



Road Block

Yolanda Ridge

Interest level: ages 8-11

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162 pages

AR Quiz # 150793

Consider the following questions as you read *Road Block*:

Is change inevitable? How far would you go to keep change from affecting your family?

Story

In this sequel to *Trouble in the Trees*, it's the end of grade six and Bree plans to spend the summer hanging around her townhouse complex in Vancouver, climbing trees with her friends. But her parents have other plans for her; she is going to Ontario to stay with her grandma who lives on a farm "in the middle of nowhere." A farm that is about to be destroyed by a superhighway, unless Bree can stop it. Convinced that saving the land will end her grandma's unhappiness, Bree tries to rally cousins and neighbors, but instead of finding help, Bree uncovers some shocking things about her relatives. The more Bree gets to know her extended family and their farm, the more complicated everything becomes. If she isn't able to save the farm, can she at least manage to save her family?

Author

Yolanda Ridge (pronounced Yo-*lawn*-a, without the d) was born in Burlington, Ontario. Since then, she has had twenty different addresses in eleven cities and three provinces across Canada. She now lives in a small town in BC's Kootenay region, where she plans to stay. Yolanda is mother to twin six-year-old boys. She and her family enjoy hiking, biking and skiing.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts & Literacy

- ***Focus: timelines***

Bree plans to spend her summer climbing trees, hanging out with her friends and helping Ms. Matheson clean up after her renovations. (Of course, her actual summer turns out quite differently.) Have students create a dual timeline to show how Bree spends her summer, and how they themselves would spend an ideal summer. On Bree's timeline, include significant events like her arrival in Ontario, the information meeting at the public library, meeting Mrs. Kornitsky, starting the petition, Sonny's accident and so on. For students' own timelines, encourage them to include camps, sports and family activities as well as play.

- ***Focus: descriptive writing***

In chapter 4, Bree reflects on how she remembered Uncle Doug so differently from when they used to celebrate the holidays together. Have students write a paragraph describing a relative they know well. In their paragraphs, be sure to have students include details about this person's appearance, personality, age and position in the family.

- ***Focus: visualizing***

Visualizing as one hears text spoken is a powerful comprehension technique. In her book *Strategies That Work*, Stephanie Harvey devotes a chapter to visualizing activities. One of these is "Visualizing from a Vivid Piece of Text." Select a passage from *Road Block* that you find particularly powerful and vivid. For example: the confrontation between Bree's grandmother and Percy Murfin in chapter 2. Share this with your students and have them visualize it as it's happening. They might like to sketch it. Challenge students to find another passage to visualize.

- ***Focus: theme***

Like plot, setting and characters, theme is an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *Road Block*. Is there more than one?

- ***Focus: letter writing***

Mrs. Kornitsky has pen pals from all around the world. Have students write a letter to a friend who lives in another city, state, province or country. Be sure

to review proper letter-writing format. Post the letters. Discuss with students: How do letters differ from emails? From texts? When is a letter suitable?

- **Focus:** *narrative writing*

Discuss with students the structure of an epilogue. What is the purpose of an epilogue? How long should it be? What should it contain? In what kinds of stories do they want to see epilogues? Use the web link in the Resources section, below, to guide your discussion. Have students write a short epilogue for *Road Block*. Their epilogue should address what happens to Bree after the story, but could also include information about Bree's grandmother, uncle and cousins. Share the responses with the class, or workshop and publish them.

- **Focus:** *synonyms*

Have students create a synonym-matching test using vocabulary words from the following list:

industrial	organic	petition
acquisition	negotiation	paraphernalia
documentation	convict	
imply	activist	

Have students fold a blank sheet of paper in half lengthwise. Down one side of the page, list the vocabulary words. On the other side, write synonyms (or synonymous phrases) for these words, being sure to mix up the order. Have students challenge a family member to complete the quiz.

Art

- **Focus:** *drawing*

Ask students to choose one of the characters from *Road Block*, and draw this person, using evidence from the text.

