



A Dark Truth

Jeff Ross

Reading level: 4.1

978-1-4598-1327-4 PB

Book Summary

Riley and Dashawn have been friends since they were three. They got into skateboarding together and have advanced to the point where it's time to create a Sponsor Me tape. They bring a third skater along, Natasha, and try to get some good clips around a new office development. Then the police storm into the lot. The three skaters quickly scatter, trying their best not to get busted. Riley and Natasha arrive at the meet-up spot. They wait and wait, but Dashawn never shows.

The next day Riley visits Dashawn, only to discover that the police have given him a "beat-down." Nothing like this has ever happened before, and for Riley it is a wake-up call that whether they know it or not, not everyone lives in the same world he does.

Prereading Idea

Show students the following YouTube video to familiarize them with skateboard tricks: www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgnFln5cSVQ. Then, ask students to write a one-paragraph reaction to the video. Ask for student volunteers to read their paragraphs to the class.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Ask students to write an essay entitled “The Dark Truth.” Students should state what the term means to them, explain how that truth affects their lives and others they know, and cite personal experiences or news stories to illustrate their points. Students should also state what they can do to help change society’s perceptions of race. Ask students to read their essays to the class.
- Police and citizens often harass skateboarders for practicing their sport because of the noise and potential damage to property. Ask students to prepare a public service video directed at citizens and police departments about the sport of skateboarding. Students should include the skills needed to be a skateboarder, the cost of equipment, and a brief history of skateboarding as well as the laws and regulations in their community related to skateboarding. Students may also want to include a call for civic action to provide or to designate areas for skateboarders to practice their sport.
- Skateboarding has been approved to be an Olympic sport, and the first events will be in Tokyo in 2020. Ask students to read about the controversy surrounding this decision and to write their opinion of the decision. Students should support their opinion with information they have learned from their research.

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

Race relations have historically generated intense and heated conflicts; race relations today are no different. In day-to-day events, families and communities find themselves unexpectedly devastated by unspeakable prejudice, unspeakable cruelty. As a result of Dashawn’s beating by the police of Westlake, his family moves to Atlanta to be closer to family—and to escape the cruelty and indifference of a predominately white community. Have students work in small groups to generate a list of other choices Dashawn and his family could have made and the possible repercussions of each different choice. Students should also include choices Riley could have made that might have altered the outcome. Have each student select one of the alternate scenarios and write an alternate story ending. Have students share their alternate scenarios in their small groups or in the classroom.

Characterization

Using 11 x 14 paper or larger, have each student select one of the characters and create a character web poster including the character’s motivations, thoughts, feelings, actions, traits and relationships. Then have students find quotes from the book that support their ideas and add them to their poster. Have students share their posters and characterizations in small groups. Display the posters in the classroom.

Plot

The sequence of events in a story is the plot, and it is generally built around the conflict. The story’s plot includes four stages: exposition, rising action, conflict, and falling action. Divide students into groups of three and ask them to identify what occurs in each stage in the novel. Students can then complete a storyboard of twelve

sections on a legal size sheet of paper. For each section, have students: draw a visual representing a major event, include a caption explaining the action, and identify which stage of the plot is involved. Then have students use the plot storyboard as a tool for students to pre-write their own narratives.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Why do Riley and Dashawn skateboard even though they can be seriously injured? How has skateboarding helped form a bond between them?
2. Why does Riley get so angry at the kids who ride scooters? How do the kids on scooters affect the skateboarders?
3. How does Natasha use her skateboarding injury to motivate her? How does she still stay connected to skateboarding?
4. Why are Riley and Dashawn filming Sponsor Me videos? How do the videos motivate them to try more difficult moves and tricks?
5. Why is the space in Westlake so perfect for skateboarding?
6. Why do Riley and Natasha leave Westlake without Dashawn? What do they assume has happened to him?
7. How does Riley react to the truth of what happened to Dashawn? What attempt does Riley make to prove the truth is a lie?
8. When Riley returns to Westlake, what does he find that would prove Dashawn's story was the truth? Why doesn't Riley attempt to set the record straight?

Writer's Craft

Foreshadowing

In chapter 5, the author gives readers a clue that something bad is going to happen. The author uses foreshadowing when he writes, "I feared the worst—that he'd been busted. That wasn't the worst." Have students stop at this line and write what they think happened to Dashawn. After the truth is revealed in the novel, have students compare what they thought had happened to what actually happened. Have students reflect on which of the two outcomes would be worse and why.

Author Biography

Jeff Ross teaches scriptwriting for animation, game developers, and communication at Algonquin College's School of Media and Design and had written several books for adults and young adults. In eighth grade, Mr. Ross was inspired by an author to begin writing himself, and his first short story was published when he was nineteen. Mr. Ross enjoys snowboarding and skiing in the winter, skateboarding and surfing in the summer, and running marathons whenever he can. He is married and has two sons and lives in Ottawa, Canada.