

goofy: riding with your right foot on the nose of the board

heel flip: flipping the skateboard backwards with your heel once you have performed an ollie

ollie: the act of snapping the tail of a skateboard onto the ground and jumping at the same time in order to launch into the air

powerslide: when travelling with speed, a skateboarder will push the tail end of the skateboard out so that the board is travelling sideways rather than forward. With enough speed, a good skateboarder can slide a long way using this technique. Also used for slowing down on longboards.

switch: riding the opposite way than you normally do

tail slide: sliding along a ramp or obstacle on only the tail of the skateboard

truck grind: riding on the edge of a ramp or obstacle on the trucks of the skateboard

Connecting to the Curriculum**English**

- Vivid writing is key to holding an audience's interest. Have students read the following passage from *Powerslide*:

I landed on the vertical part of the ramp, leaning far enough forward to get the speed I would need for my next trick. I was tightly coiled, ready to explode, when I hit the other side. As my front wheels came up to the coping, I pushed on my back foot, brought the board up, then launched. I grabbed the nose of my board, took my feet off, and managed to get three full swipes in the air to perform an airwalk. After the airwalk, I put the board back under my feet and landed fakie on the vert. As I came up the other side, I did a fakie backside grab, before finally shooting up and hopping off onto the deck.

Ask students to circle or note words that contribute to the power of this passage. Have them underline the strong verbs. In pairs, invite them to rewrite this passage using less vivid language. Have each pair read their rewrite to the class. Who can come up with the most boring rewrite? Challenge students to find other passages in *Powerslide* where the author uses vivid writing.

- Explore with students how to write a screenplay. Watch a section of *Stand by Me*, *E.T.* or *Edward Scissorhands*. Discuss setting, dialogue and the importance of stage direction. Have students choose a section of *Powerslide* and adapt it for a screenplay.
- Good writing involves calling on the five senses. Descriptive writing like this helps to really put readers into the scene. Here's a selection from *Powerslide*:

Goat stared at me from the other side of the ramp, his long dreads whipping around in the wind. A hush descended on the crowd, and I could hear a camera shutter clicking.

Have students discuss the effectiveness of having Casey hear the camera shutter clicking. Invite students to write about a banal school-day task (such as changing class or recording homework in their notebooks) using sensory description. What kinds of things do they hear? See? Smell? Feel?

- Showing a character's emotion is more effective than simply telling the audience how he or she is feeling. Have students read this selection from chapter 4:

"What's going on over here?" McNaughton said, resting a hand on Rebecca's shoulder. She cringed and shifted away.

What does Rebecca's cringe and shift indicate to students about how she's feeling about Danny McNaughton? Have students locate ten other examples of showing instead of telling.

- Have students ever heard the word *colloquialism*? It's similar to a "saying," or a "figure of speech," except it refers to terms that are relatively recent in a society's language. Here's an example from chapter 7, where Casey arrives at the beach, ready for Goat's next challenge (the colloquialism is underlined): *My shin felt five times larger than normal. I cringed every time I put weight on that leg. But I would have to suck it up.* Ask students: what does "suck it up" mean? Can they think of three more figures of speech that mean the same thing? As they see it, why do these kinds of sayings evolve?
- In chapter 7, Sara tells Casey the world won't end if he doesn't get the gig with Jack. "Life wasn't so bad way back then, was it?" she asks. Imagining that they are Casey, have students write a day in Casey's journal from before he met Jack Coagen. Then have them write a day from when he's involved with Jack. Finally, have students write a journal entry one year after having met Jack. How has Casey's character grown over that length of time?

Science

- Casey knows it's pretty dumb to be skateboarding down Beacon Hill at speeds of up to sixty miles an hour without any sort of protective gear. Have students look up the reasons why motorcyclists are advised to wear helmets and protective outerwear. Why is leather such a common choice? Invite them to design a protective outfit for Casey that will keep him safe in the event of a crash.
- When Goat goes off a cliff, Casey finds himself out in the woods at nighttime, without any sort of safety equipment. Discuss with students: what are the dangers in being in the woods at night? What is Casey doing right? Divide them into groups; challenge each group to come up with a list of items that could be carried in a lightweight emergency/survival kit each time an individual were to head into the woods.

Health/Personal Planning

- Casey feels like he's been handed the opportunity of a lifetime in being selected to be Jack Coagen's stunt double. Invite students to write or speak about their dream career—the one they really would like to pursue, outside of what parents and other caring adults have pushed them toward! What is it that makes this career seem so alluring, or to be such a good fit with each student's personality and abilities?
- Choosing to do the right thing when we're feeling the pressure of our friends and peers around us is really difficult. But sometimes it can be done. Discuss with students what advice they would give to Casey as he imagines skating in Mr. Henderson's empty pool. What makes it so hard to do the right thing when you're surrounded by friends?
- As Casey and Goat have their skate-off in the pool, we can see that each guy has a strategy for how he's going to defeat the other. Having a strategy or a plan of attack is a valuable tool for many situations, not just skate contests. Discuss with students what kinds of events require strategy and planning ahead (examples: games like chess or checkers; managing certain friendships; managing relationships with parents or siblings).
- When Mr. Henderson discovers the boys skating in his pool, he's furious. Have students role-play an exchange between Mr. Henderson and one of the police officers who arrive to investigate the scene. What does Mr. Henderson say about the pool and its significance? How does he describe the boys? What sorts of emotions is he experiencing?
- Casey thinks everything is a game to Jack Coagen—that the guy has no idea how hard it is to make a life for oneself. "Everything had always been handed to him," reflects Casey in chapter 13. But is Casey seeing all sides of the story? Discuss with students: how is it important for us to try to understand things from other people's points of view? Why do things always seem so much easier for other people—and so hard for us?