Social Studies

- **Focus:** *map skills*

Have students create a map of Bree's grandmother's property and her uncle's adjoining property. Encourage them to include things like the convict cemetery, the trees, roads, driveways, houses, barn and other landmarks. Each map should be completed with a scale, a legend and a title.

- **Focus: agriculture**
 1. The decline of the family-owned farm is underway in North America. Nowadays, much of our farmland is managed by large multinational corporations. Discuss this with students. What do they know about it? Have any of them seen *Food, Inc.*? If your class's maturity permits, watch this documentary and discuss the questions and thoughts it raises. How does this compare to the idea of the family farm as they've been raised to understand it (in books, on TV and on farm visits)?
 2. Sonny mentions that he might like to join a farming co-op in his exploration of organic farming. Have students learn about farming co-ops in your area. Discuss food security. How many of their families grow food? What do they know about small plot intensive (SPIN) farming?
- **Focus: justice**

In chapter 4 Bree and Sonny discover the convict cemetery at the back of the family property—where bodies were buried back when guys “did something horrible enough to get hung for their crimes.” As your class's maturity permits, lead students in a discussion about capital punishment. What do they understand about it? Why has it been used in the past? Have they heard of restorative justice? How do the two compare?
- **Focus: government & democracy**
 1. Mrs. Kornitsky's house is going to be situated between an airport runway and a highway by the time the road is built—and this will negatively impact the value of her property. Basically, it will be worthless. But she seems resigned. “You know what they say,” she says. “You can't fight city hall” (chapter 4). Discuss with students the meaning of her comment. Widen the conversation to talk about democracy—its benefits (the people get a voice) and its limitations (the minority will always lose). How have students felt democracy at work in their own lives, either at school, during sports or at home? Is there a better way?
 2. When Percy Murfin tells Uncle Doug the province is going to reroute the highway and install a soundproof fence, Uncle Doug retorts that this is only happening because it's an election year. What does this mean? Where have students seen evidence of this kind of behavior on the part of elected representatives?
 3. Explore with students: What's the purpose of a petition? What's involved in establishing a petition? Have students research a recent petition in your

community.

- **Focus:** *public transportation*

A highway is being built through Bree's family's land because there is so much commuter traffic in the communities near Toronto. But is driving the best option? Discuss the downsides of driving to work. Engage students in an exploration of the various transit options available in your region. Break them into small groups. Assign each group a "commute," with a starting point and a final destination. Provide students with maps of their community. Task each group to plot how to reach their destination using three distinct modes of transport. (Transportation modes must be reasonable for a modern urban centre i.e. not a horse-drawn carriage!) Using schedules and map scales, students should calculate the amount of time it takes to walk, bike, drive, take the bus, take the train etc. As an extra challenge, they can calculate the cost of driving, taking public transit, or even biking/walking (equipment and maintenance costs etc.). As an extension, have students watch sections of the documentary entitled *The End of Suburbia*.

1. **Health and Career Education**

- **Focus:** *giving back*

Bree's grandmother knits tiny caps for premature babies at the local children's hospital. This is an example of giving back to your community: where you use your talents and abilities to help others. Discuss with students why giving back is so important, and how it benefits not only the receivers but the givers as well. What kinds of things can students do to give back? Check the Resources section below for links.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

- **Focus:** *constructing, monitoring and confirming meaning; making connections*

1. Bree doesn't know her grandma very well. What are your relationships like with your grandparents? Explain.
2. When Bree arrives at her grandmother's place, she discovers there's no Internet connection. How would you cope without the Internet for an entire summer? Make a list of ten things you would spend your time doing instead of being online.
3. Bree is good at climbing trees—and at standing up for what she thinks is right. What are you good at? Explain one thing in detail.
4. Bree climbs a tree when she feels the need to carve out a bit of privacy. Where is your private sanctuary? Is it inside? Outside? Can you make one anywhere, or do you have a special place?

