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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Touching Spirit Bear

by Ben Mikaelson

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Touching Spirit Bear

Note to the Teacher

Touching Spirit Bear contains brief scenes of graphic violence. In addition, it deals with the issues of alcoholism, child abuse and neglect, and suicide.

All references come from the Harper Trophy edition of *Touching Spirit Bear*, copyright 2001, by Ben Mikaelson.

Touching Spirit Bear

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify and explain, using specific examples, the point of view from which the story is written.
2. discuss the concept of forgiveness and the challenges it presents in relationships.
3. identify similes and explain how the author uses them to help develop characters and events in the novel.
4. discuss the motif of fire and its connection to anger or rage, using specific examples from the story to explain the significance of the repeated images.
5. explain, using specific examples, how hubris plays a role in Cole's difficulties throughout the novel.
6. describe how the story illustrates four different types of conflict
 - man vs. man,
 - man vs. self,
 - man vs. society,
 - and man vs. nature.
7. discuss the motif of the circle and explain, how the use of repeated images of circles and circular events relates to a theme of the novel.
8. explain, using specific examples from the novel, how violence is cyclical in nature.
9. describe how the author uses flashback and explain its effect(s) on the story and the development of Cole's character.
10. cite examples of aphorisms in the novel and explain, using specific examples from the novel and from their own lives, whether students agree or disagree with them and why.
11. identify a theme of the novel using specific examples of actions and events in the story to support their thoughts.
12. discuss the role of mentors in and their importance to in a person's life.

Touching Spirit Bear

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. At the beginning of the story, Cole seems determined to resist the efforts of people around him to change or shape him. As the story progresses, however, Cole does choose to change in some important ways. Write an essay in which you identify several key places in which Cole has to make a choice to change or to remain the same. For each example, explain the choice he makes and the effects of that choice on Cole and his future.
2. This novel shows how physical violence can create more violence. Explain, using what you learn about Cole's life story, how this is true for him. Then, consider what other destructive personal or relationship issues might also have a repetitive or circular quality to them. Discuss why you think this kind of repetition occurs and how people can break such unhealthy cycles.
3. After Cole performed the anger dance, he realized that "[n]obody ever woke up in the morning and chose to be angry. That meant that if he remained angry, something outside him controlled him." One's ability to choose how to feel and to react in any situation is a strong theme in the novel. Discuss the concept of choice in this quote. Do you agree or disagree with Cole? Use examples both from the novel and from your life to support your thoughts.
4. Often in the novel, Cole reflects back on earlier events in his life—events that we, as readers, do not yet know. As he relives these incidents, we learn things about Cole that help us understand why he is the way he is. Choose one such flashback, summarize it, and explain what you learn about Cole through his reminiscing. How does this new knowledge affect the way you look at and understand Cole?
5. Cite at least two examples of foreshadowing in the novel and explain how they help to create suspense and forward the audience's interest in the action of the story.
6. Garvey and Edwin often use aphorisms when they speak with Cole. Choose one of these statements that you have strong positive or negative feelings for, and write an essay in which you explain its significance in your own life.
7. Write a personal response to the end of the book. Is it realistic to you? Why or why not? Provide specific examples from the book and your own life experiences to support your opinion.
8. Write a personal essay in which you respond to this statement by Edwin: "[M]aybe people don't change completely overnight, but I do believe they can change direction overnight. Facing in a new direction is the first step of any new journey." Do you agree or disagree? Use examples from your life, this book, and literature in general to support your opinion.

Touching Spirit Bear

Chapter 1

Vocabulary

banishment – a forced separation from others as a means of punishment

chafed – rubbed against roughly; irritated

defiantly – in a resistant or willful way

depositions – formal statements given for use in court cases

feigned – pretended

humility – modesty; the lack of pride

omen – an object or event that is believed to have paranormal powers

probation officer – a person assigned to supervise a released convict

skiff – a small boat

smirked – smiled in an phony or annoying way

1. Where is Cole being taken by boat?

2. Why is he going there?

3. What is Circle Justice?

5. What is the effect of the repetition and parallelism in this passage? “His wild laughter mocked the world and everyone he had ever known. It mocked the loneliness. It mocked every bully that had ever picked on him. He laughed at every time he had ever been teased, every time he’d been arrested, every time his parents had argued. He laughed at all the times he’d been beaten by his drunken father, or been ignored by his drunken mother.”

6. What is Cole’s plan of escape from the island?

7. In the next flashback, when Cole suggests that if Peter forgives him, everyone else will stop seeking punishment, Garvey replies, “Forgiving isn’t forgetting, Chump!” What does he mean?

8. Garvey continually calls Cole “Champ” throughout this chapter, but he changes the nickname to “Chump” at the end of the chapter. In what ways is Cole acting like a “chump”?

Chapter 9

Vocabulary

acid – strong or irritating
fend – to provide
frothed – foamed or bubbled
grimaced – made a face that showed pain
haphazard – without order or direction
reservoir – a storehouse
sobering – making one thoughtful or serious
stuporous – extremely dulled or dazed
subsided – settled down or lessened in intensity
torrents – violent streams or sheets
ward – to guard against
welled – rose to the surface

1. Describe how the bird's nest with the baby birds in it affects Cole.

2. What sentence from the early part of this chapter shows personification? Explain what human characteristics are being given to the inanimate object in the passage. How does this relate to the way Cole is feeling right now?

3. Describe Cole's dream. What significance could it have?
