



Off the Rim

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Reading level: 3.1

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AR Quiz # 173544

Book Summary

Dylan's wish comes true when Coach Scott names him to the starting lineup for the Mountview High Hunters' first game of the playoffs. But just when he should be concentrating on basketball, Dylan becomes the target of some off-court aggression. As he's driving his girlfriend Jenna home one night, a black pickup truck tries to run them off the road. The police call it an accident. But even as Dylan tries to put it behind him, he has a sense of impending danger that he can't shake. When Jenna starts receiving threats from an anonymous cyberbully telling her to "keep quiet," Dylan becomes seriously concerned about her safety. Jenna has no idea what the cyberbully thinks she knows. But Dylan will have to help her figure it out fast if they're ever going to feel safe again.

Prereading Ideas

- Talk about the importance of teamwork in sports.
- How do you think you would deal with someone threatening you, if you didn't even know who they were...or what they wanted?
- Have you ever been helped by an "unlikely hero"?

Connecting to the Text

Plot

- Teach students about *plot elements* (see web link in **Resources**, below). These include exposition, rising action, conflicts, climax, falling action and resolution. Working in pairs, have students map out the plot using these elements to guide their writing. Have each pair create a poster or slide show of the plot elements of *Off the Rim*.
- Discuss with students the idea of a book's *premise*. The premise is a one-sentence summary of the main idea of the story. In movies, we call it a *log line*. It's a statement of what happens to the characters as a result of the actions in the story. It's a bit different than plot, which is a listing of the events in the story. It takes a bit of practice to figure out the premise of a story. You might want to start by discussing the premise of some familiar stories, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Toy Story* or *Cinderella*. Divide students into pairs and see whether they can develop a clear statement of the premise of *Off the Rim*.
 - ◆ Make copies of the following list or share it on your screen. Discuss with students some of the things that make a good story:
 - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
 - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
 - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading
 - ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems
 - ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there
 - ◆ a variety of settings
 - ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
 - ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
 - ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve

Using these criteria, have students write a critical review of *Off the Rim*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment.

Character

- Dylan describes Jenna in chapter 2, explaining that she has quirks like not eating anything with lumps in it and needing to leave a clean table behind when she leaves a fast-food restaurant. Discuss with students the importance of creating layered, believable characters. Can they think of other richly rendered characters from different books and/or movies?
- Have students draw a character map of Dylan that details his personality characteristics, his fears, his weaknesses and his physical traits. Use this as a springboard to teach students how to write a full character analysis (see web link in **Resources**, below).

- During the chase scene of chapter 12, Dylan outruns and outwits the driver of the black truck. Have students rewrite the scene from Jenna's point of view. Share these rewrites. Does the fear become more palpable in Jenna's eyes because she's not in control of the car?

Connecting to the Curriculum

English

- In chapter 3, Dylan explains how he ends up grounded the day after the black truck nearly runs him off the road. *My dad pulled the parent card and made me stay home the next day.* But adults don't really have a deck of cards that indicate their different roles, do they? This is what's known as a "figure of speech." It's like saying *it's raining cats and dogs* or *I'm so hungry I could eat a horse*. Team students up and have them look for other figures of speech in the book. Then ask them to brainstorm a list of figures of speech they have come across, either in life or in the books they've read. Share these—and their meanings—with the class.
- A simile is a comparison, usually using the words *like* or *as*. A good simile conjures an image in the reader's mind. Here's an example of a simile from *Off the Rim*:

My stomach was wound as tight as a rubber band as I took my position on the court.
- What makes similes so effective? Have students find a couple others in the text, and then create five similes of their own. Can they come up with a funny one?
- In a mystery, a red herring heightens suspense and adds challenges to the mystery by misleading the reader—or the detective. Have students go back through *Off the Rim* and make a list of red herrings. Which one was particularly effective?

Math

Dylan bought his Honda Civic using money he earned working at McDonald's. Using the table created for entry-level wages (see *Health/Personal Planning*, below), have students calculate the average number of hours they would have to work in order to purchase a car of reasonable vintage and condition. Have them compare the cost of

- a) purchasing, insuring, repairing and fueling a car
- b) purchasing and maintaining a bike
- c) using public transit.

Discuss the relative benefits of each method of transport.

Science

- Have students explore the body's skeletal and muscular systems. What role do ligaments play in mobility? Use the websites under **Resources**.
- Dylan talks about the fight-or-flight response when he and Jenna flee Jesse Derby at the Marshalls' place. Have students learn about the physiological processes involved in this acute stress reaction. This can be a jigsaw learning activity, where one group

learns about the physical arousal mechanisms; another group learns about the way constant fight-or-flight can compromise health; and a third learns strategies for managing stress in a healthy way. Each member of these groups can then partner with a member from the remaining two groups so that each group of three has an “expert” in every area.

Health/Personal Planning

- In terms of career choices, what is involved in professional coaching? Have students investigate several coaches in a sport of their choice and chart their trajectory into professional sports. Display the information on a timeline.
- Have students create a table listing the starting wages at jobs for which they could qualify. For example, Dylan works at McDonalds. What do babysitters make? Fast-food restaurant employees? Swim instructors? Retail clerks? Rec center employees?
- In chapter 4, when Noah Walker first learns he is to be coached by Jenna and Dylan together, he resists, saying, “I don’t need it getting around school that I’m being coached by a girl.” Have students create a brainstorming map about the biases evident in Noah’s reaction. What are the biases? How do these biases affect girls? How do they shape the way girls are raised? How do these biases affect boys, and their expectations of girls and women? How are girls and women treated in society as a result of these biases? What can we do to change things for the better?
- Cyberbullying, threats and stalking—what’s the difference? Divide students into groups to talk about it. Come together as a class and have students share their thinking. What will make cyberbullying go away?
- In chapter 8, Dylan stresses out when Jenna doesn’t respond immediately to his text on the day she doesn’t come to school. How does texting sometimes ease our minds, and at other times create stress?

