



Outback

Robin Stevenson

Reading level: 3.0

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AR Quiz # 143259

Book Summary

After Jayden's girlfriend breaks up with him, he spends his days isolated in his room, sad and depressed. So when his uncle Mel invites him to Australia, Jayden welcomes the diversion and agrees to make the trip. Upon his arrival in Australia, he meets his uncle's assistant, Natalie, and quickly learns they are all travelling into the outback on an expedition. Jayden is up for the unexpected adventure, but his uncle's complete disregard for safety could cost Jayden and Nat their lives.

Prereading Ideas

The Australian Outback is untamed and harsh, and Jayden's descriptions of the area intricately reveal the essence of the Outback. Show students the following video of the drive through the Canning Stock Route:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bt9UzIrAWkU

After students watch the video, ask them to consider and share the dangers an expedition of three people in one vehicle might experience in such an environment.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Divide students into small groups and ask them to track and display the expedition from Perth to Lake Disappointment. At each stop have students include background information on that locale that they find on the Internet and write a brief description of the Outback events that occurred in that location. Encourage students to be creative in their display of the route and information, and have students present the expedition's trek to the class.
- When Jayden's grandfather died, Mel called Jayden's mom and introduced himself as her half-brother. Because of technological and communication advances, finding lost or unknown relatives is becoming more and more commonplace. Even Oprah has discovered that she had a sister she never knew about. Ask students to investigate stories about missing or unknown relatives and to generate a list of the technology used to aid in the search. Then ask students to write a short story using the information they gathered, focusing on the human emotions and conflicts that inevitably result from learning of the existence of unknown relatives. The students' stories can then be bound together in a book and placed in the school library.

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

Jayden has always thought his uncle had some weird ways about him, but Nat blatantly accuses Mel of being crazy. In groups, ask students to make a list of what they know about Mel based on what Jayden and Nat have revealed about him in the story as well as Mel's own actions. Based on their list and using words and phrases from the book, ask students to write a poem about Mel. Students should start with an overriding character trait word such as *insane*, *paranoid*, *risk-taker* or others. All words, phrases and evidence from the story should support their choice of character trait. Students can share their poems with the class and post around the room.

Conflict

Man vs. nature is a common conflict, and from the outset of the expedition, Mel, Jayden and Nat know their biggest challenge will be the terrain and the climate. Man vs. man is also a major conflict in the novel because of Mel's paranoia. Have students work with a partner to create a word and picture collage poster to demonstrate the two types of conflict in the novel and possible connections between the two. Display the posters in the classroom.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Jayden describes his attitude toward school in chapter 1. How could he have been more successful in school? What could teachers have done to help him change his attitude?
2. Why is Jayden's mother worried and concerned for him? Why is "the weight of her worry" more than Jayden can take? What action does he take to help alleviate her worry? How is Jayden's action ironic?
3. Nat knows full well the dangers of the expedition, so why does she agree to go with Mel?
4. At what point does Nat accept Jayden? How does their friendship save their lives? Why will their friendship be a lasting one?
5. While Jayden knew his uncle was a little weird, he didn't think he was dangerous. What happened previously between them to give Jayden an idea that his uncle might be unstable?
6. What do Nat and Jayden learn about themselves as a result of their near-death experience?

Writer's Craft*Imagery*

Jayden paints pictures with his word descriptions of the outback. Using the author's writing as a model, ask students to describe a place they have been. Then ask students to switch their descriptions with a partner and have their partner draw, paint or find a picture that fits the description. Students can share their writing and pictures with the class as a pair.

Author Biography

A former counselor and social worker, **Robin Stevenson** loves to read, write and travel. While she has always loved to write, her publishing career began after her son was born. She has since published ten novels for children and teens. A world traveler, Robin spent a year sailing to the Bahamas and has also lived in Japan, Australia and England. She currently lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with her partner and son.