



Squeeze

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Reading level: 3.6

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AR Quiz # 140395

Book Summary

Byron is thrilled to be invited on a weekend caving expedition with his older brother, Jesse, and two of Jesse's friends. Their original plans go sideways when they discover that the entrance to their cave has been buried by a collapsed riverbank. The weekend is saved when Byron discovers the opening to a new cave. Caving is always dangerous, but things get out of control when the water in the cave starts to rise, and Jesse's girlfriend accuses his college roommate of committing a crime. When the accused tries to make a break for the surface without the others, Jesse gets injured. It's up to Byron to figure out how to get his brother and his brother's girlfriend out of the cave before they succumb to hypothermia or drown. Byron has to make some life-or-death decisions, and every second counts.

Prereading Ideas

- What do you know about caving? Have you ever been inside either a “show” cave (on a commercial tour, for instance) or a “wild” cave?
- What do you think the potential dangers of caving are? (i.e., falling, getting stuck, getting lost, drowning, hypothermia, getting struck by rocks)
- What fears/phobias might prevent someone from wanting to cave?
- Is there a high-risk (extreme) sport you have tried or would like to try?
- How important is it to trust the people you're with when you're participating in a high-risk sport?
- When things go wrong do you panic, or are you able to focus on finding solutions?

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 *Squeeze*.
- 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 *Squeeze*.
- 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 *Squeeze*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment.

Theme

- In the first chapter Byron admits that while he is the youngest person in the group, he doesn't want to be seen as the weakest. How big a part does peer pressure/pride play in Byron's decisions? Does it get him in trouble, or does it push him to test his limits in a positive way?
- Conquering fear is another important theme in *Squeeze*. Is there such a thing as good fear and/or bad fear? Does it depend on what's at stake?

Character

- 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. Have students read the scene in chapter 4 where Byron and his companions discover that the entrance to the cave they intended to explore has been buried. Is the dialogue realistic? Does it reveal some of the personality traits of the characters? Divide students into pairs and have them search through the text for several other instances of realistic dialogue. Can they find any examples of words that teenagers wouldn't use in real life?
- Have students create a scene where Byron tries to talk Michelle into giving caving another try. What would he say to convince her? How would she respond?
- Have students draw a character map of Byron that details his personality characteristics, his fears, his weaknesses, and his physical traits. Use this as a springboard to teach students how to write a full character analysis (see web link in Resources, below).

Point of View

- *Squeeze* is told from Byron's point of view. Have students write a scene telling the story from another character's perspective. For example, try writing from Cole's point of view when he cuts Jesse's rope at the waterfall, from Jesse's perspective as he's being carried through the cave on a makeshift stretcher, or from Michelle's perspective when she learns that the way out is flooded.
- Ask students to consider how the story would be different if it was told in the third person point of view. What are the advantages or disadvantages to using the first person? Third person?

Vocabulary

Cavers and climbers use some of the same vocabulary, while some expressions are unique to caving. The following words are taken from the glossary at the end of *Squeeze*. Have students choose a set number of words and use them in a sentence. Can they use five of the following terms in a short paragraph describing a caving experience?

anchor	bombproof	breakdown	chimney	crawlway
jug	lead	push	rappel	scoop
stalagmite	survey	squeeze	traverse	vadose

Connecting to the Curriculum

English

- Explore with students how to write a screenplay. Watch a section of *Stand By Me*, *E.T.* or *The Karate Kid*. Discuss setting, dialogue and the importance of stage direction. Have students choose a section of *Squeeze* and adapt it for a screenplay (see Resources, below, for information about writing screenplays).
- Good writers use strong verbs. Strong verbs excite the reader and keep the story moving forward. Here are some examples of how Rachel Dunstan Muller uses strong verbs to enhance her story:
 - ♦ *I jam my toes into the ground and push off.*
 - ♦ *Michelle practically sails down when it's her turn to rappel.*
 - ♦ *I grope my way to the end of the crevice walls and descend a little farther.*

Have students go through one chapter of the book and find as many examples of strong verbs as they can. Discuss as a class how verbs can change the feel of a passage and how they can be effective at showing the characters' emotions. Select a passage to rewrite using plain, run-of-the-mill verbs. See who can come up with the most boring, flat passage!

- Assign students to imagine that they are Byron. Write a blog post describing the ordeal in the cave.
- A simile is a comparison using the words like or as. A good simile conjures an image in the reader's mind. Here are examples of three similes from *Squeeze*:
 - ♦ *I'm on my belly, stretched out like a piece of spaghetti.*
 - ♦ *The droplets sparkle like little jewels.*
 - ♦ *I'm like a mole on steroids, clawing the earth out of my way.*

Why are these similes effective? Have students create five similes of their own. Can they come up with a funny one?

- Have students imagine that they are Byron. Have them write a letter to his mother trying to convince her to let him go caving again.

Social Studies

- Caving is an extremely dangerous sport. Have students google caving accidents, and summarize one or more recent incidents in a paragraph.
- Have students search online for the nearest caving club or "grotto."

