



## **Rise of the Zombie Scarecrows**

Deb Loughead

Reading level: 3.2

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### **Book Summary**

Dylan is back and this time he's making a movie, *The Rise of the Zombie Scarecrows*, with his best friend, Cory, and his girlfriend, Monica. The film is for school credit, and their plan is to film on Halloween. Everything falls into place until Dylan and Monica encounter a zombie scarecrow that causes Mr. Dalton, a friend of Dylan's grandmother, to have a heart attack. Dylan and Monica learn that a couple of zombie scarecrows are pranking a local neighborhood. The police shut down Dylan's project until the pranksters are caught. But Dylan is determined to see his film through to completion, no matter what the cost.

### **Author Biography**

**Deb Loughead** is the author of more than twenty-five books for children and young adults. She completed an English degree at the University of Toronto before working as a copy editor. She turned to creative writing after deciding to stay home to raise her three sons. Deb's books have been translated into seven languages, and her award-winning poetry and adult fiction have appeared in a variety of Canadian publications. In addition to having extensive experience with educational writing, Deb has conducted workshops and held readings at schools, festivals and conferences across the country. She has written and directed children's plays and taught creative writing classes for adults in Toronto. Deb likes to spend her non-writing time reading, knitting or hanging around horses as a therapeutic riding volunteer. Deb lives with her family in Toronto, Ontario.

**Connecting to the Text*****Character Study***

To engage students with the characters in *Rise of the Zombie Scarecrows*, use the following as large discussion topics, individual novel study or writing exercises:

- In chapter 5, Dylan describes how he never liked Tim Dalton. He says that Tim was a whiner with an overprotective mom, and he picked his nose and ate it: "He'd never had many friends, for obvious reasons." At the end of the novel, we learn that Tim "got dragged into" Charlie's plan to kill Buddy for the inheritance. Tim couldn't say anything because he was really scared.
  - When you consider Tim's past, do you feel at all sorry for him?
  - Do you think Dylan, Cory or Monica will treat Tim any differently from now on?  
**Prompt:** Nicole's comment in chapter 10 about Dylan once being a follower too.
  - If you knew Tim, what advice would you give him so he can have a happier life and better friends?
- Monica was mad at Dylan for not telling Officer Vance the truth about shooting the movie even though he'd been asked not to (ch. 3). She avoided Dylan and left him a note saying she didn't want to be a part of his movie.
  - What are some other ways she could have reacted? What would you have done?
  - How would the story have been different if she had talked with Dylan directly? What if she had stayed his girlfriend and they had worked it out?
- Dylan and Gran have a unique relationship. Dylan's mom works nights at a bar so Dylan and Gran spend a lot of time together. At the beginning of the novel, Dylan describes his Gran negatively, saying she's "great at sticking it to me" and plays "guilt trips" (ch. 1). At the end of the novel, Dylan describes her differently: "I couldn't imagine ever doing something so awful to Gran" (ch. 9).
  - Describe the relationship between Dylan and his Gran. For example, they seem to squabble a lot but deep down, they love each other. How do you know? How do they express their love for each other?
  - Do you think Dylan and Gran's relationship will change or improve now that Gran is dating Buddy Dalton?

***Building Vocabulary***

- The following words are used in the novel in the context of Dylan's short film.

audition	edit	production	starring role
cameras	footage	scene	the part
cast	in character	screening	video
casting call	lead	script	voice-overs
director	pan around	shoot	wrap

Ask students to use five or more of the above words in sentences or paragraphs that describe scenes from the novel. For example,

- ◆ *Dylan had a great idea for a project for his media class. He decided to...*
- ◆ *Dylan knew he couldn't make the short film himself, so he...*
- ◆ *Making a short film meant Dylan had a lot of preparation to do...*

2. The words below are used to describe the setting of Bridgewood at Hallowe'en.

creepy	grotesque	nightmare	spirit
eerie	haunted	rotting	spooked
ghost town	hideous	scarecrow	surreal
gore	make-up	shiver	undead

Ask students to use at least five of the words in descriptive paragraphs, stories, poems, songs, etc. Students can use the ideas below or use their own.

- ◆ *Bridgewood hosts a scarecrow contest every year. If I lived there, I'd...*
- ◆ *My family drove through the desert late one summer. We ran out of gas by—what we thought was—a quiet town. Boy, were we surprised when we saw...*
- ◆ *The scariest job I ever had was cleaning up the backstage of the town theater after a magician's performance. One night I thought I was alone but...*
- ◆ *Scarecrows don't scare me, I live on a farm. Zombies, on the other hand...*

### *The Writer's Craft*

1. Deb Loughead uses particular words to help the novel and its characters come alive for readers. A literary device she uses is alliteration. Ask students to find three examples and one full sentence as they read the novel. See examples below. You may wish to ask students to find examples of alliteration in popular culture and advertising.

