



Off the Grid

Lesley Choyce

Reading level: 4.0

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Book Summary

Cody and his parents lived in the wilderness with little connection to the outside world: no cell phones, no Internet, no outside news. Their lives were simple and relaxed—until Cody’s dad was diagnosed with cancer. In order to save his life, Cody and his family move to the city where Cody feels lost and alone in a world he doesn’t understand. He makes two friends but, through no fault of his own, he attracts the attention of bullies as well. In standing up to them, he fights and gets in trouble with the police. Jail is not an option for Cody, so he must return to his home in the wilderness rather than risk a jail sentence in the city.

Prereading Idea

Ask students what the term “off the grid” means. After defining the term, ask students what the magnitude of being “off the grid” would mean in today’s society. Have students reflect and write whether or not they would like to live “off the grid.”

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- In chapter 1, Cody says, “I traded the wilderness for the city.” He then tells the reader what he gained and lost by moving to the city. Ask students to create a multi-media presentation illustrating the differences in Cody’s life in the wilderness and his life in the city. Create displays around the classroom and have students from other classes visit each of the multi-media displays.
- Austin and his goons bully DeMarco because he is gay, and Cody responds with violence (chapter 5). In small groups ask students to discuss more appropriate ways to handle bullying, and to research anti-bullying programs available in schools. Ask each group to select a program that is currently available in various locations or to write a new program to address the bullying issues at their school. Then ask students to write a proposal to present to their school administrators outlining the steps necessary to implement the anti-bullying program at their school.

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

Thoughtfully crafted stories have well-developed conflicts, most of which fall into one of the following categories: man against man, man against nature, or man against self. *Off the Grid* has all three of these types of conflict. As a class, ask students to create a chart of events and situations from the book representing each of these three types of conflict. Then ask students to choose one specific conflict from the book and to prepare a book jacket with a drawing of the conflict and a short paragraph describing the conflict and its resolution.

Characterization

Ask students to form small groups and to create a poster-sized graphic organizer (such as a web or tree map) to organize what they know about Cody’s character: his personality, his ambitions, his faults, his relationships, and his moral character. Each person in the group can take one or more parts of the graphic organizer to flesh out and for which to find textual evidence from the novel to illustrate his/her point-of-view about Cody. Have students use Post-its or other means to attach their evidence directly to the graphic organizer. Display posters in a gallery walk for the class.

Theme

Cody’s relationship with his friends and family are key elements of this novel. Ask students working in small groups to write a thematic statement for the book *Off the Grid*, using support from the book. Then have each student create a found poem using lines/phrases from the book and the thematic statement. Have students present their poems to the class.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. In chapter 1, Alexis asks Cody if he is autistic and then calls him “Moonboy.” What characteristics does Cody display that would make Alexis think he might be strange? What is her reaction when Cody tells her about his home?
2. In what way does Mr. Costanzo help Cody on the first day of school? Why does Cody trust Mr. Costanzo?
3. How does DeMarco help Cody adjust? What is Cody’s reaction to the knowledge that DeMarco is gay? How does DeMarco being gay ultimately affect Cody?
4. Cody finds himself lost in the city. Why is being lost in the city different from being lost in the woods? How does Cody’s training eventually help him find his way through the city? What advice does Cody’s father give him that helps Cody understand the city better?
5. Both Earnest and Cody need help out of a negative situation. How do they help each other?
6. Why does Cody have trouble with the police? How do his parents react to the situation?
7. Why does Cody blame himself for his father’s cancer?
8. How do Alexis and DeMarco prove their friendship to Cody? How does Cody demonstrate his friendship for Earnest?
9. Cody says the best lesson his parents taught him was to always be true to himself (chapter 9). How does this lesson help Cody make tough decisions and be a good friend and son?
10. What does Cody learn about Austin that helps him understand Austin’s actions? How does the knowledge of their backgrounds bring a change in their relationship?

Writer’s Craft

Dialogue

The author uses dialogue to convey information, develop character, build story background, give readers information, and move the plot forward. Working in small groups, ask students to select a section of dialogue. As a group, have students break down the author’s use of dialogue. Students should discuss the types of information the author conveyed, the decisions he made about what to include and what to leave out, the reasons why he may have chosen dialogue to convey this information, and stylistic decisions made in the crafting of the dialogue. Have each group share highlights of their dialogue discussion with the entire group.

Author Biography

Lesley Choyce teaches part-time at Dalhousie University, hosts a nationally-syndicated TV talk show in Halifax, runs Pottersfield Press and has written over eighty adult and young adult books, including science fiction, fantasy, poetry and nonfiction. He is a writer, publisher, educator, musician and television host. He surfs year-round

and has worked as a rehab counselor, a freight hauler, a corn farmer, a janitor, a journalist, a lead guitarist, a newspaper boy and a well-digger. He lives in a 200-year-old farm house at Lawrencetown Beach overlooking the ocean. He says, "I decided to be a writer with high hopes that it would allow me to avoid work. When writing turned out to be work as well as fun, I stuck with it anyway."

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