

A NOVEL STUDY



Novel Study Project

This novel study project was developed by the Regional Vancouver Island Aboriginal Circle with the help of the Aboriginal Education Branch at the Ministry of Education.

Special thanks to Louise Spencer for her contributions.

The goal of the novel study project was to create lessons incorporating Aboriginal literature and/or Aboriginal authors, while keeping in mind, the Aboriginal learner.

In order to best meet these goals the lessons were designed to:

- Respect the cultures of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who may read and participate in these lessons.
- To use a non-linear approach
- To provide mix and match strategies that may be applied to many texts
- To use graphic organizers whenever possible to accommodate the inclusion of a diversity of learners
- To provide opportunities to integrate English and Social Studies
- To include elements of writing, inquiry, collaboration and reading in each lesson
- To provide a set of question that can be used as prompts for discussion groups, journaling activities, comprehension or evaluation

Touching Spirit Bear

A novel by: Ben Mikaelson

ISBN 0-380-97744-3

NOVEL SUMMARY

The main character in *Touching Spirit Bear*, Cole Matthews, is an angry young man. Cole has been stealing and fighting for years. Early in the novel, Cole catches Alex Driscal in a parking lot where a fight ensues and Cole smashes Alex's head against the sidewalk. Now, Alex may have permanent brain damage and Cole is in deep trouble.

Cole is offered Circle Justice, a system based on First Nation's traditions that attempts to provide healing for the criminal offender, the victim and the community. With prison as his only other alternative, Cole plays along. He says he wants to repent, but in his heart Cole blames his alcoholic mom, his abusive dad, wimpy Alex — everyone but himself — for his situation.

Cole receives a one year banishment to a remote Alaskan island. There, he is mauled by the mysterious white bear of First Nations legend. Hideously injured, Cole waits for his death, his thoughts shift from anger to humility. To survive, he must stop blaming others and take responsibility for his life. Rescuers arrive to save Cole's life but it is the attack of the Spirit Bear that may save his soul.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Mikaelson has won the International Reading Association Award and the Western Writers Golden Spur Award. His novels have won critical acclaim, as well as several Reader's Choice awards. These novels include: *Rescue*, *Josh McGuire*, *Sparrow Hawk Red*, *Stranded*, *Countdown*, *Petey* and *Touching Spirit Bear*. Ben's articles and photos appear in numerous magazines around the world. Ben and his wife, Melanie, live in a log cabin near Bozeman, Montana, with a 700-pound black bear they have adopted and raised.

RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL: 8 and up

THEMES EXPLORED IN THE NOVEL:

- ◆ Aboriginal Justice Circles
- ◆ Survival
- ◆ Elders
- ◆ Respect
- ◆ Empathy
- ◆ Behaviour
- ◆ Character

STUDENT ACTIVITY 1: Word Splash

Connecting what you're learning to what you already know.

Noting similarities and differences is one of the most powerful ways to have students connect to what they are learning and to what they already know about a topic. "Word splash" is a learning strategy that asks students to sort and classify words, while explaining the connections and the relationships between the words or concepts. Graphics can be substituted for words and metaphors and analogies can also be used to promote comprehension.

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Have students cut up the word lists that follow..
- 2 Ask them to sort the words into categories.
- 3 Students then make lists and give headings or titles that explain their categories.

Touching Spirit Bear
Word Splash

Detention centre

Circle of Justice

skiff

Juvenile delinquent

Tlingit

Spirit Bear

banishment

healing contract

prosecutor

punish

defense lawyer

convicted

patience

probation

honesty

gentleness

innocent

victim

Creator

guilty plea

soul

depositions

sincere

survival

strength

protected bay

Anger

STUDENT ACTIVITY 2: Speaking Bubbles

Exploring Characters and their Behavior

Behavior is a major theme in this novel. When Cole is offered the chance to take responsibility for his behavior and heal himself and the community through a Circle Justice, he grabs it, but for all the wrong reasons. While Cole cons everyone who is trying to help him into believing that he sincerely wants to change, he fully intends to escape their brand of justice, and to continue being in control of his own life. Cole's character is particularly good for providing students an opportunity to explore how a person's behavior shapes who they become.

DIRECTIONS

A) Discussion with whole group

Discuss with students the relevance of our behaviours as they influence how others think about us.

- Ask students to consider how our behaviours shape who we are?
- Does our behaviour matter?
- Why is it important?
- Does the way in which other people see us ever cause us to change our behaviour? Give an example.

