



Medusa's Scream

Melanie Jackson

Reading level: 3.2

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Book Summary

Medusa's Scream is a thrill ride that hurtles a train through an out-of-service gold mine in the Fraser Valley. Chase can't believe his luck when he lands a summer job in the food truck outside the ride's entrance. But then he notices strange things happening at the old mine. Chase starts to piece things together, and soon a villain even scarier than the snake-headed Medusa of myth threatens his life.

Author Biography

Melanie Jackson is the author of several Orca Currents titles, including *Death Drop* and *High Wire*. She enjoys hiking, piano and English/Scottish history—and continually learning from the kids she works with as a writing mentor for the Vancouver School Board. Melanie also teaches a mystery unit to grades eight and nine at two secondary schools in Vancouver and is a business writer/editor as well. She lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Novel Study

To engage students with the characters and themes in *Medusa's Scream*, use the following as novel study and paragraph-writing exercises:

1. Make a list of three words/phrases used to describe a character or figure (Chase, Lars, Sophie, Klopper, Auntie, the cat, the ride, food truck). Then write a descriptive paragraph that connects two characters. Examples to get students started:

Chase: *restless, doesn't obey rules well, reputation for acting out, works hard, loyal*

Karl Klopper: *gaunt old man, scowling, murderous look, rages, leathery face*

Sophie: *quiet, serious type, into studying, melting force brown eyes*

- ♦ Chase is a restless guy. He enjoys cooking pies because it's fun and reminds him of his mom. His principal says he isn't responsible enough for a summer job, but...
 - ♦ Sophie is more serious and steady. She likes studying. It might take some time for her to forgive Chase because...
2. As you're reading, make note of *aha* moments—instances where questions or unknowns are answered/revealed. Did you predict this outcome, or did it come as a surprise? For example, in chapter 10:
 - ♦ Chase discovers more under the ride than “special-effects props and train tracks.”
 - ♦ Chase gets why Lars stayed so pale in a “summer of nonstop sun.”
 - ♦ Chase sees jars of marmalade, all blood orange, and understands why they weren't for sale.

The Writer's Craft

1. *Medusa's Scream* presents an opportunity to explore the use of adjectives. Examples of different kinds of adjectives are listed below. After sharing each, invite students to find more examples in the novel. How do they lend meaning (and humor) to our reading?

- ♦ Hyphenated: *sweet-faced auntie* and *tornado-like sneeze* (two words are put together to form one adjective that precedes the noun)
- ♦ Ending in *y*: *slithery scalp*, *craggy mine walls*
- ♦ Ending in *ing*: *piercing whistle*, *speeding train*

2. Invite students to add descriptive adjectives to these sentences (be creative and silly!).
Chase makes _____ pies. (e.g., melt-in-your-mouth, yummy, enticing)
Medusa's Scream is a _____ ride. (e.g., white-knuckle, scary, thrilling)
Sneeze Machine is a _____ cat. (e.g., now-safe-at-home, snooping, bushy)
3. Foreshadowing is a literary device the writer uses to hint at things that may come later. Ask students to find their own examples of foreshadowing or discuss the following examples. How does foreshadowing engage readers?
 - ♦ In chapter 1, the boy who jumped from the still-moving train said to Chase, “The cat knows too much.” That seems strange. Did this leave you curious?
 - ♦ In chapter 3, Chase talked about Pete the Gold Panner's shop, and he said, “Like there would ever be any gold nuggets.” Did you wonder if there actually *is* gold?

4. Similes expand our understanding of situations and characters. Because they use comparisons, they usually include the words *like* or *as*. Review the following examples or invite students to find more similes in the novel. Identify the connection being made and how it lends meaning (for example, whistle + shrieking noise = anger, scary, powerful):
- ◆ Ch. 1: The whistle shrieked at me now like an accusation.
 - ◆ Ch. 8: ...the mine was shabby gray, the tracks jutting across its dirt floor like scars.
 - ◆ Ch. 11: It looked like we'd had an attack of volcanic ash.

