



The Way Back

Carrie Mac

Reading level: 3.8

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Book Summary

Abandoned by her junkie father, Colby moves in with her best friend, Gigi, and Gigi's grandmother. Together, they make their money from burglarizing homes and stores so that Gigi's grandmother has merchandise to sell in her pawnshop. Life changes for Colby again when she learns she is pregnant and that the father of her baby is Gigi's brother Milo, who is gay. Even as Colby enters rehab to get clean, she agonizes whether or not to reveal who the father is; still she comes to terms with her own life and begins to make better choices. When she does tell Milo, his support is amazing, and although they don't marry, Milo does take a role in raising the baby. Unfortunately, Gigi's anger at the situation, her best friend, and her brother, causes her to spiral downward into drugs...permanently.

Prereading Idea

Brainstorm with students the common elements in the following topics: pregnant teens, drug rehab, thieves, drug abuse and abandonment. Discuss the stereotypical behaviors and attitudes associated with each of these issues and how teens can avoid these life pitfalls. As they read the novel, ask students to keep a record of moments when the main characters make decisions that impact whether or not they find themselves in these traps.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Gram taught Milo, Gigi and Colby how to steal to profit her business, without considering the cost to the companies she was stealing from. Shoplifting incidents have increased dramatically in recent years—along with the costs to the businesses and the consumers. Place students in groups of four or five and assign each person in the group to research one of the following aspects of shoplifting: statistics, laws, prevention, causes and costs to businesses and consumers. Then ask each group to prepare a technology presentation of their findings to be presented as part of a school crime prevention program or other civic or citizenship programs.
- Colby did not plan on becoming pregnant, but when she did she had some decisions to make: abortion, adoption or raising the baby. In small groups, have students research community programs and counseling resources for pregnant teens. Then ask students to prepare a brochure that will encourage pregnant teens to utilize these resources to make the best decisions for their lives. The brochures can be made available through the counselor's office, the nurse's office, or the community program.

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

The setting provides detail, depth and a variety of situations which support both the plot and the characterization. Ask students to select a different setting (time and place) and to create and illustrate a storyboard detailing the changes that would occur in the story. Have each student select one event from the new storyboard and provide a short analysis of how the new setting would impact the plot events or characterization. Have students share their analyses in small groups and post storyboards in the classroom.

Character

The reader sees Gigi's decline into drugs as the story progresses. Discuss with students how the author portrays Gigi's decline through her appearance, her actions, her words, and the way others view her. Working in small groups, ask students to investigate and discuss ways to help a drug addict get clean. Then ask the groups to write an action plan explaining what they would do if they were in a situation similar to that of Colby and Milo. Have groups write, practice and present a new scene for the book in which the characters put the plan into action. The scenes can be presented as part of Drug Prevention Week at the school.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Why does Gigi feel betrayed when Colby tells her she is pregnant? Why does Colby keep it a secret from Gigi?
2. In the chapter “home again,” what is Gigi’s reaction to the fact that Milo is the father of Colby’s baby? How does Gram react to the news?
3. When Colby enters rehab and meets Jordan, they are enemies from the beginning. Why does Colby confide in Jordan about her life? How does that change their relationship?
4. After rehab, Colby makes the decision to stop stealing. How does her decision affect her relationship with Gigi and her family?
5. Knowing Colby’s family background, why would she be so willing to change her life for her baby? How does fatherhood affect Milo’s life? In what ways do Colby and Milo change as a result of the baby?
6. How does Colby react to Mr. Horvath’s visit to her apartment in the chapter “the fox and the moon”? How does Milo smooth out the tension?
7. How do Colby, Milo and Gram react to Gigi’s death? Could they have done anything to save her?
8. How does Colby react to reuniting with her father? How does his involvement in her life complete her family?

Writer’s Craft

Ask each student to find the following words in the novel and then to look up their meanings in various different classroom dictionaries. Students should locate and copy 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 and determine if/why the author chose each word as the perfect choice for the sentence. Have students create a visual representing their discussion and findings.

bristled	(“the fox”)	gawked	(“not telling”)
dapper	(“the fox”)	glowered	(“not telling”)
debonair	(“the fox”)	ommission	(“not telling”)
frenetic	(“Gigi in the night”)	smirked	(“extreme barf warning”)

Author Biography

Award-winning author **Carrie Mac** loves to spend time with her imagination and reads nonstop. She homeschools her two children and has taught them to keep a journal of their thoughts, drawings and story ideas. Her book ideas come from her surroundings and stories of the past. She is fascinated with hurricanes, plagues, genocides and car wrecks, and these topics find their way into her books. She also loves to dabble in fairy-tale stories and regrets not running away to join the circus when she had the opportunity. Ms. Mac currently lives in Vancouver with her family.