



Big Guy

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Reading level: 2.9

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AR Quiz # 122455

Book Summary

When Derek sends his online boyfriend, Ethan, a picture of himself before he gained eighty pounds, he never dreams they will meet. So when Ethan tells Derek he is coming for a visit, Derek ends the relationship and throws himself into his job helping elderly people in a nursing home. But when he helps Aaliyah, a young woman severely physically disabled from an aneurism, both Derek and Aaliyah are forced to face their fears and to accept who they are and the people they love.

Prereading Idea

With the divorce rate at an all-time high, many children are being raised in one-parent homes. Ask students to brainstorm the possible effects, both negative and positive, a one-parent home can have on children—socially, emotionally and academically. Then ask students to investigate programs and resources that are available to single mothers and fathers raising children. Students can share their findings and compile them in an information sheet to be distributed at a Parent Teacher Association meeting.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- According to recent statistics, more children are overweight in today's society than at any other time in history. Ask students to investigate the issue of obesity in teenagers and solutions that are being proposed to eliminate the problem. Each pair should search their community to obtain information on programs that are available to help obese teens and the expense involved. Ask students to form partnerships and to create a brochure to inform students about the availability of help in their community. The brochures can be distributed at the public library, local movie theaters, churches or game arcades.
- Most students would be hard-pressed to find a friend who did not have a MySpace page, belong to a chat room, Instant Message with a group of friends, or participate in a blog. So when Derek falls in love with Ethan online, it isn't all that surprising, nor is the fact that he lied about his looks. In groups of three, ask students to use surveys, questionnaires and interviews to research teenagers' use of the Internet for social interaction. Ask students to present the information they discover in a creative, visual or auditory format.
- Gay teenagers fall into a dangerous category with alarmingly higher statistics of suicides, drop outs and runaways. Fortunately for Derek, despite his parents' neglect, he has a support group of friends that do care about him, but so many gay teens don't. Ask students to research other teenage problems that often accompany gay teenagers. Divide the class into four groups and have each group research a five-year span to find the statistics on hate crimes, runaways, dropouts and suicides. Then as a class make a graph of the previous twenty-five years to analyze any decline or rise in the statistics. After the graph is complete, ask each group to compile a listing of conclusions and recommendations.

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

Derek and Aaliyah are both dealing with the same issue; they must find the courage to face their fear, overcome the problem they have with self-image, and learn to trust others. Ask students to write a thematic statement that portrays this idea and then to relate the thematic statement to themselves or someone they know by writing a short narrative in prose or poetic format. Their pieces can be shared with the class.

Characterization

Ask students to draw a timeline of Derek's life leading up to his relationship with Ethan and continuing through his first meeting with Ethan. Students should include the major events in Derek's life that contribute to his negative self-image, his weight gain and his dropping out of school, and the turning point, the person and event that help him realize the need to make a change. At each point on the timeline, students should write a brief statement from Derek's first-person point of view about what happened and the effect it had on him. Students can display their timelines in the classroom.

Point of View

Ask students to assume the voice of Ethan or Aaliyah's fiancé and to write a letter to Derek or Aaliyah expressing Ethan or the fiancé's feelings about being left out of the decision to end the relationship. Anger, hurt and frustration might just be a few. When the students turn the letter in, return them to another student and have the second student answer the letter, assuming the voice of either Derek or Aaliyah, depending on who the letter is addressed to. Then, the students who write the original letter read the letter in two voices with the person who responded to it.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. After hanging out at the bar and drinking beer for a few hours, Derek's friends ask him if he's okay to drive, and Derek assures them that he is as he staggers off to his car. What should his friends have done? Why didn't they do the right thing?
2. Sending Ethan an outdated, skinny picture of himself doesn't bother Derek until he finds out Ethan is coming to meet him. Derek excuses himself from the lie stating that living with his dad has taught him to lie "pretty well." Why does Derek try to justify his lie? Is this a reasonable excuse to lie to someone you care about? Why or why not?
3. Gabi and Derek relate to each other like true, loyal friends. Derek calls Gabi to talk to her about his situation, but then he chickens out. Gabi says, "Cut the crap and tell me what's going on." What other examples demonstrate that Gabi and Derek are best friends? What other characteristics does their friendship possess?
4. The situation with Aaliyah and her fiancé mirrors the situation between Derek and Ethan. To some degree, Derek gives Aaliyah the same advice Gabi gives Derek, "Give the guy a chance." What does Gabi mean by this statement? What chance do Ethan and Aaliyah's fiancé need to be given?

5. Aaliyah's answer to her physical disability is to pretend not to care, and Derek decides pretending not to care is the easiest way out of his lie to Ethan. What happens to change Aaliyah and Derek's minds about this strategy? Are the two happier as a result of their courage to face their fear?
6. Derek is confused about his feelings for his mother. He wants to hate her for leaving him, but he still hopes she will come back and get him. Why are his feelings so mixed up about her? What would Derek say to her if he actually found her in California?
7. When Derek returns home to pack after his father kicks him out of the house, his dad tells him, "If you decide to forget about the gay thing, I guess you could move back in." Is this a choice for Derek? Why or why not? What does this show the reader about Derek and his father's relationship?

Writer's Craft

Vocabulary Enrichment

Ask students to look up the following words in a dictionary to determine the meaning. Then have students write an original sentence and draw a cartoon to illustrate the sentence.

Seething
Rummage

Snarled
Solemn

Sluicing
Grimace

Author Biography

Robin Stevenson loves to read and write and has since she was a child. Traveling and sailing also play a major role in her life as well as being a mother to her son, a university instructor and a social worker. Robin is currently working on another novel for young adults, and she always carries pen and paper with her to record new ideas and bits of dialogue that pop into her head. She currently lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with her partner, her son and a variety of animals.