



Haze

Erin Thomas

Reading level: 2.9

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AR Quiz # 151105

Book Summary

Bram's friend Jeremy wants to go public with information about a hazing-related student death. The morning after he tells Bram this, he's injured in a hit-and-run accident. Now Jeremy is in a coma, and Bram is trying to follow the trail that he left. The trouble is, Abby, Jeremy's sister, is convinced Bram's swimming coach is to blame. Bram knows Coach is innocent, but can he prove it? And what will happen if he's wrong?

Prereading Ideas

- What motivates you?
- What is your experience with hazing or initiation rituals?
- Is there a sport or activity that you like enough to do competitively?
- Have you ever been let down by an adult you trusted?

Connecting to the Text

Plot

- An exciting plot unfolds quickly, with chapters and sequences that make the reader want to keep going. Ending a chapter with a cliffhanger is one way that authors can keep that feeling of excitement. Have students skim through *Haze* searching for cliffhanger endings. Ask them to create a two-column chart: in the first column, have them quickly summarize the cliffhanger ending to the chapter; in the second column, have them write reasons why it's an effective way to keep the story's momentum.
- Talk about how good dialogue helps to advance the plot (and develop characters). Have students read the beginning of chapter 5 again, or read it to them. The conversation between Bram and Abby in chapter 13 is also a good example. Have them pinpoint things the characters say that lead us to understand more about the storyline. Discuss: Why is it often more effective to let the plot unfold through the characters' speech than in any other way, i.e. through blocks of narrative? Have students find two or three other sections in *Haze* where dialogue adds to the plot.
- Have students create a timeline of the story to show the major events in the book. Discuss literary elements such as conflict, climax and resolutions. On the timeline, students should note the main conflicts and their resolutions, as well as the climax of the story.

Character

- Dialogue redux! Explore the dialogue links in the Resources section. At these carefully selected websites, you'll find examples of strong dialogue as well as tips on how to create good character speech. Using the information they learn from these sites, have students create a section of believable dialogue between two characters in *Haze*. Their dialogue must do one of the following:
 - ◆ advance the plot (move the story along)
 - ◆ help us understand the characters and their motivations
 - ◆ create conflict
 - ◆ stir up emotion in other characters
 - ◆ stir up emotion in the reader
- Talk about what the word *motivation* means. Then discuss with students: characters are just like real people: they have motivations that determine how they act. There's a reason for nearly every action a character takes (or every thing a character says). Have students find three examples in *Haze* where they clearly understand a given character's motivation for behaving in a certain way. Have them write the character's action, then beside it, write the reason why that character behaved so.
- Have students draw a character map of Bram or Coach that details his personality characteristics, his fears, and his strengths and weaknesses. Use this as a springboard to teach students how to write a full character analysis. See web links in Resources, below. The second link is a particularly good example of a character analysis.

Setting

- Have students look for sections in *Haze* where the swimming action is particularly detailed. Ask them to make a list of swimming-related words that develop the scene and the setting of that scene.
- Discuss with students the importance of setting, especially for a story like *Haze*. As they read the book, have them create a list of words and phrases that help to create a clear picture of the setting in the reader's mind.
- The author writes a sentence near the beginning of chapter 17 that helps us to infer information about the setting: "Water lapped at the sides of the pool and threw squiggly reflections up on the ceiling." How does this help us to imagine the pool? Why does the author choose to develop the setting in this way rather than simply saying there were windows surrounding the pool? Challenge students to create a few sentences to describe their classroom or their favorite place in a similar way.

Literary Devices

- A metaphor is a way of writing about something by making it similar—or comparing it—to something else. For example, in chapter 2, when Bram's coach gives the older swimmers heck for making the younger team members all wear diapers, Bram says "Steven's face might as well have been molded from plastic." By this, he means Steven didn't give any hints about his guilt in the matter. The metaphor works to show Steven's desire to keep his true feelings in check. Challenge students to find other metaphors in *Haze*.
- As Bram works out in chapter 14, a buzzing fluorescent tube "sets his teeth on edge." This is a figure of speech. What does it mean? Have students brainstorm a few other figures of speech, and connect them to the contexts in which they are ordinarily used.

