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Interest level: grade 7 and up

Reading level: 3.2

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AR Quiz # 118308

Book Summary

When Remy returns home from juvenile detention center after serving a nine-month sentence for assaulting a young man, his neighborhood has changed. Racial tensions have increased, his girlfriend Asia is dating someone else, and his mother and sister do not want him at home. Remy finds a manual labor job earning minimum wage and does his best to stay out of trouble, but his jealousy toward Asia's boyfriend and his loyalty to his friends interfere with his desire for a future out of his neighborhood. In a gang fight between the two factions, Remy succumbs to those interfering forces and causes the death of Asia's boyfriend.

Prereading Idea

Ask students to listen as you read the first three paragraphs of chapter one to them. Then, as you read the section again, ask students to make a mental list of questions the author poses. On the board, compile a list of questions the students have about the characters and what events might take place in the story. Discuss with them the possibilities before reading the book. Have students in writing make predictions about the characters and events in the book. Collect the written predictions and upon completions of the book have students revisit their original thoughts.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

After he is injured and his partner is killed, Officer Dunlop returns to the force. However, Remy and others believe that Officer Dunlop is too quick to pull his gun and jumps to conclusions, especially where teens are concerned. Ever aware of the alarming number of policemen who are killed in the line of duty by gang-related deaths, robberies, and drug deals gone bad, law men are bound to err on the side of caution. Ask students to consider the question: How can policemen protect society from those who want to harm the innocent and at the same time protect their own lives? Ask students to interview police men and women as well as other community leaders to gain insight into the issue. Conduct a classroom panel discussion of the issue. Record and post ideas on which the panel comes to consensus and ideas on which they remain divided as a reminder of the complexity of the issue.

Asia wanted Remy to talk to Marcus so that he would warn Marcus about life in juvenile detention. Asia knows Marcus has a knife, and she is worried that he will hurt somebody and end up in jail. In pairs, ask one student to assume the voice of Remy and one to assume the voice of Marcus. Then ask them to write a short dialogue between the boys that would be more satisfying to Asia and more meaningful to each other than the one that takes place on page 72. Have students practice and present their dialogues to the class.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

Conflict

The author states on page 24, “When James and the rest of them talk about the other guys; their faces get all twisted so that they don’t even look like themselves.” School boys fighting over turf and countries fighting over land—territorialism is a recurring cause of world conflicts, from the schoolyard to the battlefield. Ask students, “In this story is the key to the conflict territory or race?” After a brief class discussion, ask students to assume that Remy has been indicted for his role in Marcus’s death. Then ask students to assume a lawyer “voice” and write a legal argument against Remy choosing either territory or race as his motivation. Students should state their position, supporting their position with three main arguments, and using examples from the book to substantiate their arguments and to develop their “case” against Remy.

Point of View

The story is told entirely from Remy’s point of view. Ask students to work in small groups to select a scene where Marcus, James, or Officer Dunlop are involved and to rewrite the scene in first person from one of their viewpoints. Students should include dialogue as well as narrative sections and stay true to the story’s plot and the character’s actions and reactions as the author intended. Upon completion, students can present their rewrites to the class with students assuming the roles of narrator and characters in the scene.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

7. On page 13, Remy says that everyone expected him to beat someone up; no one was surprised by his behavior. Even Asia's parents thought he was trouble. What type of behaviors had Remy previously exhibited that led people to believe that he was capable of beating someone up, almost to death?
8. Remy seems to understand why the guys from Eastdale come to play on the court James and his buddies have always played on (pages 23-24). What could Remy have done differently that perhaps would have helped diffuse this tense situation?
9. Even though Remy's mother does not want him at home, he gives her money and asks her for nothing. Why does he pay her half his salary and then leave her house without a word? (page 46).
10. How does Remy's parents' indifference for him affect the decisions and choices he makes in his life?
11. Despite his past, Remy finds work, hard labor for minimum wage, and makes plans for his future away from his neighborhood. What does this say about his character? How has his stay in juvenile detention affected his life?
12. When Remy tries to talk to Marcus as Asia asked him to do, Marcus and his friends laugh at him (page 75). Why does Remy care? What does he ultimately do about it?
13. When Officer Dunlop finds Marcus after the big gang fight, he makes Marcus get on the ground and put his hands behind his back. When Remy sees Marcus go for something in his pocket, he yells, "He has a knife," (page 100). Why does Remy yell that when he knows Marcus is reaching for his cell-phone?
14. On page 102, Asia tells Remy, "I know you lied." How does she know? Why can't she prove it? Did Remy lie?
15. How does the title relate to the book?

Writer's Craft

Dialogue

Have students work in small groups to select a particularly powerful section of dialogue. Students should develop the section as a reader's theater presentation, omitting narration, cutting and/or expanding lines of dialogue, repeating lines for emphasis, or having characters say lines in chorus to create effect. Then have groups present their reader's theater selections in the same sequence as the book.

Author Biography

Born and raised in Montreal, Quebec, **Norah McClintock** earned a degree in history from McGill University. A five-time winner of the Crime Writers of Canada's Arthur Ellis Award for Best Juvenile Crime Novel, she began writing mysteries because she personally loves reading them. In addition to her love of reading, she enjoys writing, hiking, biking, taking long walks in the woods, cross-country skiing, baking, and going to the movies. The initial ideas for her books usually stem from news stories to which she adds her own imagination and creativity. Norah lives with her family in Toronto, Ontario.