



Racing for Diamonds

Anita Daher

Interest level: ages 8–11

978-1-55143-675-3

128 pages

AR Quiz # 133756

Consider the following question as you read *Racing for Diamonds*:

Is it always a good idea to follow your instincts?

Story

What Jaz thinks of as an adventure her mom and dad call trouble, but Jaz just can't seem to help herself. When she joins the Junior Canadian Rangers and is teamed up with an annoying partner, she has no idea that all her newfound skills will soon be put to a life-and-death test.

Author

Anita Daher began her life in a small town on Prince Edward Island, but left at the age of five and has remained something of a gypsy ever since. Many of her favorite childhood memories involve roaming over rocks by Hudson Bay and fishing on the tundra in the Northwest Territories. Her writing reflects the places she's been blessed to spend time. She is the author of many books for young readers, including two other books about the JCRs, *Poachers in the Pingoes* and *On the Trail of the Bushman*. Anita lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with her husband, two daughters, one basset hound and a Westfalia camper van named Mae.

Author Website

www.anitadaher.com

Connecting to the Curriculum***Language Arts***

- Colly accuses Jaz of asking too many questions. Have students devise a set of questions in one of the following ways:
 1. about selected chapters in *Racing for Diamonds*
 2. in a list as they read
 3. as a way to introduce the novel and what it is about
- Have students join together to make dogsled teams. Invite them to write descriptive paragraphs introducing each of the team members and driver. Add these to the art display described below.
- In *Racing for Diamonds*, teams must perform tasks at each checkpoint. Divide the class into small groups and have each group develop a book-based activity to do at their checkpoint. Groups then travel to each checkpoint/center, completing the task at each one.
- Read this passage aloud, from near the end of chapter 4: “It was time to recharge and breathe in the colors; the sky was as blue as a painted ocean on a globe. The scrub lining the trail was a collage of winter gold, brown and green.” Ask students to visualize the scene it describes and then write a poem to connect with the passage.
- Create poems about cooperation, honesty and respect using the slogans created below (see *Drama*) or selected passages from *Racing for Diamonds*.
- Learn some simple dog mushing terms or have students make up their own terms to mean such things as: turn to the left, right, slow down and stop. Divide the class into groups and see which group can follow their directions the best around a course or route set up for that purpose. Discuss the power of oral language and communication. How would life be different if we didn't have oral language?
- After reading each chapter in *Racing for Diamonds*, have students record one or more new things they learned in their reading response journals. Share with the class.

Mathematics

- Diamonds are weighed in units called carats. One carat equals 0.2 grams or 200 milligrams. Find items that weigh one carat and display them beside a picture of an actual one-carat diamond. Find out the monetary value of each item.
- Jaz makes bannock at one of the trail checkpoints. Locate a recipe for bannock (or use the one below) that contains actual measurements for the ingredients and make some in the class. Convert the measurements to metric if necessary.

Small Bannock

(Serves 6–8)

3 cups flour

dash of salt

3 teaspoons baking powder

2 tablespoons oil or shortening

1 cup water or milk (approximately—enough to make dough)

1. Combine the dry ingredients in a bowl.
2. Make a little well in the middle and pour the water in.
3. Mix into a dough and knead it.
4. Flatten into biscuit shapes and put it in the frying pan; or cook on hot ashes over open fire; or cook in oven, 20–25 minutes at 400 degrees Celsius.

Especially good fresh, with butter or margarine. For a sweet variation, add raisins and sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon.

Social Studies

- *Racing for Diamonds* takes place along the Canol Trail. The trail was named for “Canadian Oil” and was built to link the oilfields near Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories to military bases in Alaska. Divide students into small groups or into partners to learn more about how it was built and its actual route.
- On a blank map of Canada, have students label the provinces, territories and capital cities. Include the Mackenzie River, Franklin and Mackenzie Mountain Ranges, Arctic Ocean, Carcajou and other locations found in *Racing for Diamonds*.
- Have students draw a map of the route Jaz and Colly take in the race.
- The first known diamonds were discovered in India around 800 BC. On a world map, label the different countries and specific locations where major deposits of diamonds have been discovered since then.
- The proceeds of the sale of “conflict” or “blood” diamonds are used to fund wars in places like Angola and Sierra Leone. As a class, learn more about blood diamonds. Find out more about where these places are and why their diamonds are being used in such a way.
- The JCRs are trained in some traditional aboriginal skills (setting snares, making bannock). Research some other aboriginal skills that might be useful in isolated northern locations.

