



Responsible

Darlene Ryan

Interest level: grade 7 and up

Reading level: 3.2

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AR Quiz # 118311

Book Summary

Frequently moving due to the nature of his father's work, Kevin always falls in with boys who make trouble, though he has learned to keep his head down and his mouth shut to stay out of serious trouble. Kevin calls his strategies basic survival skills for any high school. But when his "friend" and the leader of the pack start harassing Erin for no reason, Kevin becomes uncomfortable. Kevin plays along, even putting a dead mouse in Erin's locker, but when he learns that Nick is going to attack Erin on her way home from work and shave off her hair, Kevin decides to investigate further. When he sees Nick and his buddies with Erin, Kevin realizes that Nick's plans for Erin are far more insidious than a hair cut. Without thinking, Kevin springs into action, fighting and fending off Nick until they hear police sirens, and Nick and his minions escape. Badly beaten and scared, Kevin and Erin make their way to the school where the police find them and send them to the hospital. In the aftermath of the attack, all their lives are forever changed.

Prereading Idea

Bullying in school assumes a variety of forms. Ask students to conduct "Man on the Street" interviews in the halls of their schools and to ask students the following questions:

1. Have you ever been bullied?
2. If so, did you report it to a teacher, parent, or principal?
3. Was any action taken?
4. Have you ever bullied another student?

Ask each student to interview at least twenty students and to keep a record of their answers. Then tally all students' results to examine the bullying environment at your school. As a class, research and recommend an appropriate counseling program for your school that focuses on bullying prevention.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

Though many rapes may yet go unreported, reports of rape on school campuses and at school events, continue to increase. Have small groups of students utilize a blueprint of their school grounds and research security measures at school events to develop a school safety plan to prevent attacks. Have groups prepare a presentation to submit to school administration, including the cost, personnel needs, and any possible building renovation ideas.

Throughout the novel, Kevin's emotions are taxed to the limit as he is forced to make choices that will affect his future, in particular his decision to come to Erin's aid by fighting off his "friends." Have students work in groups of three or four to write a talk show interview with Kevin and Erin as guests, focusing on Kevin's heroic actions and Erin's response to the entire series of events. Have groups practice and present their interviews to the class.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

Characterization

Kevin is a dynamic character, but Nick is a static character. Ask students to look up the definitions of these terms, and justify the labeling of the two characters as indicated. As a class, discuss points in the story where the main characters, Kevin, Nick and Erin, either change or remain unchanged as a result of plot events. Make a timeline of the major plot events and list each character's reactions and responses, noting change or consistency of character.

Setting

The setting of a story is more than just a physical location; it can include atmosphere and mood, as well as customs, ideas, beliefs, and values. The author chose a high school setting because both the audience and the characters are high school students. Divide students into groups of three and ask them to cast the book as a movie, using popular teen actors and actresses. Each group should write a script for a movie trailer advertising the movie and prepare a poster, including elements of the setting in each.

Theme

In the play *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, in Act I, Scene III, Lord Polonius gives the flowing advice to his son, Laertes:

“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

As a class, discuss the meaning of the quote, justifying it as the theme of the book and using evidence from the book. Divide students into groups of three to four students. Have each group rewrite the quotation into the poetry of the day: slam poetry, rap, a song chorus or a commercial jingle. Post the rewritten theme statements.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. The vice-principal, Mr. Harris, surmises that Nick doesn't like himself very much, and that he suffers from low self-esteem. If this is true, how does Nick's attitude toward himself lead to his hurtful behavior toward others? How could someone help him change?
2. On page 5, Kevin makes a list of clichés that he thinks represent the culture of most high schools. What cliché(s) best relate to guys like Nick?
3. Erin is portrayed as a nice girl and a good student. What is it about her that Nick so intensely dislikes? Why does he target her for his abuse?
4. When Erin complains about Nick's abusive tricks to Mr. Harris, he places her in after-school suspension for three days. Why does Mr. Harris punish her? Is this punishment fair? What would have been a more appropriate punishment?
5. Kevin tries to do the right thing by warning Erin to stay away from Nick, but Erin gets angry at him. Why does she get angry? Is her anger justified? What could Kevin have done at this point to possibly prevent the attack on Erin?
6. What role does Kevin's father play in his life? How does their relationship change over the course of events in the novel? What motivates the change?
7. Kevin's father tells him on several occasions that doing the right thing is not always the easy thing to do. Why is doing what is right sometimes so difficult?

Writer's Craft

Similes

Kevin uses similes to compare major characters to animals. He compares Nick to a cat, Mr. Harris to a salamander, and Brendon to a ferret. Ask students to select a Kevin's father, Charlie, Erin, or another character, and, based on what they know about the character, write a simile about that character comparing that character to an animal. The similes can be written on sentence strips and posted around the room.

Author Biography

Darlene Ryan has been writing all of her life—as a teacher, a scientist, a late-night disk jockey, a producer, an entertainment columnist, a consumer reporter, a news reader and a copywriter. As a child she was taken to the library every two weeks for a stack of books that was never enough to last the two weeks. This early desire to read made her an avid reader, and inspired her to develop characters full of life and to place them in situations that hit home to her many readers. Darlene has recently been honored in the poet category by receiving the Dr. Marilyn Trenholme Counsell Early Childhood literacy award from the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick.