



I Owe You One

Natalie Hyde

Interest level: ages 8-11

978-1-55469-414-3

136 pages

Consider the following question as you read *I Owe You One*:

How far would you go to repay someone for saving your life?

Story

According to his best friend, Zach, Wes owes a life debt to the old lady who saved his life. Wes isn't sure that Zach is right, but it doesn't help that Wes keeps hearing his dead father's voice saying things like, "A man pays his debts, Wes," and "A man always treats a woman with respect, Wes." But how does a guy go about paying back a life debt anyway? And what if it involves a transmission tower, an ice cream truck and a few sticks of dynamite?

Author

Natalie Hyde was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, and grew up in Galt (now Cambridge), Ontario, where she still lives. She spent most of her childhood collecting crickets, toads and tent caterpillars. The rest of the time she practiced being a genie. When that didn't work out she studied languages at the University of Waterloo. Natalie lives with her husband and four children in a house with too many stairs, which they share with a little leopard gecko and a cat that desperately wants to eat him. *I Owe You One* is Natalie's first book for Orca.

Author's Website

www.nataliehyde.com

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- **Focus:** *asking questions*
Wes can't believe that Mrs. Minton could ever have been young and daring and... cool! Have students create a set of questions for an older person in their life, and conduct (or film) an in-person interview to learn what that individual did for kicks when he or she was young. After the interview—which you may invite students to share with the class—have students complete a reflection, including their preconceived notions and how those notions changed as a result of the interview.
- **Focus:** *plot map*
In this story, a lot of characters work together to help each other achieve their goals. Invite students to work in small groups to create a story map or web that shows each person's connection to the other characters. Include a short description of how each relationship is mutually beneficial.
- **Focus:** *mythology*
When Mrs. Minton first rescues Wes, she says the Fates probably didn't mean for him to get into trouble with his mother. Ask students for their understanding of who the Fates were. Invite them to explore several of the books on Greek mythology in the Resources section at the end of this teacher guide. Lead the class in a discussion of how the belief in three Fates would have shaped the world of the ancient Greeks.
- **Focus:** *visualizing*
How much sensory detail can you find in the first paragraph of *I Owe You One*? Make a list of sights, smells, sounds and textures that come to mind as you read this passage. Explain how the use of sensory detail is a powerful way to start a story. How does visualizing a scene help to understand it better?
- **Focus:** *sensory detail*
Take a story that you've written, or one that you have recently read. Rewrite the beginning in a way that's similar to the author's opening for *I Owe You One*. Put your reader right into your character's shoes, and have that reader experience events using as many senses as you can.
- **Focus:** *vocabulary*
Have students compile a lexicon of words from the book. Here are a few to get started: *wheedling*, *pneumonia*, *bedridden*, *omen*, *integrity*, *begrudging*, *stagnant*. Have students add to their word lists as they go through the story, writing a definition beside each word. The definitions can be student-generated or taken from a print or online dictionary.
- **Focus:** *organizing information; creating lists*
When the boys are convincing Frank to hold up the cables in order to get good reception for the ski race, Wes reflects that Zach is a pretty smooth talker—and that maybe he would be a good fit with politics. Have students create a list of characteristics that they believe would be essential for a public figure (such as a politician) to have.

Social Studies

- **Focus:** *government—social support*
Mrs. Minton lives on a fixed income—and at least part of that income comes from the government. What sorts of social supports exist for elderly people? Break students into small groups. Have each group research government and community group supports that are in place for our aged population. Include income support, food banks and food delivery programs, prorated fees for seniors (at rec centers, for example), health care delivery, etc. As a class, discuss the importance of social services for older people as well as for people at all ages. How would our world look if these supports weren't in place?
- **Focus:** *identity, society and culture*
It was a big deal when the Winter Olympics were held in Vancouver in 2010. Did your students hear about the loonie-at-center-ice story? What do they remember of it? Read about it. Discuss the power of superstition and belief in helping us achieve our goals.
- **Focus:** *map skills*
On a whiteboard, project a map of eastern North America. Have students chart, trace or map Frank's journey to Florida. How much distance does he cover? As a math extension, have students calculate the amount of gas that the truck would use (assume twelve miles per gallon). How much would this cost?

Math

- **Focus:** *budgeting*
Mrs. Minton lives on a fixed income. She knows what she needs to buy in a given month—and she knows how much money she has to pay for it all. Have students brainstorm a list of things they think a senior citizen would need on a monthly basis—including rent/mortgage, utilities, clothes, food, recreation and everything else. As a class, research the average costs of these items. Then, working in pairs, have students create a reasonable monthly budget for a senior citizen. How does this budget differ from, say, that of a mother with four children to support? A university student? Themselves?

Science

- **Focus:** *properties of matter*
Wes realizes that they're facing a problem in how to transport the snow down to Florida. It can't travel in a cooler, because it will melt too fast—and snow melts even faster than ice. Have students conduct an experiment where they compare the melting times for equal masses of snow and solid ice. Discuss why the two types of frozen water differ in their melting times.

Connecting to the Text

1. **Focus:** *sensory detail; showing vs telling*

In chapter 2, Wes and Zach are headed across a farmer's field in search of an excellent dirt-biking hill. Here's a sentence describing the action: "Zach stopped his bike to let me catch up. I was glad he did. My teeth were aching from going over all the ruts, and I was sweating. I was glad I hadn't worn my jacket." How do these words create a clear picture of what Wes is feeling? Have students find other examples of where Hyde 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."

2. **Focus:** *writing great dialogue*

Here's a section of dialogue from chapter 2 of *I Owe You One*:

"How steep do you think it is?" I asked Zach, as I rode my bike through the old gate that he held open for me.

"It's like a wall! Straight up!"

"Remind me again why we're going across—umpfb—Mr. Delany's empty field,—ouch— on our bikes?"

"You want—ow—to try it out, don't you?"

Discuss with students how the characters' interjections of "umpfb" and "ow" help the reader to understand what the boys are experiencing as they bike through the farmer's field. Invite them to create a few lines of dialogue where two characters are having a conversation while rafting down a river, riding on snowmobiles, running a race, etc.

3. **Focus:** *character comparison*

On a Venn diagram, have students compare Wes and Mrs. Minton. Diagrams should be very detailed, as there is plenty of information about both characters in the book; they should include personality traits, actions that support those personality traits, beliefs and misconceptions, and physical characteristics.

4. **Focus:** *metaphors*

A metaphor is a way of writing about something by making it similar—or comparing it—to something else. For example, in chapter 4, when Wes and Mrs. Minton are talking about her pending hip surgery, her face "clouded over." We all know faces can't really cloud, yet the metaphor works to show Mrs. Minton's feelings at possibly missing her granddaughter's ski race. Challenge students to find other metaphors in *I Owe You One*. There are lots!

5. **Focus:** *figures of speech*

When Wes introduces the reader to Daryl, he says the guy is "a few bricks short of a load." 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.

6. **Focus:** *story sequence*
There are a number of interconnected events in *I Owe You One*. Similar to a cause and effect sequence, invite students to create an “if-then” pattern for the events in this story. They may choose to do it as a web on chart paper, or with webbing software, or as an organized tree. This is an activity that may take a bit of thinking and experimenting to get right; allow them to work with a partner or in a small group.
7. **Focus:** *story map*
Have students create a story map or timeline to show the way events unfold in *I Owe You One*. Ask them to illustrate their maps with images from the story that have particular meaning for them.
8. **Focus:** *writing with strong verbs*
Stories are more interesting when they're told using vivid language that creates strong images in the reader's mind. Some of the most powerful words are verbs. Strong verbs can take a so-so piece of writing and really make it sing. Here's an example from chapter 1 of *I Owe You One*: “My feet jerked out from under me and I landed—splat!—in the mud and began sliding head first down the slippery bank. Just before my face hit the water my right hand grabbed a root and I whipped around, almost dislocating my shoulder.” Share this passage with students, either on the board or on an overhead, and have them identify the strong verbs. Invite one or two students to come up and replace the strong verbs with weak or common verbs. Read it again. Which is more effective? Task students to find a drab piece of writing—preferably from a book they have read or are currently reading—and spice it up a bit by substituting strong verbs for boring ones. Share these with the class.
9. **Focus:** *writing in different styles*
Wes likes playing video games like *Quinlan's Quest*, *The Firewalker's Fury* and *Star Lynx*. In order to get to the next level in a video game, you must pass through a specific series of steps. Have students create a list of “steps” or “instructions” for one of their favorite activities. It could be baking cookies, heading to the beach, or even playing a video game of their own choosing. Instructions should be clear, complete, and easily executed by the reader. Peer-editing will help students spot any holes in their thinking!

Connecting to the Students

Discussion questions

Focus: *constructing, monitoring and confirming meaning*

1. Wes hates being called Wesley. Is there a particular name you detest being called, or a particular way it's said that bugs you? If so, why does it bother you?
2. What is your opinion of Mrs. Minton? Did it change and grow as the story unfolded?
3. Wes is tempted to lie to Zach when his friend catches him coming out of Mrs. Minton's house, but he ends up opting not to—primarily because he's a bad liar. Give three reasons why honesty is always the best policy.

4. In chapter 2, Zach wants to show Wes the dirt hill. They don't bother replacing the railing on the fence as they go through the farmer's field, even though Wes knows better. Is he making the right choice in leaving the rails off? Why is it sometimes so difficult to do the right thing when you're with friends?
5. Wes isn't sure he'll ever be as strong or honorable as his own father. Draw and describe an adult you admire. Why do you admire this person?
6. Make a list of the wise sayings that Wes's dad imparted to him before he died. Why are these good words to live by? What other adages would you add to the list?
7. Wes is a deal-maker. He promises snow to a guy in Florida, an arrowhead to a guy in town, a fixed transmission tower to an old lady...and the list goes on. How does making all these deals help him achieve his ends? Do you know any deal-makers who are similarly successful because of their willingness to help other people?
8. Wes sacrifices his comic book in order to get the transmission tower working for Mrs. Minton. Sacrifice is hard, especially big ones like this. How is it good? Do we grow through sacrificing things that mean a lot to us?