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Discussion and Exploration

1. Chase describes himself as the “restless type.” With this, he appears to be in tune with his own reactions and what his body needs.
 - ◆ Find examples of Chase feeling restless, nervous or tense. What does he do to cope (and bring himself to equilibrium)? *Prompt:* He does cartwheels, jumping jacks, running on the spot, etc. How does Chase feel afterward?
 - ◆ Restlessness and emotions can feel overwhelming. When that happens, what helps you feel grounded? *Ideas:* yoga, running, working out, journaling, music, gaming, reading, movies, hanging out with friends. Would Chase's techniques work for you?
2. In chapter 7, Chase describes how easy it is to remember words in a recipe, and how difficult it is to remember dates and names in history class. He often feels restless, and sitting for long periods is uncomfortable—Chase likes to keep moving! Invite students to research different learning styles and then guess Chase's.
 - ◆ *Option:* Introduce the kinesthetic learning style, and ask students to find examples of Chase demonstrating this in the novel (thrill rides, restlessness, coping by exercising, enjoying the textures, smells and ingredient combinations in cooking).

Connecting to the Curriculum

Service Projects

Klopper says he's going to take the cat to the SPCA, but Chase knows better. He also knows cats need water, food and safety. Ask your local humane society or SPCA to visit your class to talk about caring for animals and pets. See if they need donations of such items as blankets, litter and food. Challenge students to organize a campaign to gather donations. They may present donations to the humane society/SPCA rep or visit a shelter.

History, Mythology

The Medusa's Scream thrill ride is based on Medusa from Greek mythology. Medusa had venomous snakes instead of hair on her head, and anyone who looked at her turned to stone. Perseus, a Greek hero, killed Medusa and used her still-powerful head to turn others to stone. Ask students to find out more about Medusa.

- Medusa didn't always have snakes for hair or the unfortunate ability to turn others to stone. She got these as a punishment. Who punished her, and why?
- How did Perseus protect himself from turning to stone?

- After Perseus cut off Medusa's head, what came out?
- Find an example of Medusa in popular culture. (Ideas: *Dungeons and Dragons*, Wonder Woman, the TV show *Once Upon a Time* and Disney's *Hercules*)

Geography

1. Chase, Lars and Sophie live in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, Canada, the home of the 1858 gold rush. As a research project, ask students to find out more about the gold rush along the Fraser River. Encourage students to make connections to the novel.
2. A fine teaching resource is the Government of British Columbia's *The Rush to BC*, noted in Web Resources below; see activities 4–6 on pages 43–64.

Food Sciences

Chase is great at making pies. He says pies are an all-in-one meal, and he enjoys preparing them: "I liked trying out ingredients, seeing how they worked with each other. It was like being a combination of artist and mad scientist." Ideas for students to explore:

- Chase mentions Canada's Food Guide, which is similar to Choose MyPlate in the United States. Both guides provide recommendations for healthy food choices, portion size and number of servings per day. Log your diet for one day and then compare your meals to the recommendations in one of the guides. How did you do? How could you do even better?
- Find a recipe for one of the pies Chase makes. Note the special way recipes are written, with listed ingredients first, followed by clear, step-by-step instructions. Ask students to write recipes for dishes they enjoy and then share them with the class/group.
- When it comes to cooking and baking, what part is art and what part is science?

Orca Currents with Similar Themes

Students who enjoyed *Medusa's Scream*, with its thrill ride, mystery and reference to mythology, will enjoy *Death Drop*, also by **Melanie Jackson**. Zeke wants to experience a new thrill ride called Death Drop, which is an elevator that falls faster than gravity. Its theme is based on the story of Persephone, who tumbled into the underworld. Zeke tumbles into a frightening situation himself after he discovers a little girl who is lost. He takes her to the Death Drop manager's office. Later, when he tries to find out what happened to her, staff at the ride say they never saw her. To find the missing girl, Zeke must navigate a devilish plot that includes Dante Gabriel Rossetti's famous painting *Proserpine*, a fiery drop into flames, and an angry coach.

Web Resources

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/teach/teaching-tools/history
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html> <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fraser-river-gold-rush/>