



Absolute Pressure

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Reading level: 3.2
978-1-55469-130-2 PB
AR Quiz # 129562

Book Summary

For years seventeen-year-old Ian has been spending his summers on Key West, Florida, helping his Uncle Gord at his dive shop and spending as much time as he can underwater. When he's not diving, he's admiring Sherri, the beautiful girl who works at the dive shop. He wonders how she would feel if he told her his secret: he's got a disorder that makes him experience the world in very unusual ways. For instance, every time he sees her he tastes blackberries. But romance isn't the only thing that's worrying Ian. A series of near-fatal accidents leads him to believe that his uncle is in grave danger. Whatever his uncle is involved in—finding sunken treasure, drug-running—Ian is determined to help the man who has been a father figure to him. But the truth turns out to be more complicated and terrifying than he could ever have imagined.

Prereading Ideas

- Research *synesthesia*. What is it? How many people does it affect? What happens in the brain of someone who has it?
- Scuba diving is a very popular sport, but it can be dangerous if divers don't follow the rules. Find out what kind of training you need to go scuba diving. What are some of the dangers involved?



Connecting to the Text

Theme

One of the themes of *Absolute Pressure* is the importance of trust in relationships. Ian knows that “lying is not right” but he justifies it by saying that he and his uncle lie to each other in order to protect each other. He also has a lot of anger towards his father, who lied to Ian and his mother. Near the end of the book, he says, “...worse than dying was thinking that someone I’d trusted had betrayed me.” Have students form small groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Is there ever a time when lying is okay? Provide reasons and examples to back up your point of view.
2. Uncle Gord tells Ian a very complicated lie. Is a simple lie more effective than a complicated one? Do details make it easier or harder to “sell” a lie?
3. Is there any way to tell if someone is lying? Get students to make two simple statements to their group—one a lie and one the truth. See if the other students can tell which is which.
4. Is there really any “science” to lie-detection? Are TV shows like *Lie to Me* based on truth or lies? Have students write a brief report.

Similes

The author of *Absolute Pressure* uses similes to make the underwater scenes in the story more vivid. For example:

- “...like a rag doll shaken by a giant.”
- “...like a pinball bouncing off flippers.”
- “...like a piano falling through the air.”

Ask students to write a brief paragraph on a familiar scene (a family dinner, a day at the beach) using similes to enliven the story. Encourage humor and creativity.



Connecting to the Curriculum

Vocabulary

One of these words is not like the other. The following words all relate to scuba diving, but only one has a single meaning. Have students figure out the multiple definitions in order to find the word that has only one definition.

gauge	weight	mouthpiece	tank
mask	buoyant	bends	flipper
pressure	off the wall	guideline	valve
wreck	shark	reef	dive

Answer: valve

History

- Ian does research on the Spanish kings of the 1700s. What is he trying to find out and why? Have students research the history of the Spanish in Florida. Then have them do research on the Native Americans who lived there before the Spaniards arrived. How do place names in Florida reflect the state's history?
- It's estimated that 30% of immigrants in Florida are illegal. Uncle Gord is part of a scheme to get Cuban criminals into the country. How do most illegal immigrants get to Florida? What happens to them when they get there? What would happen to the economy if there were no illegal immigrants?

Science

- Shark attacks. Have students research the myth and the reality behind shark attacks.
- Artificial reefs. Ian dives into the hull of a ship that was sunk to make a reef. Have students debate the pros and cons of man-made reefs.
- Extreme weather. Hurricanes are a fact of life for Floridians and other coastal dwellers. Uncle Gord claims that a recent hurricane had moved some valuable coins on the ocean floor. Is such a thing possible? Get students to research the effects of hurricanes and write an emergency plan to help people who live in hurricane zones.



Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Ian has never talked about his “condition” with anybody. Why does he hide it? And why does he decide to confide in Sherri and Judd?
2. Why does Ian spend his summers with Uncle Gord?
3. Who are the men that Uncle Gord goes out on the boat with at night? What are they doing?
4. Is Uncle Gord a hero or a bad guy? Or both? Why?

Author's Note

The neural condition that Ian experiences in this story is rare but real. There are people who feel, taste and hear color. Synesthesia is a neural condition in which two or more senses intertwine. To scientists, however, the cause is still a mystery. Some wonder if all of us experience this as infants, before our brains learn to separate the senses, so that when we are very young, we not only hear our mother’s voice, but see it and smell it too.

Resources

Theme

- www.blifaloo.com/info/lies.php
- www.howtodothings.com/family-relationships/how-to-tell-if-someone-is-lying-to-you
- www.forbes.com/2006/11/03/detecting-lies-trust-tech_06trust_cx_ee_1103_lies.html
- www.signsofflying.com/signs-of-lying-4-hidden-tells

History

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Florida
- www.floridahistory.com
- www.native-languages.org/florida.htm
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_American
- www.usimmigrationsupport.org/cubaimmigration.html



Science

www.sharkattacks.com
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shark_attack
www.bigshipwrecks.com
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artificial_reef
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Florida_hurricanes
www.nhc.noaa.gov

Author Biography

Sigmund Brouwer is the bestselling author of many books for children and teens. He has contributed numerous titles to the Orca Currents series, the Orca Echoes series and the Orca Sports series. He and his family live in Red Deer, Alberta, and Eagleville, Tennessee.

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