



## ***Bike Thief***

Rita Feutl

Reading level: 2.9

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### **Book Summary**

After the death of Nick and Katie's parents, the siblings are placed in the same foster care home. But when Katie breaks the television set, Nick searches for a replacement in a pawn shop so the two of them won't be taken from their current home and separated. Finding himself in a tough situation, Nick is forced to make a deal with the pawn shop owner that leads him into big trouble. Initially promising to steal and rebuild ten bikes in order to work off his debt, Nick quickly finds that the debt keeps growing—and the deal keeps changing. Eventually, Nick enlists a few of his sister's friends to help him steal the bikes, but one of them gets caught. The situation worsens when Nick sees Danny, another bike thief, beaten up and taken hostage in a van. As Nick follows the van on his bike, he stumbles into a drug deal. How will Nick ever untangle himself from the lies and deception he has created?

### **Prereading Idea**

Ask students if they have ever been in a situation where they wanted to help a friend or family member—but in order to do that they would have to do something that they knew was wrong. Ask students to consider the following questions. How did they make their decisions? What were the consequences for their actions? Were there better options that they did not explore? What are the long term consequences for choosing to ignore your personal moral compass?

**Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas**

- Drunk drivers kill thousands of people every day. In small groups, ask students to investigate the following: laws in their community that seek to prevent driving while intoxicated, programs such as Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD), national and local statistics of DWI-related accidents, and a contemporary news report about a drunk-driving incident. Each group should produce a two to four-minute informative media presentation highlighting their findings for the class. Select the best presentations to showcase as a “student service announcement” for one or more district campuses.
- *Bike Thief* was inspired by a true story (read the Acknowledgments). Ask students to investigate programs that serve their communities or states by rehabilitating troubled children and teens by teaching them a skill. Students can also investigate preventative programs for children and teens that help keep them away from trouble. If possible, have students focus on one specific preventative program; students should interview organizers of the program, teens that are involved in the program, and representatives of other organizations that help support the program. Have students consolidate their findings into a resource for their communities: a website, a digital or hard-copy brochure, or a webinar for community members.
- Nick and the other characters refer to several different types of bikes and the materials from which they are made. Ask students to make a list of the different metals used, the brand names of bikes, and the variety of bikes written about and/or produced. Ask each student to select and illustrate a bike that demonstrates the essence or the personality of one of the characters. Have students include an explanation of why the illustrated bike personifies that particular character. Have students share and post their illustrations and explanations.

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

In chapter 12, Nick ponders, “Funny how one little action seems to cause a whole bunch of other actions.” Ask students to create a plot line based on the cause-and-effect sequences in the novel starting with the car accident that killed Nick and Katie’s parents. The time lines should include an explanation of how one event leads to other events in the story. Display the time lines in the classroom.

***Character***

Nick can be viewed as both a victim and a bike thief: a good kid who makes bad choices and a bad kid who steals and lies. With a partner, ask students to analyze each of these viewpoints of Nick and to find support for both views with details and quotes from the book. Have each set of partners write a Poem-for-Two-Voices based on the two views of Nick. Poems should include the support students identified for each view. Have students practice and present their Poems-for-Two-Voices.

**Setting**

The setting is important to the action that occurs in *Bike Thief*. Have students write a detailed description of the setting including the location, time of year, elapsed time, climate, and other factors they consider important. Along with their descriptions, have students write an explanation of why the setting element is important to the story. Have students use their descriptions and explanations as a basis for small group literature circle discussions. Have each group debrief with the whole class after their individual group discussions.

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. Nick knew right from wrong, so why is he willing to break the law with known troublemakers? How does he feel about involving Katie's friends in the bike scam?
2. When Dwayne takes Nick to the bike den in chapter 3, he punches Nick for disrespecting Trevor. Why does Dwayne consider Nick's comment disrespectful? What is Nick's intention when he asks the question?
3. At the end of chapter 7, why is Nick so offended when Trevor and Dwayne call him a runt? Why does Nick think he is above runt status?
4. How do Nick and Alex react when they see Stevie in the police car in chapter 10? What is Nick's concern?
5. In chapter 15, when the social worker questions Nick about his absences at school, why does Nick scream at Katie?
6. Why is Nick unwilling to abandon Danny after he has been beaten and thrown in the van? How does Nick save Danny's life?
7. Why are the police and the Radners so willing to let Nick off the hook for what he has done?
8. How does Nick plan to redeem himself with Mandy? What might her reaction have been to receiving her bike in better condition than it was when it was stolen?

**Writer's Craft*****Foreshadowing***

The author uses foreshadowing to give readers clues and to make them aware a problem exists. In chapter 2, readers are aware that there is a problem with Nick's dad, and, in chapter 3, readers discover that Nick has been in rehab and that Nick's parents are no longer around. Have students look for other similar examples of foreshadowing and then write a short prediction and/or explanation of the possible issue. Within small groups, have students share their suppositions based on the clues the author revealed.

**Author Biography**

**Rita Feutl** wrote her first book when she was seven, and she has been writing and editing professionally for more than twenty-five years. She writes for children and young adults, presents workshops on creative writing, and offers a variety of editing services for other writers. Rita loves big dogs and enjoys traveling, biking, and eating chocolate. She currently lives in Edmonton with her family.