



Rat

Sean Rodman

Reading Level: 3.8

978-1-4598-0300-8 PB

978-1-4598-0301-5 LIB

Book Summary

Colin is not a do-gooder; in fact, he stays in trouble with teachers and the principal most of the time, but it makes him angry when bullies target and harass students who are unable or unwilling to stand up for themselves. When Colin comes to the rescue of an old man, the bullies, Liam and Craig, post a naked picture of him online. Since the photo is not actually Colin's body, Colin doesn't let it bother him, but he soon discovers that Liam and Craig have posted pictures of other students as well and use the pictures as blackmail for "favors." Angry that no one will stand up to the bullies, Colin rats them out, breaking the student code of silence and setting in motion a new standard for bullies and the students who are bullied.

Prereading Idea

Read the poem "The Poison Tree" by William Blake to the class and discuss the meaning and how the poem's message applies to twenty-first-century teenagers.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Colin hopes that his interest in and love for wild animals will someday lead to a career where he can pursue his passion. Ask students to work with a partner to research careers that would enable Colin to work with animals in some capacity. Or have students research individuals, such as Jane Goodall, that have made major contributions to the understanding of animal behavior. Have students use technology to compile their information and to create a class presentation.
- Ask students to find a news article about students and cyber-bullying, or to research a social media site that teens can use to post pictures or stories about their peers. As a class, discuss some common character traits of all cyber-bullies. In what ways does cyber-bullying reach a wider audience? As a class prepare an anti-bullying technology presentation such as Prezi or PowerPoint that focuses on cyber-bullying. Ask school officials to include the presentation during anti-bullying campaigns or use the information to begin such a campaign in your school.
- Ask students to form small groups and to investigate connotations associated with rats, including quotations, movie lines, song lyrics, etc. Then have students assume the voice of Colin in writing and respond to being labeled a “rat.”

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

The setting of *Rat* is an urban high school. With a partner ask students to select a scene they can rewrite, changing the setting to a small-town, rural high school. Ask students to practice and perform their new scene for the class.

Theme

“You have to stand for something, or you’ll fall for anything.” Ask students working in small groups to justify this statement as a theme for the book *Rat*, using support from the book. Then have each student create a found poem using lines/phrases from the book and the theme statement. Have students share their poems with the class.

Conflict

The characters in *Rat* have both internal and external conflict. After discussing conflict in small groups, have students choose a character and draw the character’s conflict journey throughout the book. Students should include the conflicts, both internal and external, events that increased the conflicts, conflict resolutions and lessons learned by the character. Post character journey maps around the room.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. In chapter 2, Colin states that outcasts need to stick together in a high school. What are some reasons that this is a good idea?

2. How and why does Emily become personally involved with Craig and Liam? Why won't Emily or the other girls help Colin stop them?
3. Colin sums up the student code of silence in chapter 1: "We all know the drill. Don't get involved. Don't rat anyone out." Why do teens rely on this code? What drives teens to keep silent?
4. Why doesn't Mr. Miller believe Colin when he rats out Craig and Liam? What happens to make a believer out of Mr. Miller?
5. How could Mr. Miller and the teachers have helped the bullying situation? Why were they unwilling to take a stand?
6. How does Emily and Colin's relationship develop? What do they learn about each other and themselves throughout the ordeal?
7. What, if anything, could Colin have done to save Jerome's life? How does Jerome's death affect Colin? What impact does Jerome's death have on the school officials?
8. How does Colin raise the level of ratting to a whole new level of acceptance?

Writer's Craft

Imagery

Ask students to find the following words in the book, and then look up their meanings in the dictionary, writing the definition that most closely fits the meaning of the word the way it is used in the sentence. Working with a partner, have students compare and discuss their choice of definitions.

brute (ch. 6)	defiant (ch. 2)	ferocious (ch. 7)
fidgety (ch. 7)	glint (ch. 10)	idealistic (ch. 4)
irrational (ch. 9)	mongers (ch. 9)	

Author Biography

Lesley Choyce teaches part-time at Dalhousie University, runs Pottersfield Press and has written over forty adult and young adult books. His YA novels span diverse topics such as skateboarding, surfing, racism, environmental issues, organ transplants and rock bands. He surfs year round in the North Atlantic and is considered the father of transcendental wood-splitting. He's 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 also hosts a nationally syndicated tv talk show in Halifax.