



Sleight of Hand

Natasha Deen

Reading level: 3.5

978-1-4598-1120-1 PB

Book Summary

Javvan is a good kid by everyone's standards, but when he tries to prove he is worthy of Tiffany, a beautiful white girl, her brother goads him into stealing a Lexus—BIG mistake. Now, his reputation is shot, and his life is miserable. According to his probation, Javvan must find a job, but no one is willing to give Javvan a chance to prove himself. Finally, after twenty-two interviews, his probation officer helps him land a job with a construction crew. A hard-worker, Javvan is intent on proving to his family and friends that he is still a good kid who made a bad mistake, but his new employer has other ideas. He gives Javvan a choice—steal from customers or go back to jail. With no one to turn to for help and no idea how to escape the inevitable, Javvan is determined to find a way out!

Prereading Idea

Ask students, "What is the difference between a good kid who makes a mistake and a bad kid?" After some discussion, ask students for examples of people they know or people they have heard about in the news.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Javvan's probation officer, Mary, frequently talks about recidivism. In the first chapter, Javvan defines the term as "Once a criminal, always a criminal." Ask students to work in small groups to investigate recidivism as it relates to teens who are in the juvenile correction system. Then ask each group to create a multimedia presentation using the information they obtain in their research. Students should include: graphs to portray relevant statistics, definition of terms as they relate to the criminal justice system, and a summary of one specific case relating to recidivism. Have students share their presentations with the class.
- Sammy loves magic and practices continually because he wants to be a magician. Ultimately, it is Sammy's knowledge of magic that helps Javvan out of his no-win situation. Ask students to investigate one of the following: (1) the life of a famous magician and the steps he/she took to achieve his/her status, (2) famous tricks that only a few magicians have mastered, or (3) a "How To" guide for a young magician who wants to make a career out of magic. After making their selection and conducting their research, students should choose a creative way to present their information—maybe even performing a magic trick.

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

Working with a partner, ask students to create a timeline of the events in Javvan's life from the time he steals the Lexus until Mrs. O'Toole hires him to be her assistant. Students should include Javvan's emotional state at each event on the timeline. Then ask students to write a free verse poem conveying some or all of the events on the timeline. Have students share their poems with the class.

Conflict

Carefully crafted stories have well-developed conflicts, most of which fall into one of the following categories: person against person, person against nature, or person against self. *Sleight of Hand* has all three of these types of conflict. As a class, ask students to create a chart of events and situations from the book representing each of these three types of conflict. Then ask students to choose one specific conflict from the book and to prepare a book jacket with a drawing of the conflict and a short paragraph describing the conflict. Display book jackets in the classroom.

Characterization

When the story is over, the reader often wonders what happens to the characters after the last page is turned. Making sure that they stay true to the character's personality, ask students to select a character in *Sleight of Hand* and to write a monologue revealing what happens to that character after the story's end. Ask students to assume the voice of the character and to perform their monologues for the class. Post monologues in the classroom or bind for the classroom library.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. When Javvan begins seeing his probation officer, Mary, what does he learn about her? How does she act and what does she say that clue him in to her true feelings about the kids she deals with?
2. Javvan is repeatedly denied employment. Why does he continue to apply for jobs? How does he feel about the continual rejections?
3. What is special about the relationship between Javvan and his brother, Sammy? How has the relationship between Javvan and his parents changed since the theft? What role, if any, does culture play in Javvan's father's attitude toward the situation?
4. What does Javvan learn about the importance of a reputation? What steps does he take to earn back his reputation?
5. How does Kevin use Alphabet to test Javvan's honesty? In what other ways is Javvan tested by his employment with Kevin?
6. When does Javvan realize that Mary is working with Kevin in illegal businesses? How does Mary and Kevin's partnership serve to destroy Javvan and other kids in his situation? What emotions do Mary and Kevin use to manipulate the kids who are in their businesses?
7. How does Sammy help Javvan expose Mary and Kevin's illegal business? What tools does Sammy use to successfully implement his plan?
8. How does the title relate to the book in multiple ways?

Writer's Craft*Dialogue*

The author uses foreshadowing to give the reader clues that all is not right with Mary and Kevin. In groups of three, ask students to find three clues that could lead the reader to know that a conflict will occur with these characters. Ask students to write the line(s) and the page number of the clue, and then to connect the clue to the event that occurs later in the story. Get each student to select one of the examples of foreshadowing the group has identified and to create a cartoon drawing highlighting the foreshadowing of the events to come. Display drawings in the classroom.

Author Biography

Natasha Deen says, "Writing is the most difficult thing I've ever done, but I love it, because writing is *STORY*, and stories change the world." It is this belief that has led to her career as a writer. She writes creative nonfiction, young adult and adult fiction and has received multiple awards for her writing. Her desire as a child was to be a super hero, and she has definitely achieved her goal; she is Writing Girl, and no topic or story is too big for her to handle!