Physical Education

Challenge students to describe the “home advantage” phenomenon in a creative way, either through a poem, a song, a short video, animation, or a graphic representation. Share these with the class.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. When Dylan makes a technical error and loses the ball to the other team in the game that will qualify his team for the playoffs (chapter 1), he realizes he doesn’t have time to dwell on it but must instead pay attention to the game that’s still happening all around him. How difficult is it to keep your mind on a task when you are worried about having made a mistake, or possibly making a mistake? What do you understand about mindfulness, or keeping your mind on exactly what’s happening, right now in this moment?
2. Dylan reflects in chapter 2 that in the year that he has been dating Jenna, he hasn’t yet learned to tell the difference between when she is joking and when she is being serious. What’s it like hanging out with someone like that?

3. When the basketball team is hanging out at Jo's Diner after school one day, Jenna observes that Noah Walker plays badly because he *thinks* he's bad at the game (ch. 2). Talk about how our confidence shapes and affects our performance.
4. Dylan is a strong basketball player who takes Noah under his wing and helps him improve his game (ch. 2). There are many people in the world who do this kind of thing, mentoring younger or less experienced people in how to do their job or sport better. How have you been a mentor? Has anyone mentored you?
5. The students like hanging out at Jo's Diner after games and after school. Have you got a special place you like to hang out? What makes it such a good spot?
6. When Noah and Dylan hack into Nick Smith's Facebook account, they find out where he lives and what he does for a living. Explain why Dylan's description of Nick Smith as "sleazy enough to be a car salesman" is an example of stereotyping (ch. 9). How are stereotypes sometimes true? When are they misleading or unfair?
7. Dylan makes a decision not to tell Jenna that Nick Smith is the man who has been stalking her. He reasons that it won't change what's actually happening, anyway, so why worry her with the name? Do you agree or disagree?
8. When Dylan drives out to Jenna's house in the country, he doubts she is going to want to live way out there "in the sticks" for the rest of her life (ch. 11). What are the advantages and disadvantages to living in the country?
9. What have you heard about Sasquatch?

Author's note

Dear Reader,

The idea for *Off the Rim* came while traveling by car to Melbourne one summer. I knew I wanted to write about basketball; it was something my girls had been involved in for years. But Dylan and Jenna waited for that long day of driving across the Hay Plains to come into being. I pictured them driving as well, not across the barren landscape before me, but along a cold dark mountain road, a common enough thing in the Northwest, yet filled with potential dangers nonetheless.

As for the mystery, cyberbullying is a real threat to a lot of teens in this technological age where it is the rare high school student who does not own a smartphone and have access to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and the myriad of other social media apps available. And with the wide-sweeping and permanent nature of the Internet, where blogs, posts, tweets and photos are instantaneously shared across the globe, the potential for opening yourself up to embarrassment, ridicule, humiliation, or in Jenna's case, threats, is huge. One wrong picture, often innocently posted, can be devastating. It was worth writing about, and something I hope readers will identify with.

Sonya Spreen Bates

Author Biography

Sonya Spreen Bates is a Canadian writer living in Australia. As a child, when she wasn't riding horses, she loved to read, daydream and scribble down short stories that she never dared to show anyone. She dreamed of traveling to Australia, but never imagined she'd be living there one day. Sonya obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Linguistics from the University of Victoria and a Master's degree in Speech Pathology from Dalhousie University. She has spent many years working with children with communication disorders, both in Canada and Australia, and often writes her own stories to use in therapy. For more information, please visit <http://sonyaspreenbates.wordpress.com>.

Resources

Basketball

<http://bleacherreport.com/nba>
www.hoopshype.com
www.RealGM.com
www.nbadraft.net
www.eskimo.com/~pbender

The Human Body (skeletal and muscular systems)

http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/body_basics/bones_muscles_joints.html
<http://kidshealth.org/kid/htbw/bones.html>
<http://kidshealth.org/kid/htbw/SSmovie.html>
www.neok12.com/Skeletal-System.htm

Character Analysis

http://high-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/teach_the_character_analysis_essay

Plot Elements

http://middle-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/plot_element_lesson

Writing Book Reviews

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/bookrev/index.htm>

Books

Fiction

Alexander, Kwame. *The Crossover*.
 Brouwer, Sigmund. *Titan Clash*.
 Jaimet, Kate. *Slam Dunk*.
 Jordan, Deloris and Roslyn M. Jordan. *Salt in his Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream*.

Lupica, Mike. *Travel Team*.

—*Long Shot*

—*Summer Ball*

—*True Legend*

Mack, W.C. *Athlete vs. Mathlete*.

Rud, Jeff. *Crossover*.

Schaller, Bob. *The Everything Kids' Basketball Book*.

Soto, Gary. *Taking Sides*.

Walters, Eric. *The Nick and Kia Basketball Series*.

—*Laggan Lard Butts*.

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