- ◆ *Cracking the case, dealing drugs, Rocky's Roadhouse, saggy sofa, star struck*
- ◆ *"Oh, great. Garrett, standing there with his goofy grin. This guy had been giving me grief for a few years now." (ch. 1)*
- ◆ *"Now that he was home from the hospital, they might even hit up his house again." (ch. 4)*

2. Writers are also intentional about the language characters use; their words have to ring true to each character's personality and age, and for the time and setting of the novel. Ask students to consider the following words and phrases from the novel. Can students guess who is speaking? Ask students to contribute examples of their own as they read.

- ◆ Dylan: *Dude!, freakin', killer smile, nimrod, no brainer, totally pumped*
- ◆ Gran: *A gem of a man, don't get smart, fellas, like a duck on a Junebug, sweet talking.*

**Option:** Ask students to keep a log for a day of phrases and terms used by their peers, teachers, parents, etc. You may wish to then discuss related themes, like culture or slang terms used by different generations.

**Connecting to the Text***Language Arts*

1. In chapter 5, Dylan and Cory are excited because they're featured on the front page of the Bridgewood Weekly newspaper. The headline reads Local boys with cameras help bust pumpkin vandals. Ask students to write the newspaper article, or write and perform a skit acting as either an on-the-scene reporter or a nightly newscaster.

Student articles should use the 5Ws: who, what, when, where and why. These details are summarized in the first paragraph and then expanded on in the following paragraphs.

2. To prepare for shooting his film, Dylan must first write a script. Scripts have very specific specifications, including margin size, font and font size, text justification and use of capital and lower case. Ask students to research scriptwriting for a film.
  - ◆ Name and provide examples for three specifications particular to scripts.
  - ◆ Try out the format of a script. Write a one- or two-page script based on a typical conversation between two or three friends in a school setting (hallway, classroom, cafeteria, gym, bus, etc.).
  - ◆ Do the scripts in the novel fit the specifications you researched? Why or why not?

*Personal Planning*

In chapter 2, Monica saves a man's life by performing CPR. Dylan said he didn't have "a clue what [he] was supposed to be doing," and he felt ashamed "for not leaping into action." Invite students to complete the following.

- CPR (cardio pulmonary resuscitation) can be learned by anyone, for anyone. Many organizations and agencies offer training on life saving and other first aid skills. Do some research online or use a community directory. What training is available where you live? When is it offered and what is the cost?
- Does your school have a teacher or other staff member who is responsible for first aid? Invite them to demonstrate CPR for your class. Begin by finding out who has this responsibility, then write them an invitation letter or email. Make arrangements with your teacher regarding the day and time of the training, and help set the room up.

*Social Studies*

Dylan and Cory live in Bridgewood, a town that takes its holidays and festivities seriously. They hold an annual scarecrow contest for the whole month of October. Hallowe'en night is especially fun, with nearly every property decorated. Hallowe'en began as All Hallows' Evening, the night before All Hallows' Day/All Saints' Day. In some Christian faiths, the dead are remembered, especially hallows (saints) and martyrs, on All Hallows' Evening. Research some customs practiced on either All

Hallows' Evening or All Hallows' Day in different places in the world.

**Prompt:** praying, feasting, lighting candles, Mass, costumes

### *Art*

Invite students to create artwork using an image from the novel that resonates with them. Can they choose a media that helps illustrate the mood or tone of the image? Examples include:

- ch. 2 *It would be weird to have something like a dad if that ever happened.*  
A silhouette of Dylan, alone at night, done with shades of blue watercolor.
- ch. 2 *Out on the dim and windy street, the rattle of dry leaves sounded a bit like scarecrow footsteps.*  
A hollow tube with small items inside is transformed into a percussive instrument that mimics the sounds of autumn, wind and scarecrow footsteps.
- ch. 2 *Monica kept pumping on the man's sternum. She looked like a crazy girl, her face taut, dark eyes gleaming in the orange glow of the streetlights.*  
A painted mask that has orange glow sticks inside.
- ch. 6 *I was feeling breathless, my heart pounding hard, an unfamiliar fury surging from somewhere inside me. Somewhere I'd thought was mostly dead. It felt pretty alive right now though.*  
An impressionist portrait of Dylan's fury, using heavily textured oil paint and rich colors.

### **More Novels in the Orca Currents Series**

As Monica and Dylan know, Dylan has a habit of getting into trouble, although “technically, none of it has ever been [his] fault” (ch. 1). Students who enjoy the antics of Dylan, Cory, his Gran, and Officer Nicole Vance will enjoy these titles by Deb Loughhead:

- *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.
- *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—as does his guilt.