Vocabulary

Have students choose five of the following bolded terms from the book. Using print or online resources, have them define each, then use each term in a sentence.

backup	coincidence	crusade	femur
initiation	lawsuit	linger	radiology
refectory	scorch	sophomore	stealth

Connecting to the Curriculum

English

- Have students read the back cover copy for *Haze*. Discuss the parts of a back cover blurb: a short story summary, plus a teaser at the end. Talk about the importance of "hooking" the reader with an engaging issue or problem. Then have students write a back cover blurb for one of their favorite books, using the same techniques.
- A red herring is information that an author strategically places in a mystery to "throw off" the reader by making him or her suspect the wrong character. Have students find several red herrings in *Haze*. As an additional challenge, have them determine

the etiology of the phrase “red herring.”

- Head to <http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mystery/index.htm> and read about how to write a mystery story. Have students write a short mystery story of their own.
- At the beginning of chapter 24, Bram is being followed by a car. Here are a few sentences describing the scene: “My heart was pounding hard. My palms were damp. Was this how it was for Jeremy? Knowing what was coming, trying to get away?” How do these words create a clear picture of what Bram is feeling? Have students find other examples of where the author uses showing instead of telling. Divide students into teams. Have a student from one team think of and write a “telling” sentence on the board, then have a student from the other team rewrite that sentence using “showing” language. Switch the teams’ roles periodically so each team gets a chance to “show,” and each team gets a chance to “tell.”

Art

Have students read the part of chapter 12 where Bram snoops in Steven’s dorm room. This is a very detailed piece of writing where Erin Thomas paints a clear picture of what the room looks like. From her description, we can make some inferences about Steven’s personality. Have students sketch this section of the book, or another section where the author vividly evokes a scene/setting.

Health/Personal Planning

Engage students in a conversation about what kind of role teachers and coaches are supposed to have. What kind of news or media coverage have students seen or heard that brings to light instances where these leaders aren’t fulfilling their roles responsibly? Discuss what children can do if they become aware of an adult who’s not upholding his or her end of the bargain to keep other kids safe.

Physical Education

Have students learn about swimming. How is it beneficial to the body? Are swimmers at risk of repetitive strain injuries? How is swimming and water therapy useful when getting people back on their feet in the wake of an injury?

Science

- After being hit by a car, Jeremy has bleeding in his brain. Divide students into small groups and do a one-period research project on brain injuries and conditions such as: concussion, stroke, epilepsy and possibly lesions. (You could also explore degenerative or chronic conditions such as Parkinson’s Disease, Alzheimer’s Disease, ALS or Huntington’s Disease.)
- In chapter 2, Bram is trapped in the sauna until he feels “half melted.” How long would it take for a human being to actually die in a dry sauna? Challenge students to research this question, including learning how dehydration and heat stroke affect our bodies.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. On the first page of chapter 1, the narrator describes the pool and the act of being a competitive swimmer. "This was my world," he says. What's your world?
2. Steven, one of the Sharks, calls the other boys "pond scum." He uses the nickname as a put-down, and uses it to address the entire group as well as individual swimmers. Do you have a nickname? Who uses it? How do you feel when it's used?
3. In chapter 3, Jeremy explains to Bram how Marcus Tam died. He hints that if he'd taken Marcus home after the initiation party, maybe the kid wouldn't have choked on his own vomit and died. But Bram reminds him that blaming himself isn't the right thing. "You can't know what would have happened," he says. Why is Bram correct? Have you ever had the same feeling about an event?
4. In chapter 3, Steven forces Bram to do 50 pushups for talking back to him, even though it's after practice time and he technically can't boss anyone around. But Bram does the pushups anyway because it's just easier not to "get into it" with Steven. Write about a time when you did something you didn't feel like doing because it was just easier not to try and argue.
5. When he reaches the information desk at the hospital, Bram says he's a close friend of Jeremy's. As a result he's not allowed up to see his pal. "I should have lied," he reflects. As children, we're all taught to tell the truth. But we don't. At least, not all the time. So...when is it okay to lie? How do we decide?
6. In chapter 6, when Abby cries about her brother being in hospital, Bram tells her it'll be okay—even though he doesn't know for sure. Abby says he can't promise. And in his mind, he agrees. "But that wasn't what she needed to hear," he thinks. What purpose do his words serve? Why do we tell each other these things if they aren't strictly true?
7. The swim team has an initiation party every year where new members have to take part in embarrassing or risky events. Have you ever had to suffer through an initiation?
8. At the party, Abby observes that once everyone found out who she was, all they wanted to do was talk about how great Jeremy was. Similarly, we often have the nicest things to say about others...when they're dead. As you see it, why is this?
9. Bram and Droid like to blow each other up in online games. What games do you like to play? Describe them briefly.
10. Bram hits the gym when he needs to de-stress. What's your escape?
11. Throughout the story, Bram clings tenaciously to his belief that Coach can't possibly have had anything to do with Marcus Tam's death. Why is this? What is it that compels us to deny that someone close to us could have done anything wrong?
12. As you see it, why did Coach get involved in initiation activities if he knew it was inappropriate for him to do so?
13. Bram has a photo that shows Coach pouring alcohol into a student's body. Yet he reasons if Coach didn't have anything to do with Jeremy being in the hospital, "there was no point destroying Coach's life over a mistake he made three years ago." Think about recent cases in the media where coaches, teachers, clergy and other "caring adults" have been brought up on charges for abusing—or not taking

