

Red Rage

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genre: FICTION

themes: VIOLENCE
FAMILY
IDENTITY
TEENS
RIGHT VS WRONG
RELATIONSHIPS
FITTING IN

suitable for: GRADES 9–11

Mara's home life is a mess. Her father has a drinking problem and is sometimes violent toward her mother. Because of psychological problems, Mara's mother is no longer able to work to help make ends meet. And Mara's sister has left home, leaving Mara to cope with her parents. Outside of home, Mara hides behind her image of a tough kid, a bully whose aggressive behavior at school is about to get her kicked out. When an interested boy and an enjoyable work placement come along, things seem to be looking up. But when both these situations go wrong, Mara's rage lets loose—with devastating consequences.

The following activity ideas ...

... are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

Before

STARTING THE BOOK

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest.

1. Have students define “alienation.” Ask them to consider:
 - if they have ever felt alienated from a group and, if so, why.
 - characters they've encountered in books and movies who felt alienated, and how a sense of alienation affected these characters.
 - whether feeling alienated is always a negative experience.

READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

CHAPTERS 1–12

1. Invite students to discuss in what ways Mara constructs an identity to present to others, and why she does this. How is this identity different from who Mara really is inside?
2. In chapters 9–10, the author introduces two situations that suggest further developments in the novel: Mara's work placement at the daycare and her encounter with Tim Harris on the bus. Have students make predictions about what might happen with each situation.
3. Students could write a journal entry to respond to one of the following questions:
 - In what ways is Mara a victim? What is she a victim of?
 - What behaviors show Mara to be her own worst enemy? Why do you think she engages in these behaviors?

CHAPTERS 13–24

4. Mara judges the behavior of the gang of four grade 9 girls as “totally evil” (p. 82), as well as “stupid” and “totally wrong” (p. 100). Invite students to write a brief monologue showing how Mara might respond if someone described her own worst behavior in the same way.
5. Discuss with students how authors create situations that allow them to develop a character, and then have students review the predictions they made in activity 2. Ask:
 - How do the scenes showing Mara at the daycare center and with Tim reveal more about Mara's character?
 - What ideas do these scenes give you about how the rest of the novel might take shape? Do they offer the possibility of change for Mara?

CHAPTERS 25–38

6. Invite students to work in pairs to role-play a conversation between Mara and Mrs. Clement, in which Mara explains why Katie was in the closet. Through the conversation, students could present their views about whether Mara deserves a second chance working at the daycare.

7. Ask students to evaluate how the author brought the novel to a close in the final chapter. Did they find this conclusion effective? Can they think of other approaches that might be more effective? Some students may wish to outline or write an alternate final chapter for the novel.

After

READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

1. In small groups, students could informally debate who or what is most responsible for what happened to Mara—herself, her parents, or society in general. Encourage them to consider whether the author provides any clues about her own point of view.
2. Invite students to make connections between the novel and incidents of violence involving young people that have been in the news. Ask them to consider whether the novel has in any way affected their ideas about youth violence. Have students create a personal statement about youth violence, choosing a form such as a song, a poem, a public service announcement, or a poster.