Text-to-self connections

1. In the beginning of the book, we see how important Wes's hat is to him. Important enough that he risks his safety to get it back. Do you have a special item that you would go to great lengths to protect? How did this item come into your life? Why is it meaningful to you?
2. You've heard the quote "Don't judge a book by its cover." How does this apply to Wes? How has it come into play in your own life? Explain.
3. Early in the story, Wes is holding out for the day he can buy a 250cc Hummer dirt bike. He's waiting until his comic becomes valuable enough to sell, and then he'll buy his toy. Do you have something that you're burning to acquire in the same way? How long will you have to wait until you can get it? Why is it so important to you?
4. When Mrs. Delaney catches the boys—and the horses—in the mud, she shakes her head and says to Wes that his father would have been very disappointed if he could see his son now. Write about a meaningful adult in your life. Why is that person's opinion of you important?
5. Do you owe anyone a life debt? Have you ever helped anyone else, or do you know of someone who has saved another person's life? Explain.
6. Wes is determined to help Mrs. Minton, even though it turns out to be an onerous task. But through it all, he realizes that good things come when you spend the time and energy to boost other people. Write about a time when you helped someone else. What good things came to you as a result?
7. Wes and Zach take a big chance when they invite Daryl to blow up the foundation of Mr. Elliot's old barn, but it works out perfectly for everyone. Write about a time when you took a significant risk that you weren't certain about—and had it come out well.

Text-to-text connections

1. Frank is a hermit who lives to fix things that break. Where else have you encountered hermits in literature? Write the names of those stories, and a couple lines about each hermit character. Did anything happen to make those characters change their ways?
2. When Wes realizes he needs to forfeit his comic to Frank in order to pay for the snow run to Florida, he's sad. But then he hears his father's words: *People are more important than things, Wes*—and he decides to do it. Write about another book you've read where a character makes a similarly difficult decision based on this truth.

Text-to-world connections

1. We see throughout the story that Mrs. Minton is squarely in Wes's corner. Why is it important to young people to have adults rooting for them—to have adults who believe in them?
2. The coach of the Chiefs says his team has a defeatist attitude. They're great—but they don't believe in themselves, and for that reason, they won't ever win. How is this true? Can you think of an example from the real world where you have seen this truism playing out?

Author's Note

Dear readers,

I grew up listening to stories about my father's childhood on Bell Island, Newfoundland, where he and his friends had wild and crazy adventures. It was a close-knit community where everyone knew everyone else and that made it hard, if not impossible, to get away with anything. So, my father usually ended up getting caught and having to repay his friends, relatives or neighbors for his mischief.

This was the kind of place I imagined Six Roads to be, a small town where two boys like Wes and Zach could have the freedom to roam and explore, but if anything happened, someone, somewhere in town would notice. I had fun letting them get into all kinds of scrapes as they figure out that freedom comes with responsibilities, too.

The little bits of wisdom on what makes “a man” that Wes remembers his dad telling him come from the sayings that I hear my husband pass on to our own children. He tells me that he can still remember his father and grandfather telling him the same things. “A man works smarter, not harder” was the one my husband remembered when he had trouble digging the postholes for our deck...so he invented his own digging tool!

I think I'd like living in Six Roads, even with Daryl constantly blowing things up and Mr. Elliot on a rampage. It would be fun to know someone with an interesting background like Mrs. Minton or to shop in a store like Lee's where I would find mustache combs next to garbanzo beans.

That's the best part about being a writer and a reader. We get to spend some time with new people in new places every time we turn a page or scroll down a screen.

I hope you enjoy your time in Six Roads!

Sincerely,
Natalie

Resources

Books

Fiction

- Adler, C.S. *Daddy's Climbing Tree*
Boniface, William. *The Extraordinary Adventures of Ordinary Boy*
Korman, Gordon. *Our Man Weston*
—*Swindle*
—*The Zucchini Warriors*
Lorenzen, Karin. *Lanky Longlegs*
Martin, Anne M. *With You And Without You*
Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*
Paulsen, Gary. *Lawn Boy*
Rock, Gail. *House Without a Christmas Tree*
Stevenson, Robin. *Liars and Fools*
Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Nonfiction

- Amery, Heather. *Greek Myths for Young Children* (Usborne)
Campbell, Guy. *The Boys' Summer Book*
D'Aulaire, Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire. *D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*
Evslin, Bernard. *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths*
Iggulden, Conn. *The Dangerous Book for Boys*
LeShan, Eda. *Learning to Say Good-Bye: When A Parent Dies*
MacDonald, Guy and Dominique Enright. *The Boys' Book: How to Be the Best at Everything*
Osborne, Mary Pope and Troy Howell. *Favorite Greek Myths*
Stalfelt, Pernilla. *The Death Book*

Online

Life Debts

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/IOweYouMyLife>

Current comic book price guide

www.comicspriceguide.com

The Canadian Alpine Ski site

<http://canski.org>

How Stuff Works: digital vs analog television

<http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/dtv2.htm>

The Junior Red Riders Dirt Bike Club

www.jrr.honda.ca/jrr-templating