



Cheat

Kristin Butcher

RL 2.8

9781554692743 PB

9781554692750 LIB

AR Quiz # 140881

Book Summary

Laurel discovers her passion for investigative journalism when she writes an article for her school paper about the homeless man who's been living at the school. Eager to write more articles with impact, she launches an investigation of a cheating scam at her high school. Laurel's efforts elicit hostility from her classmates. Nobody is interested in seeing her article go to print, not even her own brother. It is evident that the cheating is widespread, and Laurel, caught up in the thrill of the investigation, is willing to commit social suicide to get the story, but her ultimate discovery changes everything.

Author Biography

Kristin Butcher taught everything from primary science and intermediate math to junior high art and senior high English before becoming an author. She credits her experience in the classroom with both helping her understand children and teens better, as well as making her a whiz at Trivial Pursuit. Kristin has always had a wild imagination, and can't imagine that she'll ever run out of ideas for stories. She has published twelve books for children and young adults. Kristin lives in Campbell River, British Columbia.

Connecting to the Text

Character

As a way for students to connect to the characters in *Cheat*, invite them to choose a scene from the novel and write a paragraph which describes or reflects on what the character is thinking or feeling, and the choices they make. For example,

- Laurel says at school her brother Jack “barely acknowledges I exist” (ch. 2). Why is this? Can you relate to this situation?
- Laurel says, “It’s tough carving out a corner for yourself when you’re related to a school legend” (ch. 2). How does Laurel make herself stand out?
- When Laurel saw Dale and Jarod cheating during the math test, she decided she had “a topic for [her] next article” (ch. 2). She feels strongly that cheating is wrong and this was, in part, her motivation for writing her next article. What else was motivating her?
- When Laurel gets the threatening note that says, “If you don’t stop snooping around, you’re going to be sorry!”, she isn’t dissuaded from “getting [her] story” (ch. 10). What does this tell us about Laurel? What do you think it would take for her to stop chasing the cheating scam story?

Plot

As a way for students to connect to the plot of *Cheat*, invite them to choose a scene from the novel and write a paragraph in response to one of the topics below.

- Laurel wrote an article about cheating, exposing a “real issue” in her school (ch. 4). What other choice could she have made, and how might that different choice affect the plot? *Prompt:* She could have told the teacher after class; pointed to those cheating and accused them aloud; spoken to Dale and Jarod and shared how she feels.
- While Laurel is outspoken about cheating, she also misleads Mr. Wiens to get the information she needs to write her story. She says, “But being a reporter meant digging, and that could be dirty. If it meant uncovering the truth, it was worth it” (ch. 5). What else could she have done, and how would the story have been different? How would other characters be affected?

Point of View

In a large group discussion, consider the point of view of Laurel and Jack in the novel. To what extent do they see the cheating scam differently because of their unique point of view? How does each justify their point of view through their actions in the novel? As the novel progresses, what do Laurel and Jack learn?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Citizenship

1. Laurel, Tara and Liz discuss cheating in chapter 4. Although Laurel is very much against cheating, Tara and Liz seem to think it's not such a big deal. Ask students to research the policies on cheating in your school and write a short report about what they've learned. What happens when a student is caught cheating? What might cause a student to make the choice to cheat? What other options are available in your school for them? *Prompt:* tutors, study hall, meeting with their teacher or a counselor, etc.
2. In chapter 4, Liz says cheating wasn't "going to stop the world from spinning... [and] it might save a kid from getting grounded or cut from a team." She also says that cheating in high school doesn't really matter: "The real world doesn't care." In a large group, ask students to consider if this is true, making connections to the novel. *Prompt:* For someone like Jack, good grades and athleticism are the only way he'll get his "free ride" to college (ch. 2).

Art

There are many descriptive sentences in chapter 6 that provide images of Lauren's experience of her school after hours. For example, "The whiteboard was filled with math equations in red, blue and green marker" or "There was one dinky little corner where a coffee-stained mug and a tin can of pencils clung to the edge." Ask students to imagine that it is ten years from now. What images of their elementary or high school life will they most remember? Ask them to choose an image that resonates with them and create an art project. *Prompt:* the windows in the classroom when it's snowing outside; the teacher's desk; an overflowing garbage bin in the hall, etc.

