



Tap Out

Sean Rodman

Reading level: 3.0

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Book Summary

After Dar's father is sent to prison for violent behavior, Dar's mom removes Dar from the negative influence and sends him to a prestigious private school. Dar does his best to fit in at the private school he attends, but fighting is all he knows; it's what he learned from his father. When one of the academy students approaches him to fight for money in an illegal fight club, Dar can't refuse. His mom needs the money to pay rent, and Dar needs to release the anger that lives inside him. As the fights get increasingly more violent, the fighting gets out of hand and Dar almost kills another student, eliciting fear in all those who witnessed the event. But when the fight promoter brings in a small, nerdy kid and asks Dar to take him out, Dar realizes that his life is out-of-control and takes drastic steps to correct it.

Prereading Idea

After reading the letter Dar's father wrote to him in chapter 1, ask students to discuss what Dar's father says about the following ideas: Can hate be good? If so, when? What kind of life do you create for yourself if you believe you have to fight for everything you want or need? Ask students to reflect in writing how the advice Dar's father gives him will affect Dar's life.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Many cities prohibit their police officers from using a choke hold because it can be deadly. However, Dar uses the choke hold in a fight with Mason, “one forearm across his throat, pressing hard” (ch. 2). Dar also uses the move when he fights his opponents in the fight club. Ask students to research the legalities of choke holds by police officers in their community, including, if possible, an interview with a local police officer. Have students write a newspaper article about a fictional or actual account involving the use of a choke hold. Students should answer the questions who, what, when, where and why as they write their article. Have students share their articles and post them in the classroom.
- Like every school, Norfolk Academy has student cliques. Ask students to investigate cliques and to write an exposé about the different cliques in their school, making sure to address cliques without personal attacks on specific individuals or groups. Students should answer the following questions in their paper: What is a clique? How are they formed? What are the positive and negative aspects of cliques? What, if anything, does money have to do with cliques? Post student articles in the editorial section of the school or local newspaper.
- Jonathan runs an illegal fight club at Norfolk Academy. Ask students to investigate fight clubs to discover their origin, the laws governing them, and the legalities of running or participating in a fight club. Working in small groups have students create an action plan to eliminate or prevent fight clubs in their community. Have students present their plan to school officials and/or local police agencies.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

Theme

As Dar reflects on history, he is struck by the thought that “one little moment could have changed everybody’s lives—one speech, one bullet” (ch. 8). Ask students to restate this idea as a thematic statement and to write a justification for this idea to be the theme of *Tap Out*. Have students discuss and share their themes and justifications in small groups and post in the classroom.

Character

Dar’s father teaches him that “if you want to survive, you turn the fear into fight” (ch. 10). The author doesn’t reveal a lot about Dar’s father, but based on what the reader does know about him, ask students to write a back story for his life. Ask students to include the reason he is in jail, to create a family background for him, and to write about a day in his life. Students can then share their writing within small groups.

Setting

Ask students to define setting and the role it plays in a novel. Have students work in small groups to analyze the setting in *Tap Out* and to explain how the setting impacts key events in the plot development. Have students create a plot diagram or other chart visual of the significant events of the novel. With each event added to the visual,

have students provide a short paragraph of explanation of how the setting impacts the events. Have groups post their visuals around the room and have students do a “gallery walk” of the displays.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. How does Dar’s father’s advice lead Dar to make wrong choices about who he is and what he wants? What is Dar’s father’s outlook on life?
2. Why does Dar’s mother transfer him to Norfolk Academy? How does Dar trample on his mother’s good intentions? What sacrifice do Dar’s mother and brother make for him to attend the academy?
3. How does Dar feel about going to a school with rich kids? What role does Dar’s social class have on the way other students see him?
4. What does “tap out” mean? How does the title relate to the story?
5. Dar fits a profile, and people judge him based on his looks. What does a casual observer see when they look at Dar? What do they miss “seeing” by judging him?
6. How does Dar feel about Keisha? Why is Keisha willing to look past Dar’s background and appearance to get to know him? How does she see him after she learns about his fighting?
7. Why does Dar feel alone in a crowded place (ch. 8)? What does he eventually do to change his course?
8. What assumption does Mr. Hassel make about Dar that makes Dar angry? How does Dar react to the insult? Why does Dar go to Mr. Hassel when he is ready to tell all?
9. Dar intuitively knows that he should not be fighting and participating in the fight club. Why does he ignore his intuition and become involved anyway?
10. What is Dar’s relationship with his brother Runt? How does Runt “see” Dar?

Writer’s Craft

Vocabulary Enrichment

Ask students to look at the list of words below and find them in the book. Have students create a reading vocabulary dictionary with sections for each letter of the alphabet, adding the listed vocabulary words in the appropriate sections. First, ask students to write definitions of the words based on the context clues in the sentence. Students should then confirm their definition by using classroom dictionaries and thesauruses to add a dictionary definition. Next students should add a drawing depicting the word and an original sentence using the word. Students should continue to add to their reading vocabulary dictionary in their independent reading.

descends (ch. 4)
grimaces (ch. 2)

irate (ch. 2)
repercussions (ch. 2)

stench (ch. 4)
various (ch. 2)

Author Biography

Sean Rodman lives and works in Victoria, British Columbia. He is the child of two anthropologists who gave him a keen eye for observation and a bad case of wanderlust. His interest in writing for teenagers came out of working at some unique schools around the world. In the snowy mountains of Australia, he taught ancient history to future Olympic athletes. Closer to home, he worked with students from over 100 countries at a non-profit international school. When he is not writing, Mr. Rodman works as a fundraising consultant.