Art

- Draw a portrait of one of the main characters. For example: Colly, Jaz, Gunther, Joe or Sergeant Sugar. Guide students in experimenting with different drawing media: charcoal, oil pastels, pencils, ink.
- The northern lights (*aurora borealis*) are bright lights seen in the northern skies in early fall and spring. Go online with students to find pictures of the northern lights, then have them create their own using a paint wash or pencil crayons.
- The Junior Canadian Rangers Program is for young people living in isolated northern locations. It began in 1994 and offers participants a range of learning opportunities, including first aid, environmental protection and survival skills. Using the information found on its website listed in the Resources section, have students design and create posters advertising this exciting program.

Science

- Research how diamonds are formed and mined. Have students write an informative manual that describes the process of taking a diamond from its raw to finished state.
- Using either pictures or actual samples, have students look at a variety of rocks and minerals and describe their similarities and differences.
- *The Mohs Scale* is a measure of rock and mineral hardness developed by German mineralogist, Friedrich Mohs. Discuss why Mohs would have developed the scale in the first place. Why and how is it useful? Have students use the scale to help them identify rocks and minerals.
- There are three basic types of rock: sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic. Display pictures and samples of each, and investigate them online. Have students write the different qualities of rocks in each group.

Drama

- Have students create short skits based on *Racing for Diamonds*, using only questions as dialogue.
- Divide the class into small groups and have them create and perform a conversation between the sled dogs as they are preparing for the race.
- Play charades using vocabulary from *Racing for Diamonds*. For example: harness, snowshoe, dogsled, husky, snowmobile, bullhorn, towline and trail.
- Cooperation, honesty and respect are qualities held in high regard by the JCRs. Divide the class into small groups and have them create slogans that reflect the meaning of these words.

Physical Education/Health

- Invite a member of St. John Ambulance or another organization that offers basic first-aid training and instruction to speak to your class.
- The Junior Canadian Rangers use “The Sharing Circle” model to run their meetings. Brainstorm topics that might be of interest to the class, and after choosing one, conduct a meeting. The guidelines are: everyone is equal in the circle; everyone gets a chance to share, including the leader; anyone can choose not to speak; there are no interruptions, probing, put-downs or gossip; time is shared equally; and the circle is closed by thanking everyone for being there.

Connecting to the Text

- Jaz and Colly were presented with an award for showing courage in a dangerous situation. Does this remind you of a different story or film where the main character(s) had to face danger in order to keep someone safe?
- Discuss with students the idea of a book’s *premise*. The premise is a one-sentence summary of the main idea of the story. 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 *Racing for Diamonds*.
- Discuss with students the importance of *setting* to this story. Have them go back through the novel and find ten or more details that tell the reader about the story’s setting. How do these details contribute to creating a picture in the reader’s mind? Invite students to draw or create a diorama of their own interpretation of the setting in *Racing for Diamonds*.
- In their reading response journals, invite students to write an *epilogue* for the story. They may choose to explain how the relationship between Colly and Jaz develops, what happens to Gunther as the investigation progresses, how Jaz figures out a way to balance her visits between her parents. Students may even choose to follow up with little Luka. Share the responses with the class.

- Guide students in completing a character sketch of either Colly or Jaz. Have them select eight to ten adjectives that describe the personality of their chosen character. Then answer the following questions:
 - ♦ Which qualities do you think helped this character most during the story?
 - ♦ Were there any qualities you think harmed this person during the story? Explain.
 - ♦ Which of the qualities listed above describe you? Why?
- How would *Racing for Diamonds* have been different if there was less tension between Jaz and Colly? Would the story be the same?

