



River Traffic

Martha Brack Martin

Reading level: 4.2

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Book Summary

Sixteen-year-old Tom LeFave is trying to hold his world together. His family's marina is struggling. His dad is full of secrets. And the quarterback of the football team hates his guts. When a huge yacht docks at Tom's marina, things look brighter, especially when he meets Kat, the daughter of the boat's owner. Kat and Tom share a love of rum-running history. It's not long, however, before Tom starts to realize there's something more than history happening on the river. And if Tom can't figure it out in time, he just might be history too.

Prereading Idea

Often teens don't see themselves as others see them, and self-perception can be more powerful than reality. Write each student's name on a slip of paper and have students draw one of the names. Then, ask students to write a paragraph about that person, stating his or her positive attributes. Then distribute the positive paragraphs to the appropriate student subjects.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- In groups of three, ask students to investigate the rum-running industry on the Detroit River in the early 1900s. Students should explain the reason rum-running became necessary, the culture of society in the early 1920's, and the result of the illegal activity in the area. As students read articles on the Internet, ask them to write down five facts they can share with the class. Then form a read-around so that students can share the facts they have gleaned from their research.
- People smuggle a variety of illegal substances across borders using different methods. Ask students to find a news article on the Internet describing a recent bust of an illegal smuggling operation. Students should read the article and write a one-page summary, answering the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how. Then ask students to share their summaries with the class.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel***Characterization***

Tom and his father's relationship appears to be strained in the beginning of the novel for several reasons. Ask students to identify the reasons for the strain and how the problems are resolved. Then with a partner, ask students to write a poem for two voices expressing the problem, the emotions both Tom and his father feel, and the resolution. Have partners practice and present their poems to the class.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a tool authors use to heighten suspense about future events. For example, in chapter 2, Officer Murphy asks Tom if he has noticed any strangers and requests he keep his eyes open for anything unusual. This lets the reader know that trouble could be brewing on the river. Using this model, ask students to find other statements that foreshadow future events. Have students copy the statements and then predict the possible implications of the statements. In small groups have students discuss and compare the statements they found and the implications they noted. At the end of the novel, have the students revisit their foreshadowing statements and implications.

Setting

The setting is crucial to the action that occurs in *River Traffic*. Working in small groups, ask students to discuss and list how the setting impacts the story line, focusing on the elements of location, time of year, elapsed time, climate, and other factors they consider important. Then have students create a setting collage which includes ideas from their discussion, visual elements and excerpts of text that support the importance of the setting. Post collages in the classroom.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. What evidence does the author give the reader to support the statement, “Tom is a good kid”?
2. Why does Oleg bully Tom? How does Tom handle Oleg and his attacks? How does Nate help Tom cope with Oleg?
3. Why is Tom so surprised that Kat is attracted to him? What do they have in common?
4. How could Kat’s relationship with her father be described? How does her father portray his love for his daughter? How does she portray her respect for him?
5. What devices do the FBI and the LaSalle Police use to track Kat and Tom? How do the authorities know that Oleg is the smuggler? What is Oleg smuggling?
6. How does Oleg react to being busted? How does Oleg help himself and the police? What are his parents’ reaction?

Writer’s Craft***Vocabulary***

As students read, ask them to find unknown or new words and then to look up their meanings in the dictionary, writing the definitions that most closely fit the meaning of the words as they are used in the paragraph. Have students create a student-developed writing dictionary to be used throughout the year. Students should add a page for each of the words and write the meaning of the word; students should continue to build their understanding of the words by adding synonyms, antonyms, illustrations and other meanings from different contexts.

Author Biography

Martha Brack Martin is an award-winning teacher-librarian in the southern Ontario town of LaSalle, near Windsor. After twenty-five years as a teacher, she continues to motivate kids to read and to help them find just the right book. She was dared by a colleague a few years ago to put “Book Babe” on her business card, and she now revels in the title. The creator of a number of “Book Babe” teacher guides and author of four nonfiction books for children, she frequently facilitates workshops on children’s literature, teaching with technology and librarianship.