Language Arts

1. Laurel called her story about the homeless man "definitely more meaningful" than other stories she'd written about volleyball games, school dances or "who's getting cozy with who" (ch. 1). Encourage students to research and write newspaper articles about topics they find meaningful. *Prompt:* bullying, school uniforms, endangered species, cruelty to animals, recycling, etc.
2. As an introduction, you may wish to lead a short lecture on newspaper articles, indicating that they must include 'the five W's and an H': who, what, when, where, why and how. Note that these details are summarized in the first paragraph of the article and then expanded on in subsequent paragraphs.
3. 2. Use the following excerpts from *Cheat* for creative writing activities. They can be used as the first line (or prompts/ideas) for a song, rap, poem, letter or short story. Encourage students make connections to the characters and plot of *Cheat*.
 - (ch. 4) *I'd gone from hero to villain.*
 - (ch. 4) *I was putting my classmates under a microscope.*
 - (ch. 4) *Was I the only person at Barton High who knew the difference between right and wrong?*

- (ch. 5) *I'd probably passed the guy in the hall a hundred times, but I couldn't even tell you what he looked like.*
- (ch. 5) *I wasn't sure if she was impressed with my brilliance or shocked by my sneakiness.*
- (ch. 6) *Teachers are always shutting out the day.*
- (ch. 6) *As I headed back to the door, I heard footsteps in the hall. They were close—and getting closer—*
- (ch. 10) *The note inside was short and to the point. If you don't stop snooping around, you're going to be sorry!*

Vocabulary

The following words are used in *Cheat* in the context of Laurel's experience as a reporter getting a story on the cheating scam. Invite students to tell the story of Laurel's experience, in a short report or paragraph-writing exercise, choosing from the words and terms below.

Option: Working in teams, have students write and perform a short skit in which they incorporate the words and terms below.

accusation	evidence	journalism	reporter
article	explanation	jump to conclusions	reveal my sources
chase down a story	human interest	newspaper	suspicious
editor	informant	proof	uncovering the truth

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

1. In chapter 1, Laurel writes a story about a homeless man living in her school's basement. Mr. Wiens said the homeless man "had nowhere else to go" (ch. 1). As an individual or small-group project, ask students to research the issue of homelessness in their community. Are homeless people in some areas of the community but not others? Why? Does the community recognize this issue, and how do you know? What resources are available to these homeless people?
2. In chapter 3, Laurel talks about her nervousness before tests. She says, "My heart always speeds up before a test, but once I get started, I'm fine." Ask students to brainstorm ideas of how they mentally and physically prepare for a test or stressful situation. Working in small groups, ask students to create posters which show their pre-test strategies, and hang them prominently in the classroom or common areas.
3. In chapter 3, Laurel describes her approach to tests. In a large group, have students read aloud and comment on the effectiveness of Laurel's approach in different test scenarios they've experienced. What tests would this approach work in? What other approaches are there, or what steps could students add?

4. Laurel feels strongly that cheating is wrong, but her friend Tara says, “Oh, Laurel, take a pill...It’s not like somebody robbed a bank” (ch. 4). And Liz, the smartest kid Laurel knows, admitted to letting other kids copy her answers. Ask students to dialogue about this. Is cheating “less wrong” than robbing a bank? Is letting someone copy off you “less wrong” than actually copying?
5. To research her article on cheating, Laurel designs a survey and asks students to drop off their responses to the newspaper office (ch. 4). Lead a large group discussion on how surveys are developed (you may wish to describe open-ended vs. closed questions and ratings such as the Likert Scale). Then have the small groups decide on a topic that interests them, and design a short survey to distribute to the class (for example, school uniforms, amount of homework, year-round school vs. traditional schedules). Once each group has collected their results, have them report their findings to the large group.
6. Mr. Wiens, the school principal, shares with Laurel some information about how many students in Canada and in Barton High go on to university. Ask students to research these statistics in their state/province and school. Where are these statistics available, and how might they be useful?

Web Resources

<http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/cheating.html>

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/kidusasu>

<http://homeschooling.about.com/od/freeprintables/ss/surveyprint.htm>

www.statcan.gc.ca/edu/edu01_0000-eng.htm