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. In chapter 9, Jaz tells Gunther that it's never worth it to do bad things to repay someone else's favor. Have you ever had to repay a favor in a way that made you feel uncomfortable? What did you learn from the experience?
2. How far would you go to help someone you liked? Would you put your life in danger if you knew other lives depended on you? What would make this kind of decision difficult?
3. How does the dangerous situation with Gunther change the way Colly and Jaz work with each other? Does it change the way each of them sees the other?
4. What do you think about what Jaz says: All adults ever do is argue!
5. Jaz, Colly and the JCRs have a set of outdoor skills that are unique to living in the North. Do you have a set of outdoor skills that's unique to the area where you live? If not, where could you go to learn more about how to cope independently with your natural environment?
6. Jaz's parents are proud of her bravery. Think of a time when someone you love was proud of something you had done. Write about that event, and how it made you feel.
7. The fact that her parents argue drives Jaz crazy. What about your parents, or the people who look after you? What drives you crazy about them? Explain. Do you think there are perfect parents anywhere in this world? Why or why not?

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

My daughter used to drive me crazy with how many questions she asked! Crazy, but I loved her to bits for it. You see, as a child I often missed out on things that looked like a lot of fun, because I was too shy to say I would like to participate. I would also go for very long periods of time not understanding something, because I was too shy to ask questions. In *Racing for Diamonds* Jaz does not have this problem—no way! She is not shy, and—like my daughter—she asks so many questions that she sometimes drives people crazy. She doesn't mind though. Nope! Jaz is comfortable with who she is. She asks questions and jumps into life with eyes wide open and both shoes on—sometimes even snowshoes.

I first learned of the Canol Trail from my friend Donna Huffam. I met Donna shortly after I moved to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, in 1999. She had just moved from Norman Wells, Northwest Territories, which is the community at the very start of the trail. She was fascinated by the trail's history, and even took time to fly in by helicopter to have a good look around. Her enthusiasm inspired me to learn more, and I'm so glad I did. I was as much amazed by the fact that workers were able to complete the road in such a short period of time—in harsh terrain and sometimes horrendous conditions—as I was by the area's beauty.

I hope you have as much fun reading this adventure as I did writing it. If you have any questions about Jaz, or anything else in the story, please feel free to email me through my website at www.anitadaher.com.

Happy Reading,
Anita

Resources**Books***Fiction*

- Adler, David. *Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the Stolen Diamonds*
 Blake, Robert J. *Akiak: a tale from the Iditarod; Togo*
 Bunting, Eve. *A Day's Work*
 Citra, Becky. *Dog Days*
 Daher, Anita. *Flight from Big Tangle; Flight from Bear Canyon*
 Fox, Paula. *The Stone-Faced Boy*
 Gill, Shelley. *Kiana's Iditarod*
 Lemieux, Jean. *Toby Laughs Last*
 Little, Jean. *Birdie for Now; Rescue Pup*
 Wishinsky, Frieda. *A Bee in Your Ear; Each One Special*

Nonfiction

- Edwards, Ron. *Diamonds and Gemstones* (553.8)
 Gear, Adrienne. *Reading Power* (372)
 Hancock, Lyn. *Northwest Territories* (971.9)
 Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement* (372.47)
 Holbrook, Sara. *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam* (811.54)
 Janeczko, Paul. *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms* (811.008)
 Llewellyn, Claire. *Kids Survival Handbook* (796.4)
 Love, Ann and Jane Drake. *The Kids Book of the Far North* (971)
 Lynch, Wayne. *Arctic Alphabet: Exploring the North from A to Z* (577.09)
 Marshall, Diana. *Northwest Territories* (917.1)
 Morris, Neil. *Diamonds and Other Gems* (553.82)
 Riddles, Libby. *Storm Run* (798.8)
 Stead, Tony. *Is That a Fact?* (372.62)
 Sherwonit, Bill. *Iditarod: The Great Race to Nome* (798.8)

Online

Conflict Diamonds

www.amnestyusa.org/diamonds/index.do

Diamond History

www.diamondwholesalecorporation.com/DiamondHistory.html

Job Description for Gem and Diamond Workers

www.careerplanner.com/Job-Descriptions/Gem-and-Diamond-Workers.cfm

The Mohs Scale of Relative Mineral Hardness

www.geology.about.com/library/bl/blmohsscale.htm

Canol Trail General Information

canoltrail.tripod.com

Sled Dog Information

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sled_dog

Iditarod

www.iditarod.com

Mushing Terms

www.athropolis.com/arctic-facts/fact-dogs-command.htm

Dogsledding

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_sled

American Heritage Canol Trail

www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/it/2002/3/2002_3_24.shtml

The Junior Canadian Ranger Programme

www.jcr-rjc.ca

Canadian Rangers

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Rangers