



Running the Risk

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Interest level: grade 7 and up

Reading level: 3.2

978-1-55469-025-1 PB

978-1-55469-026-8 LIB

AR Quiz # 129686

Book Summary

While on his job at a burger joint, Sean is held at gunpoint by a crazed robber, and after that, Sean's once protected, safe life changes; he begins to take chances. When one of the girls Sean works with comes on to him, they cut class and walk downtown, not looking for trouble but finding it. He meets and befriends a homeless woman who has the protection of several hoods who don't particularly like Sean interfering in their neighborhood. Sean recognizes one of the guys as the robber who held him up. Now he must make a decision about turning him in and face the danger that could bring to both Sean and his family.

Prereading Idea

Write the title of the book on the board, and as a class, ask students to discuss risk-taking behavior in a variety of areas. Then ask students to write a paragraph or poem individually about a risk they took and determine if what they gained or lost was worth the risk they took. Students can share what they have written with the class.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

Sean makes several comments about the adrenaline rush he feels during the robbery and then again while he is being questioned by the police. Ask students to investigate adrenaline and what it is to experience an adrenaline rush. Ask students to present their information in the form of a visual aid—poster, model, diorama, power point, etc.—depicting the parts of the body that are affected and how and why adrenaline works in each part of the body.

Reports of armed robbery, including bank robberies, are on the rise, tragically, and more often people are being shot and killed. Ask students to search for recent news reports on armed robberies in their state or city that detail how the crimes were solved. Cameras, eyewitness reports, DNA, fingerprints—what evidence was used to convict the robbers? Have students give a brief summary of the robbery details and how the case was solved. As a class, draw conclusions as to the most effective crime-fighting tools. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Post discussion findings on a bulletin board along with the robbery reports.

With the current economic crisis affecting the livelihoods of people around the globe, the increase in the number of homeless people is becoming a concern in many cities. In small groups, ask students to investigate the homeless population in their city or region and to identify some of the underlying causes and potential problems of an increase in numbers. What resources are currently available to the homeless? What programs are helping to meet their needs? What needs do the homeless have that are not being met? In order to get a complete picture, ask students to make a careful, thoughtful study, interviewing government agencies, community organizations and religious institutions that help serve the homeless. Then ask students to make a brochure listing all available services to help the homeless, including telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and locations and hours of operation. Students might also include volunteer opportunities in their brochure.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel
Character

Even though Sean's grandfather, Hank, is deceased, he is very much a part of Sean's life and a character in the novel. Ask students to make web chart of everything they know about Hank. Based on what they know about Hank, how did he shape Sean's life and the decisions he makes. Ask students to write a letter, either from Hank to Sean or from Sean to Hank, expressing the character's feelings about the decisions Sean makes during, after or as a consequence of the robbery. Have students share and post the character letters.

Theme

Generally speaking, the theme of a book evolves from the actions of the main character—what he learns and/or how he changes as a result of his experiences. Based on what the reader knows about Sean's life before and after the robbery, as a class, ask students to brainstorm several thematic statements. Then have students investigate the universal nature of themes by asking each student to write a brief personal connection to one of the themes, a connection between the theme and another text, and a connection between the theme and the world at large. Have students share and discuss their connections in small literature circle discussions.

Conflict

Conflict is what makes the story interesting and entertaining to read. In *Running the Risk*, Sean deals with both internal and external conflict, and his reactions to the conflicts are what moves the story forward. Ask students to make a list of both his internal and external conflicts and how Sean resolves them. Working in small groups, have students write a skit depicting one of the conflicts Sean faces. Encourage students to incorporate drama, exaggeration, humor, sarcasm or other elements to highlight the conflicts. Have students perform their skits for the class.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. During the robbery, Sean keeps his head and remains calm. Why is he the only one in the place that does not lose his cool? How does his calmness help the situation? What are the other employees' reactions to the way Sean handles the robbery?
2. Being involved in the robbery flips a switch in Sean—he changes from that moment forward. How does he change? What does he do differently?
3. Sean is not the only character that runs a risk. What does Sean risk? Why is he willing to risk so much? What do other characters risk? Is it costly to them? Why or why not?
4. When Sean starts seeing Jeanette, he says, “[T]he girl was trouble but I didn’t care. Maybe trouble was what I needed to make my life a little more interesting,” (p. 24). Was Jeanette trouble? Why or why not? What did Jeanette help Sean realize about his life? Why did Jeanette feel safe around Sean (p. 23)?
5. When Cam starts telling lies about the way the robbery happened, Sean is angry, so when Deacon confronts him about it in the bathroom, Sean pisses on Deacon’s shoes (page 32). Why does this shut Deacon up? What does Sean realize after this encounter with Deacon? How does it help Sean let go of his anger?

6. What examples from the novel show that living close to the edge and becoming involved with Jeanette cause Sean to use poor judgment? How does Sean make up for his temporary loss of judgment?
7. On page 87, Sean lists things he wants to change about himself, including being more like his grandfather. Does his decision to tell the police about J.L. put him closer to reaching any of his goals? Why or why not?
8. Having the support of his father makes telling the police about J.L. easier for Sean. Why does Sean's father support him, knowing it could cost Sean his life? Why don't Sean and his father discuss their decision with Sean's mother?

Writer's Craft

Ask students to work in small groups to use the following words in a complete sentence and to provide context clues so that the reader will be able to determine the meaning of the word. Although some of the words below may be familiar to the students, they should use them in the context they are used in the original sentence. Students should copy their sentences on 5x7 index cards and use the cards to build a word wall in the classroom.

Whacked	Page 2
Instinct	Page 8
Impulse	Page 20
Disturbing	Page 35
Prattled	Page 36
Frantic	Page 37
Repulsed	Page 45
Hostility	Page 58

Author Biography

Lesley Choyce teaches part-time at Dalhousie University, runs Pottersfield Press and has written sixty-five adult and young adult books, including fiction, non-fiction and poetry. He is the winner of the Dartmouth Book Award and the Ann Connor Brimer Award. His YA novels center on a variety of topics and issues, from the popular—skateboarding, surfing and rock bands—to the controversial—racism, environmental issues and organ transplants. Lesley lives in a 200-year-old farm house at Lawrencetown Beach, overlooking the ocean. He says, “I decided to be a writer with high hopes that it would allow me to avoid work. When writing turned out to be work as well as fun, I stuck with it anyway.”