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Norah McClintock

Interest level: grade 7 and up

Reading level: 4.0

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AR Quiz # 129683

Book Summary

When Eden protects a pregnant Shana from JoJo, JoJo beats Eden so severely he is in a coma for more than two years before he dies. After JoJo is sentenced and serves time, he is released from prison and returns home to care for his cancer-stricken mother. Although JoJo does his best to stay clear of trouble, Ardell, Eden's brother, harasses JoJo continually, canvassing neighborhood businesses to ban JoJo from entry, watching every move he makes and verbally threatening him. Things come to a head when Shana, who has had JoJo's baby, takes the child to see him. Ardell's plan to kill JoJo is put into action, and no one can stop it.

Prereading Idea

Read chapter one to students and ask them to make a list of facts about the characters, the setting and the situation. Ask students to make a prediction log, which they will use throughout the reading of the book. On one side of the log, have students make predictions about what could happen based on the facts. On the other side, ask students to provide rationales for each of their predictions. As students continue reading the novel, have them make additional entries in their prediction log.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

The narrator makes a wise observation on page 14: “Ardell has hate in his heart, and hate takes the fear out of people and replaces it with a thirst for vengeance.” Ask students to think of a time in their lives when they have either witnessed this truth personally or read about it in a news report. Ask students to write a one-page summary of the event to share with the class. Post summaries around the room.

On page 30, Eden’s father suggests that the family remove life support and allow Eden to try to live without the machinery that is keeping him alive. Eden has been in a coma for over two years and has no brain activity. The issue is, who has the right to decide to remove life support from comatose patients? Of great concern in society today, this question has been brought to public attention by the news media in recent years. Divide the class into groups, and have students research and debate the following topic: “Family members should have the right to decide whether or not to remove a loved one from life support.” Ask a panel of administrators, the librarian and the counselor to judge the debates.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

Setting

The place and time of this story is important to the action of the story. Ask students to determine the setting and write a justification for their decisions about when and where this story occurs, explaining why the setting is key to the story.

Irony

The reader knows what JoJo is doing to help his mother; the reader sees that JoJo is a changed man. On page 74, the narrator’s mother states, “But he’s making up for it now, without anyone watching him, without anyone knowing.” Ask students to define dramatic irony and to find examples throughout the novel of what the narrator and readers know that Ardell and the community do not know. Have students select one example and create a cartoon strip illustrating the irony.

Conflict

The conflict between JoJo and Ardell moves the story forward, and Shana adds interest. How does the phrase “an eye for an eye” (page 31) apply to these three characters as well as Benjamin and Eden? Ask students to draw an illustrated web, making the connections and showing the depth of conflict. Have students add pictures, symbolic representations and elements of color to convey the conflicts.

Point of View

The story is told through the voice of a narrator, reporting the events as they happen, interjecting her emotions and opinions about what is taking place. The reader does not ever truly know what JoJo thinks or feels. Occasionally, the reader hears what

Shana and Ardell say, but not the emotions they feel or what they think. Ask students to select one of these three characters and, with a partner, choose a scene in which they interact. Have them rewrite the dialogue from that character's point of view. Then ask students to rehearse and present their new scenes to the class.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. The reader does not know what or how JoJo feels about his past actions from what he says, only from what he does. Based on his actions, what is JoJo's attitude about his past? What does he do to let the reader know how he has changed?
2. Before JoJo was sent to jail, he terrorized the town, so the townspeople had their reasons to fear him and treat him badly. What could JoJo have done to show that he had changed?
3. Ardell is understandably angry and bitter toward JoJo. What does his anger do for him? How does it help or hinder him? How does Ardell use his anger to control others in his family and his community?
4. Why does Ardell's father move out of the house? Was the move more Ardell's idea or his mother's? Why?
5. Why is Shana able to forgive JoJo and allow him to see their son? Why are Shana's parents not so forgiving?
6. How does gossip fuel the anger in Ardell and the hatred the community feels toward JoJo? Why is no one willing to give him a second chance? To even talk to him or his mother?
7. Why are the people in the community willing to forgive and even cover up for Ardell and his actions, but not JoJo's actions?
8. After Ardell assaults Shana, shakes her baby and resists arrest, the community continues to blame JoJo. The people say, "They should have locked JoJo up longer." And, "If he hadn't come back here, none of this would have happened," (page 67). Why is it easier for them to blame JoJo than to hold Ardell responsible for his actions?
9. The narrator is a passive observer throughout the story. Why doesn't she involve herself? What are her feelings toward JoJo? Would it have made a difference to JoJo if he had known how she felt?

10. Why does the narrator finally decide to call the police about what she sees the night JoJo is killed? What will her decision cost her and her family?

Writer's Craft

Vocabulary

Have students work with a partner to look up the following words in the dictionary. Have students create synonym/antonym cards of each of the words and use the cards as a personal resource for their writing portfolios.

Notorious page 27
Glower page 28
Beckon page 35

Swagger page 38
Jeer page 44
Resound page 62

Author Biography

Norah McClintock was born and raised in Montreal, Quebec, and earned a degree in history from McGill University. A five-time winner of the Crime Writers of Canada's Arthur Ellis Award for Best Juvenile Crime Novel, she began writing mysteries because she personally loves reading them. In addition to her love of reading, she enjoys writing, hiking, biking, taking long walks in the woods, cross-country skiing, baking and going to the movies. The initial ideas for her books usually stem from news stories—to which she adds her own imagination and creativity. Norah lives with her family in Toronto, Ontario.