due care of—children in the past. Do you agree with Bram, or disagree? Support your thinking with reasons and examples.

14. “When I was in the water, things made sense” (ch. 19). That’s Bram talking. Swimming is his escape—his comfort zone. What’s yours?

Author’s note

Dear Reader,

I took swimming lessons as a kid. I remember, when I was about four years old, going hand-over-hand around the edge of a pool in Ottawa, all of us singing the Spiderman theme song. So I can swim, but the truth is, I’m not terribly good at it. I’ll never experience the sport the way my characters do.

But I wanted to write about a sport that most people have at least a little experience with. And I wanted to write about hazing.

When I was in my last year of high school, someone I knew—just a little, not well—was badly injured in a hazing-related accident at university. His neck was broken. The university made changes after that, to make things better. All good, but it doesn’t undo what happened.

In *Haze*, Jeremy knows the truth about a hazing-related student death. He refuses to move on like everyone else did. He wants to tell the truth. And when he is silenced, it falls to Bram to uncover the full story and decide what to do about it. He’s in a tough spot, but eventually he makes the right choices.

I hope you enjoy the book!

Best wishes,
Erin Thomas

Resources

Swimming

www.livestrong.com/article/353136-competitive-swimming-for-kids

http://familyfitness.about.com/od/waystoplay/a/kids_swimming.htm

Writing Dialogue

<http://screenplay.lifetips.com/cat/64969/characters-dialogue/index.html>

<http://bloodredpencil.blogspot.com/2010/03/dialogue-just-way-we-talk.html>

<http://blog.nathanbransford.com/2010/09/seven-keys-to-writing-good-dialogue.html>

www.musik-therapie.at/PederHill/Dialogue&Detail.htm

Character Analysis

<http://homeworktips.about.com/od/writingabookreport/a/characteranalysis.htm>

http://eolit.hrw.com/hlla/writersmodel/pdf/W_S0702.pdf

Brain Disorders

<http://brainfoundation.org.au/a-z-of-disorders>

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/alzheimersdisease/alzheimersdisease.htm

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/huntington/huntington.htm

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/amyotrophiclateralsclerosis/ALS.htm

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/parkinsons_disease/parkinsons_disease.htm

Books

Fiction

- Bossley, Michelle Martin. *Pool Princess*
- Brouwer, Sigmund. *Absolute Pressure*
- Brown, Terry and Dandi Daley Mackall. *Please Reply*
- Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War*
- Korman, Gordon. *The Dive Series*
- Lupica, Mike. *Too Far*
- Polak, Monique. *Flip Turn*

Nonfiction

- Coloroso, Barbara. *The Bully, The Bullied and The Bystander*
- Colwin, Cecil M. *Breakthrough Swimming*
- Lipkins, Susan. *Preventing Hazing: How Parents, Teachers, and Coaches Can Stop the Violence, Harassment, and Humiliation*
- Maglischo, Ernest. *Swimming Fastest*

Author Biography

Erin Thomas is the author of several books for children and teens. Part of the inspiration for *Haze* came from Erin's own experiences with hazing at university. Erin's first book in the Orca Sports series, *Boarder Patrol*, was a Canadian Children's Book Centre "Best Book for Kids and Teens" selection. She lives in Whitby, Ontario, with her husband, their daughter, a small gray cat and a large black dog. Both the cat and the dog hate to swim.

Author Website

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