



Heavy Freight

Sigmund Brouwer

Reading level: 4.2
978-1-4598-1475-2 PB

Book Summary

Fifteen-year-old Maxwell Stone has been surviving and thriving in the tough part of Vancouver by being smart and fast. But when a drug deal goes wrong, Max suddenly finds himself on the run from both the bad guys and the cops. Desperate to escape, Max impulsively decides to hop on a moving freight train. His first attempt to climb aboard fails, but at the last second a hand reaches down and pulls him in. Joseph has been riding the rails for years, and his tales inspire Max to take a journey to the last place he ever expected to go.

Prereading Idea

Ask students to discuss the connotations and denotations of the words in the title, *Heavy Freight*. Students should be able to conclude that *freight* might not mean goods and *heavy* might not be about weight.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- In chapter 1 the author compares a German shepherd police dog to a police officer through the eyes of Stone, a teen on the run. The author uses similes, personification, metaphors and other figures of speech to draw the comparison. Using this comparison as an example, ask students to write a comparison of two dissimilar items: a cat and a burglar, a young child and a ninety-year-old person and/or other ideas the students may have. Have students share their comparisons with a partner and post in the classroom.
- In today’s society, single-parent families are common, and the pressure and potential problems these families face are different than those faced by nuclear families. Ask students to work in small groups to investigate the statistics surrounding single-parent families and the issues and challenges that single parents and their children face. Students should also research resources available to assist single-parent families. Have each group use its research to create a brochure that could be used by parent-teacher organizations or other parenting groups to assist single-parent families.
- Instruct students to work with a partner to create a poem for two voices between any two of the characters in the book. Students may use a particular scene in the book or create a conversation that could have taken place. The piece should include lines that alternate between characters as well as some unison lines that pertain to both characters. Have students practice and present their poems to the class.

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

From the beginning, the reader can see that Max Stone has had a hard life. Ask students to use the information they glean from the book to choose a word that describes Stone’s personality and then create a timeline of events that demonstrates the patterns that lead up to the climax and ultimate conclusion. Each event should include a short explanation of the behavior as it relates to the character trait. Then ask students to assume the voice of Stone and use first-person point of view to write his “autobiography.” Have students share their autobiographies in small groups and post the writing and the timelines in the classroom.

Conflict

Stone and Nelson both experience internal and external conflicts, and their reactions to those conflicts move the story forward. Ask students to select either Stone or Nelson and list the internal and external conflicts that character faces, explaining how the character resolves them. Have students work in small groups to write a skit depicting one of the conflicts Stone and Nelson experience. Students may incorporate drama, exaggeration, humor, sarcasm or other elements to highlight the conflict. Have students perform their skits for the class.

Theme

The theme is the main idea of the story; it is not the subject of the work but rather an insight about life or human nature. Based on this definition of theme, ask students to write a one-sentence theme and find a quote that exemplifies the theme. Students can go to one of the following websites for quotes:

quotationspage.com
 brainyquote.com
 quotationsbook.com

Have students write their one-sentence theme and quote on 8 ½ x 11 poster board, with an illustration that depicts the author’s message, and display the themes in the classroom.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. In chapter 2, Stone says the dog was great protection, which was “ironic in a delicious way.” Explain what is ironic about the situation.
2. Why does Stone feel most alive when he is in danger (chapter 4)?
3. Stone has capsules of dry mustard powder that he takes in emergencies. How would dry mustard be beneficial to Stone?
4. How does Stone differentiate between pity and compassion?
5. In chapter 14 Nelson, or Train Dude, says, “Even more reason not to steal. Doing the right thing when it’s easy doesn’t prove anything.” How does Stone respond to this remark?
6. Stone doesn’t want to let raw emotion force him into a stupid decision (chapter 14). How does he apply his thoughts about decision making to his situation?
7. How does Nelson’s influence affect Stone? What text evidence can you cite to support your answer?
8. Why is Stone so angry about having to apologize and return the knife to the store? What makes him angrier?
9. How does Stone deal with Nelson’s silence and the orders he gives Stone?
10. When Stone finally meets his father, what realization does he have that makes him almost grateful the guy left him and his mother?
11. What valuable lessons does Joseph teach Stone?
12. What does Stone learn about Joseph from the Internet? Why doesn’t Stone ask Joseph about it?

Writer’s Craft**Strong Verbs**

Powerful verbs can help create an image in the reader’s mind. Ask students to find the examples below and then five other examples of powerful verbs in the novel. Afterward have students find five sentences in their own writing to rewrite using powerful verbs. Students can select their best revision and share their “before” and “after” versions of their writing with the class.

Slapped staccato (chapter 4)

Hand *clamped*...*yanked* upward and inward (chapter 4)

He *ambled*... (chapter 8)

Author Biography

Sigmund Brouwer has written dozens of books for both children and adults, including *Devil's Pass*, *The Soldier* and *Barracuda* from Orca's Seven series. He also visits schools to talk about Rock and Roll Literacy. Sigmund lives in Red Deer, Alberta. For more information, visit sigmundbrouwer.com.

orca soundings