

# PRISON BOY

by Sharon E. McKay

**Genre:** Fiction

**Themes:** Current events; death/loss; violence; global studies; love

**Suitable for:** Grades 8+

**Common Core State Standards in this guide:** RL.11-12.1,2,3,4,5,6  
W.11-12.2,2b,7,8,9,9a  
SL.11-12.1,1a,1b,1c,1d,4,5,6  
L.1-12.5,5a,5b

## THEMES

1. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of *Prison Boy*.
2. Analyze the development of themes over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account.
3. What is Sharon McKay's attitude towards those ideas?
4. Write a statement about the story's message from the author's point of view.
5. How are themes in *Prison Boy* expressed by the way Sharon McKay makes you feel? What is your attitude or response to the themes?
6. What actions and events in the story are used to suggest the theme?

## CHARACTERS

1. Who are the main characters in *Prison Boy*? Explain using details from the story.
2. How are the characters introduced and developed?
3. Describe the beliefs, hopes, dreams, ideals, values, morals, fears, strengths, weaknesses, vices, virtues and talents of Pax, Kai, and Bell. Include what they say and do to reveal themselves.
4. Discuss the feelings of the main characters. Find examples from the text that affect you as the author enables the reader to share the ideas that go through the characters' minds.

5. What are your feelings about Pax, Kai and Bell throughout the story? What do you learn about the characters as the plot moves towards resolution? How do these revelations change the way you view or feel about the characters?
6. How do the characters' actions contribute to the sequence of events?
7. What decisions MUST characters make (Bell, Pax, Kai, Ol' May, Teacher, Dr. Bennett/Peter, Dr. Ezat Ampior)?
8. What do the main characters learn in the story? What did you learn from the characters?

## SETTING

1. What feelings are evoked by the setting? Where and when is the story set? Does the author reveal this? Discuss the setting in detail as if you were a detective trying to find the "pink house". Conduct research based on facts from the story.

## FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

2. What is symbolism? How do authors use symbolism in fiction?
3. Describe what concrete and recurring objects, colors, names etc. have been used to represent abstract ideas from the book.
4. What do the following objects and ideas represent? Discuss where in the story they are mentioned and how they relate overall to the themes, events and outcomes of *Prison Boy*: shoes, poetry, birds, stories, books, the pink house, car.
5. In small groups find examples of how McKay uses figurative language in *Prison Boy*. Exchange words and phrases with other groups and determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text.
6. Analyze the impact of words and phrases used in the text on meaning and tone of the story. Discuss how Sharon McKay incorporates poetry into the lives of the characters throughout the book.
7. Who said it, at what point in the story and why?
  - "We are asked to forgive the fools of this world. I am tired of forgiving!"
  - "Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart."
  - "Every bad day has an ending and every good day a beginning."
  - "Being alone is like being hungry. Holding the baby makes me feel full."
  - "It is wrong to kill for love, but it is not wrong to fight for love."
  - "Torture is used by governments and regimes when they become afraid of losing power, when they have lost their moral compass."

## WRITERS' CRAFT

1. Analyze how Sharon McKay uses the following to structure the story: exposition, complications, crisis, climax and resolution.
2. How does Sharon McKay tie up loose ends?
3. Give examples from *Prison Boy* of plot devices including flashback, flash forward, time lapse, suspense, and surprise ending.
4. Compare and contrast the setting, events and themes in *Prison Boy* with other contemporary accounts as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.
5. What do you think is Sharon McKay's main purpose for writing *Prison Boy*?
6. Write an informative/explanatory text examining human rights violations from around the world and the organizations created to end torture across international borders. (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch)