



Fastback Beach

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Reading level: 2.9

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AR Quiz # 72399

Book Summary

Miles knows he shouldn't be joy riding with Larry and Spider in a stolen car, and his instinct is proven right when the car crashes into a dune at the beach. Miles is left unconscious while Larry and Spider flee. Miles alone takes the fall, and is placed on probation and sentenced to 100 hours of community service. Assigned to Ned Barnier, a hot-rodder from his youth, Miles begins to work off his hours cleaning up, fixing things and sorting old hot rod magazines. Ned takes a special interest in Miles, teaching him about hot rods and rebuilding engines, and together they work on Ned's 1937 Ford coupe to prepare it for a show. Soon after Miles tells Larry about the car, it is stolen, forcing Miles to reveal his knowledge of Larry and Spider's "business" in order to save the car from destruction.

Prereading Idea

Ask students to search the Internet for pictures of hot rods and stock cars so they will know the difference between the two. They can start with this site.

www.shawneecc.edu/news/carshow03.asp

Then have them write a brief description in poem form of one of the cars they find to share with the class. Encourage students to be "risk takers," choosing a poem format that will best capture the essence of the racing car.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Teenagers who are first-time offenders are often placed on probation and given community service hours. In groups of three, ask students to investigate the court system in their community and determine which offenses are most likely to receive community service, the average number of hours sentenced, and the jobs assigned for community service. Assign one group to specifically research the punishment for stolen cars and car parts. Then, ask each group to prepare community service “recruiting” posters, outlining the consequences of specific offenses and other related information.
- Racing vehicles used in stock car racing, hot-rod racing and street-car racing are also displayed at car shows with other custom cars. Divide the class into groups of three and assign each group one of the above fields. Each group should prepare a presentation to the class explaining all aspects of their particular type of racing:
 - ◆ Car modifications
 - ◆ Racetrack specifications
 - ◆ Racing rules
 - ◆ Celebrity racers
 - ◆ Popular race tracks and races

Ask the groups to construct a 3-D model of one of the famous racetracks for their racing specialty. Have students creatively incorporate their other research information into the model. Allow time for each group to make a presentation to the class.

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

It has been said, “You’ve got to stand for something, or you’ll fall for anything.” Miles learns this lesson when peer pressure almost causes him to lose everything valuable to him. What other lessons does Miles learn? With a partner, ask students to write a speech that Miles might make to a group of troubled teens. Students should include the lessons Miles learns and a thematic statement that serves as the title and driving force of the message.

Plot

The sequence of events in a story is called the plot, and it is generally built around a conflict. Divide students into pairs, and ask them to divide a sheet of paper into thirds lengthwise and list the conflicts in *Fastback Beach* in the first column, write the resolution in the second column, and if there was a lesson the character learned, write it in the third column. Ask students to select one conflict that was not resolved in a peaceful, positive fashion. Then, have them write and present a script, showing mediation between the characters that demonstrates open communication and a more positive resolution to the conflict.

Character

Miles struggles between what he knows is right and what his friends are doing, and he is forced to make a decision after he finds himself in trouble with the law. Ask students to make a list of the characters and the choices they make in the novel. Have students select one character, and write an extensive diary entry(s) focusing on his/her choices, the relationship affecting his/her choice, and the consequences of the decisions the character makes. Students can share their work in small groups.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. What motivates Miles's sudden anger toward Spider at Megan's party? Does Spider have it coming? Even though Larry is not on the balcony with Spider and Miles, what role does he play in the fight?
2. Miles does not like his mother's boyfriend Jeff and does his best to ignore him. What is the problem in their relationship?
3. Larry has a rough home life, no extra money and no support from his father. What other choices could he have made to avoid the life of crime he chooses? How would those choices have altered his life?
4. Miles considers Larry to be his best friend. What evidence is there to support the fact that Larry is not a true friend?
5. Miles instinctively knows he should not tell Larry about Ned's car, but he ignores his instinct and the result is disastrous. Is Miles's decision to "rat them out" justified? How does this decision help Miles?
6. Although Miles loves his father and has fond memories of him, he is angry at him for leaving. How do Kenny's father and Ned help him overcome some of his anger and disillusionment?

Writer's Craft*Verb Usage*

The following powerful verbs help create an image in the reader's mind. Ask students to find five other examples of powerful verbs, and then have them find five sentences in their own writing to rewrite using a more powerful verb. Have students select their best revision and, as a class, prepare "before" and "after" revision displays to remind students of the potential of powerful verbs.

Chaotic
Reeks
Talisman
Dubious

Salient
Succulent
Staid
Hordes

Perplexed
Proprietary
Provocation
Scintillating

Author Biography

Shirlee Smith Matheson writes award-winning fiction and nonfiction for adults, young adults and children. She enjoys teaching and speaking about writing and is fascinated with the history and people in northern Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon and Northwest Territories. Shirlee lives in Calgary and is employed as Administrative Officer at the Aero Space Museum Association of Calgary.