Science

- There are caves in many parts of North America, and all across the world. Have students research the geological conditions that are required to produce different kinds of caves (vadose, phreatic, lava tubes, blue holes). Are there caves in your region? How were they formed?
- Caves are very fragile environments with unique ecosystems. Formations that formed over hundreds or thousands of years can be destroyed in an instant by vandals or careless explorers. Have students research the subject of cave conservation, and write a paragraph or short essay explaining its importance.
- Byron owes his escape from the cave partly to Michelle's good planning and packing. In her backpack, she carries a tarp. Later in the story, Byron finds extra flashlights and duct tape too. Have students plan an emergency supply kit for caving. Discuss emergency preparedness with students. Investigate your province or state's emergency preparedness website. Then have them plan an emergency supply kit for their own families in case disaster strikes.
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS) is a relatively new technology. For years, cavers relied on more traditional ways to figure out their locations. But for all its convenience, GPS isn't without its flaws. Assign students to learn more about GPS and report back to the class with what they have learned.

Health/Personal Planning

- Cole belittles Byron and Michelle whenever he gets the chance. Given how important it is for cavers to trust each other underground, was it wise for the others to include Cole on their caving trip? To what extent does Cole's presence influence the decisions of the others, especially Byron? How do negative comments from people like Cole affect you?
- Byron and his companions get into some serious trouble underground. Was this danger avoidable? What could or should they have done differently?
- Michelle is suspicious of Cole's behavior, and does some "investigating" to find out what he's doing. Is her spying justified? Would you have confronted Cole if you had the same information?

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Byron is proud of his skills as a caver, and this motivates him to go places that would terrify many people. Do you have an interest or talent that motivates you to take risks or go the extra mile? How far would you go to pursue your interest?
2. Have you ever made a decision that placed you in a dangerous or life-threatening situation? What saved you? What would you do differently if you could go back in time? Have you ever seen someone else take a risk that could have resulted in serious harm? What should you do in such a situation?
3. Michelle is determined to find out what Cole is carrying, and to confront him with her suspicions. Have you ever had information that someone you knew was involved in an illegal activity? What did you do?
4. Byron has to leave Michelle and Jesse in the cave in order to get help. If he fails, they will die. As you see it, how would you feel about knowing that the lives of two other humans depended entirely on your actions?
5. Byron thinks that Doug Wizer (Digger) is good in emergencies. He's "solid" and "in control." What about you? Are you level-headed when things start to go sideways? Or do you freak out? Give an example of a time where you were faced with an emergency. How did you handle it?
6. Byron's dad goes into the cave to assist with the rescue. But he relinquishes the lead to Digger, who reserves the right to make any final—and perhaps difficult—decisions. Imagine you were a parent. How hard would it be to accept that someone else might be the one to make a life-changing call that concerns your child?
7. If you had gone through everything that Byron experienced, would you want to return to the same cave?

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Squeeze was inspired by the adventures of my friend Barry Lewis, an avid caver who helped survey the longest cave in Canada a few years ago. He had to cross-country ski several hours just to get to the entrance of the cave in the Rocky Mountains, and his team remained underground for six days straight. Barry has had some close calls over the years, but he keeps going back for more.

Caving is not for the faint of heart. I can't think of a more extreme sport. What other activity combines rappelling, rock-climbing, and slithering through impossibly small, mucky spaces, all in the pitch dark? I've been inside a few small caves, but I don't see myself ever doing any "serious" caving. I love to hear and read about the adventures of underground explorers, but I'm too claustrophobic to venture very far myself. Writing a book about caving was exciting enough for me! I hope you enjoy reading it.

Rachel Dunstan Muller

Resources

Caving

Caving in Canada
www.cancaver.ca
Caving in the U.S.
www.caves.org
International Caving
www.cavediggers.com/caving.html
Cave Conservation
www.cavern.org/acca/accahome.html

Writing Screenplays

www.screenwriting.info

Character analysis

http://high-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/teach_the_character_analysis_essay

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>

Emergency Preparedness

www.getprepared.gc.ca/index-eng.aspx

Books

Brucker, Roger W. *Grand, Gloomy and Peculiar: Stephen Bishop at Mammoth Cave*
Burger, Paul. *Cave Exploring: The Definitive Guide to Caving Technique, Safety, Gear and Leadership*
Ferris, Jean. *Underground*
Howes, Chris. *Radical Sports: Caving*
Palmer, Arthur. *Cave Geology*
Palmer, Arthur N. and Margaret V. Palmer. *Caves & Karst of the USA*
Swart, Peter. *Caving*
Tabor, James. *Blind Descent: The Quest to Discover the Deepest Place on Earth*
Waltham, Tony. *Great Caves of the World*
Wisshak, Max. *Inside Mother Earth: Magic Caves*
Yonge, Charles. *Under Grotto Mountain: Rat's Nest Cave*

Author Biography

Rachel Dunstan Muller lives on the edge of a small Vancouver Island community with her husband and five children. When she's not writing, Rachel likes to explore the rugged forest and mountain trails near her home. She recently built a wooden kayak in her basement, and took it paddling around the Broken Islands.

Rachel is an oral storyteller as well as an author. She is a member of CWILL BC and the Writer's Union of Canada.