



Scam

Lesley Choyce

Reading level: 3.2

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Book Summary

Josh and his mom live alone; when he was eight, his dad left and, sadly, none of the relatives would have anything to do with Josh and his mom. Josh's mom is a drug addict, but Josh does everything he can to make her presentable when she has to talk to the social workers. Though Josh knows his mom won't ever stop, he isn't prepared for her death, nor for his forced move into a group home. On his way to the funeral, Josh meets a girl who befriends him for her own motives. Still, Josh and Lindsey help each other through hard times, and, in an unanticipated way, she helps him change his life and move forward.

Prereading Idea

The death of a family member brings grief, and sometimes guilt, to the surviving members of the family. Ask students to investigate the commonly accepted stages of grief and the ways people cope with grief differently. Students should be prepared to share their insights.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Ask students to answer the following question: Is having a bad father better than not having a father at all? Ask students to take a position and to write a persuasive essay to convince readers their stance is correct. Students should use textual evidence to support their ideas. Have students find a partner that chose the opposite viewpoint and read their essays to one another. Post essays in the classroom.
- After Josh's mother dies, he is left in a precarious situation with the social worker and the system. Ask students to investigate the policies of Child Protective Services with regard to the placement of minors in the event of the death of parents. Then, in small groups, ask students to create a brochure that social services can provide to families so that they will be familiar with the policy. Students should include in the brochure a list of contact names and numbers that families can use to obtain help.
- Lindsey describes Caleb in chapter 13. Ask students to create a found poem using her words and feelings. Have students illustrate and post the poems in the classroom.

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

The theme of a book is often based on what the main character learns. Ask students to write a thematic statement based on the lessons Josh and Lindsey learn as a result of their experiences. Ask students to brainstorm ideas in small groups and to create a poster with a thematic statement, visual elements, and text excerpts that support the selection of thematic statement. Display the thematic posters in the classroom.

Point of View

Scam is told from Josh's point of view, so the reader knows only what Josh feels and thinks about people and situations and what he explicitly states. In small groups, ask students to select a scene where Josh has conflict with another character and to rewrite the scene from that character's point of view. Then have students present a skit based on the rewritten scene.

Character

Using a Venn diagram for prewriting, ask students to compare and contrast the two characters, Josh and Lindsey. Students should compare the friends' physical characteristics, family interactions, mental abilities and personality traits, and use specific examples from the book for support. Then have students select one of the two characters and write a "Where Are They Now?" piece that relates what happens to the character in the years after the end of the novel. As they write their future glimpse of the character, students should remain true to the characterization. Have students share their writing in small groups.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. How does Josh protect his mother and himself from the social workers? What is the result of Josh's efforts to protect his mom from the social workers?
2. Why is Josh so easily taken in by Lindsay? Why does she insist on going to the funeral with him?
3. Why are Lindsay and her brother, Caleb, involved in illegal activities? What role do their parents play in their choices?
4. In chapter 6, how does Josh react to Lindsey's *scam* of the tourist? How does Lindsay respond to Josh's reaction?
5. How does Josh feel about living in a group home? What adjustments does he have to make?
6. Darren tells Josh, "Your fate will be your decision" (ch. 8). What is Darren trying to tell Josh by that statement? Why does Josh feel like a victim?
7. Why does Josh allow Lindsey to convince him to steal in chapter 9? Why is Josh so angry at himself for his actions at the wedding?
8. How does the incident with the bomb in chapter 11 motivate Josh to action? What does Josh do?
9. Why do Josh and Lindsay drift apart after they were so close and helped each other so much?

Writer's Craft

Vocabulary

Ask students to find the following words in the novel and then to look up their meanings in the dictionary, writing the definition that most closely fits the meaning of the word as it is used in context. Have students create a student-developed writing dictionary to be used throughout the year. Students should add a page for each of the words and list the meaning of the word; students will continue to build their understanding of the words by adding synonyms, antonyms, illustrations and ways they see the word used during the year.

Catastrophe (ch. 11)

Nonchalantly (ch. 9)

Superficial (ch. 7)

Commentary (ch. 2)

Scowled (ch. 4)

Welling (ch. 3)

Droned (ch. 4)

Slathered (ch. 8)

Impoverished.(ch. 12)

Strewn (ch. 9)

Author Biography

Lesley Choyce teaches part-time at Dalhousie University, hosts a nationally-syndicated tv talk show in Halifax, runs Pottersfield Press, and has written over eighty adult and young adult books—including science fiction, fantasy, poetry and nonfiction. He is a writer, publisher, educator, musician and television host. He surfs year-round and has 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 lives in a 200-year-old farm house at Lawrencetown Beach overlooking the ocean. He says, "I decided to be a writer with high hopes that it would allow me to avoid work. When writing turned out to be work as well as fun, I stuck with it anyway."

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