5. Bree's Aunt Theresa died five years ago, and the family is still figuring out how to cope. Has anyone close to you died? How does this kind of sudden change affect a family? How does it affect the individuals within the family?
6. Bree's dad is always trying to get her to cook with him. What sorts of chores do you do at home? Do you do them alone or with a parent? Is there anything you'd be more likely to do if one of your parents did it with you?
7. In chapter 4, Bree reflects that her best Christmas moment was when she was spending time with the people she loved—and that it didn't have anything to do with presents. Discuss: The greatest gifts are ones we don't unwrap.
8. Amber loves hearing Bree talk about her life in Cedar Grove. She can't get enough of Bree telling her what it's like to live near so many kids her own age. Write about your community. Do you live close to other kids? Do you know your neighbors? Who do you hang out with and what do you do in your neighborhood?
9. In chapter 12, when Bree talks to her grandmother about the old woman's memories, she worries that her grandma might start to cry. That would be bad, thinks Bree. As you see it, why does it worry and upset us so much when other people cry?
10. In chapter 13, when Bree is out seeking signatures for her petition, she comes across a woman who certainly doesn't share Bree's perspective on the new highway. Discuss the irony of the words that are written on the welcome mat on the woman's front doorstep.
11. Bree doesn't want to give up on getting signatures for her petition. What kind of courage does it take to keep pressing onward in the face of overwhelming odds?
12. On the farm and back at Cedar Grove, Bree is deeply connected to her beloved trees. Are you fond of any natural objects, places or formations? Explain.

Author's Note

Dear readers,

By the time I finished *Trouble in the Trees* I desperately needed a break from Bree. Don't get me wrong, I love Bree and always will, but when you write a book you spend a lot of time with the main character. You get to know everything about them—including the stuff you don't really like. It's sort of like spending every moment of every day with your best friend. It's great in the beginning but after a while they start to bug you, no matter how compatible you are!

When *Trouble in the Trees* was finally ready for publication, I started writing other books with other characters. But like a best friend, I began to miss Bree after spending some time away from her. Even so, it was never my intention to write another book

about her. Trouble in the Trees was its own story and I didn't set out with any intention of writing a sequel.

Things changed when I went on a summer holiday to visit my grandma in Ontario. She lives on a farm near Breslau, exactly where Road Block is set. And just like the book, a highway has been planned through my grandma's farmland for as long as I can remember. Nothing is happening to my grandma's farm right now and it is possible that nothing ever will. But being on the farm got me thinking—what if? And that's when I knew I had another battle for Bree to fight.

Now that Road Block is complete, I'm ready for another break from Bree. But honestly, I can already feel myself starting to miss her. I don't have any other plans for her right now but who knows? It might not be long before Bree finds another fight she just can't back away from...

Thanks for reading!

Yolanda

Resources

Books

Fiction

- Adler, C.S. *Daddy's Climbing Tree*.
 Austen, Catherine. *Walking Backward*.
 Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons*.
 Goerzen, Christy. *Farmed Out*.
 Lafleur, Suzanne. *Love, Aubrey*.
 O'Donnell, Liam and Mike Deas. *Food Fight*.
 McDonald, Megan. *Judy Moody Saves the World!*
 Walsh, Ann. *Horse Power*.
 Walters, Eric. *Branded*.

Nonfiction

- Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement*.
 Lewis, Barbara A. *The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose and Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action*.
 —*The Kid's Guide to Service Projects: Over 500 Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference*.

Owen, Ruth. *Growing and Eating Green: Careers in Farming, Producing and Marketing Food (Green Collar Careers)*.

Sabin, Ellen. *The Giving Book: Open The Door to a Lifetime of Giving*.

Smith, Alisa and J.B. MacKinnon. *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating*.

Stover, Jo Ann. *If Everybody Did*.

Zeiler, Freddi. *A Kid's Guide to Giving*.

Video

Food, Inc.

The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and The Collapse of The American Dream

Online

Community Service Project Ideas for Kids

www.kidactivities.net/post/Community-Service-Ideas-for-Kids.aspx

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/volunteer.html>

How to Write an Epilogue

www.ehow.com/how_5001509_write-epilogue-novel.html

Food Security for Kids

www.thegoodgarden.org

www.foodsecurityresearch.ca/resources/tasting_rainbows.pdf

http://lifecyclesproject.ca/resources/food_security_into_drama.php

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