Physical Education

- Casey and Goat begin *Powerslide* by playing S.K.A.T.E. Have students play the same sort of elimination game, focusing on ball-handling skills.
- Have students learn about the powerful technique of visualization. Research how and why elite athletes use visualization, and how they feel it helps them achieve better outcomes in their chosen sports. Challenge students to choose a sport that they like to participate in (or use the one you're teaching currently) and visualize a sequence of movements that will lead to success. Try to allow time for students to practice visualizing as they learn and apply new skills.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Casey feels like anything is possible while he's in the air performing a trick. Is there a sport where you feel similarly? Where time almost slows down, you feel in control and you can execute each move perfectly?
2. In chapter 3, Casey reflects that Ian Holmes is the "kind of guy that would always have your back." Write about a friend in your world who would do the same for you. Who would you stick up for, no matter what?
3. Skateboarding has a real culture surrounding it. What other sports share a similar feeling?
4. At the skate park, while Casey is planning his tricks, he reflects that part of winning any competition is that you have to believe in yourself and in your abilities. How is this true for other parts of life that don't necessarily involve competitions?
5. Casey realizes that maybe his gig with Jack Coagen isn't a sure thing after all. Write about a time when you thought you had something in the bag...but then it turned out you didn't.
6. As the competition between Goat and Casey wears on, Casey admits to Sara that he feels he has no choice but to keep going through with all the crazy stunts Goat wants to do. But Sara's not having any of it: "You always have a choice. You can say no," she tells Casey. Except for Casey, it's just not that simple. Why not? Why do we sometimes feel compelled to keep going—and that quitting is just not an option? When is this kind of thinking helpful in meeting our goals? When does this kind of thinking become dangerous?
7. At the top of Beacon Hill, Casey has the opportunity to quit—and possibly save his own life in the process. Yet he perseveres. As you see it, is he right in doing so? What is the value of perseverance?

Author's note

Dear Reader,

I think as adolescents we often forget that we always have choices. In *Powerslide*, I wanted to show how one guy deals with the choices he is faced with.

A lot of what happens in *Powerslide* is directly related to people being jealous of what Casey has. To become successful at any sport takes a combination of talent, skill and dedication. Casey has got to where he is by practice and believing in himself and his abilities...whereas Goat sees the need to cheat and cut corners to try and take something away from someone who has earned it.

I believe that if you put all your energy into whatever you love, whether it's school, sports, an art or even something as out there as skateboarding or snowboarding, that it will, eventually, pay you back. By this I mean that it's foolish to do something because you think it will make you rich and famous. The people who really do well in their chosen field are those who do what they do because they love it.

Jeff Ross

Resources***Writing Screenplays***

www.screenwriting.info

Plot elements

http://middle-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/plot_element_lesson

Writing Book Reviews

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/bookrev/index.htm>

Skateboarding

Great Skateboarding Tricks

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qjzIG79ViY

Tony Hawk 900

www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4QGnppJ-ys&feature=related

Peer Pressure

http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/friend/peer_pressure.html

www.thecoolspot.gov

www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=243&id=2184&np=295

Books

Bell, William. *Death Wind*

Cherniss, Hilary. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Surviving Peer Pressure for Teens*

Choyce, Lesley. *Skate Freak*

Davis, James. *Skateboarding is Not a Crime: 50 Years of Street Culture*

Desetta, Al. *The Courage To Be Yourself: True Stories by Teens About Cliques, Conflicts, and Overcoming Peer Pressure*

Gifford, Clive. *Skateboarding*

Hawk, Tony and Sean Mortimer. *Tony Hawk: Professional Skateboarder*

Humphrey, Sandra McLeod. *Hot Issues, Cool Choices: Facing Bullies, Peer Pressure, Popularity and Putdowns*
Mason, Paul. *Skateboarding: The World's Coolest Spots and Techniques*
O'Donnell, Liam and Mike Deas. *Ramp Rats*
Sohn, Emily. *Skateboarding: How it Works* (Sports Illustrated Kids: The Science of Sports)
Stutt, Ryan. *The Skateboarding Field Manual*
Walters, Eric. *Grind*

orca sports

Author Biography

Jeff Ross grew up near Collingwood, Ontario, where he learned to snowboard, skateboard and injure himself in fantastic and unique ways. Jeff lives in Ottawa, Ontario, where he teaches English and Scriptwriting at Algonquin College. *Powerslide* is his second novel for the Orca Sports series.

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