B) Small Group Discussion

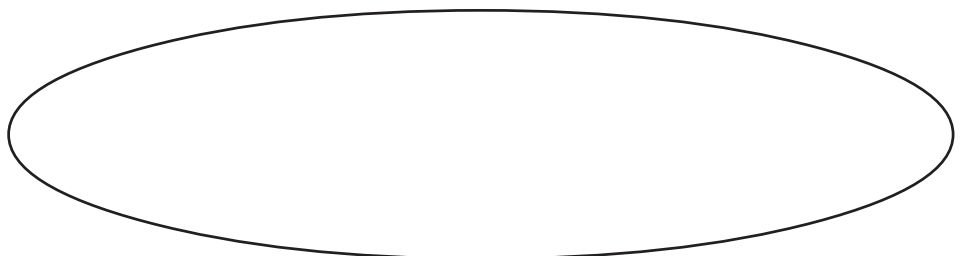
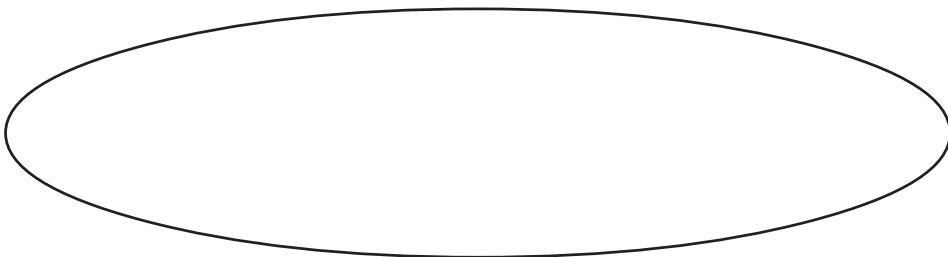
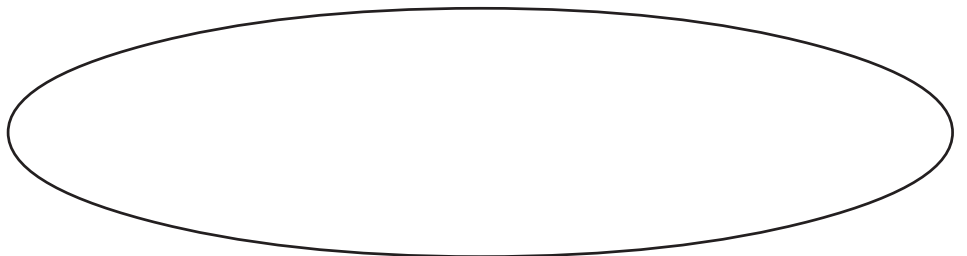
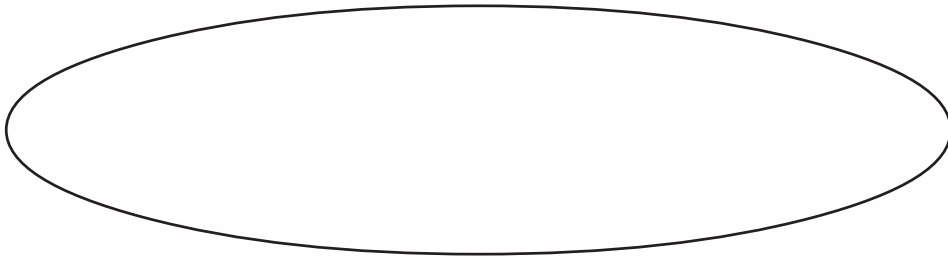
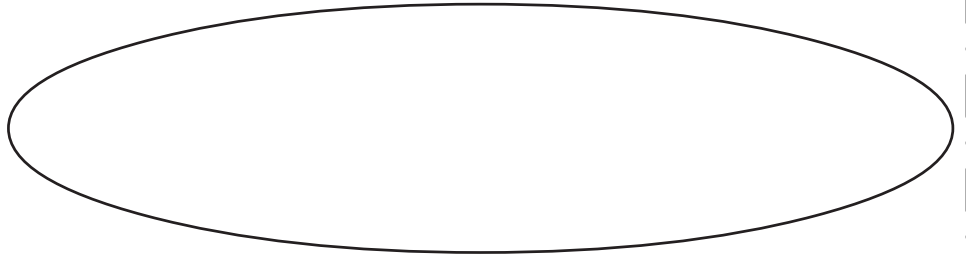
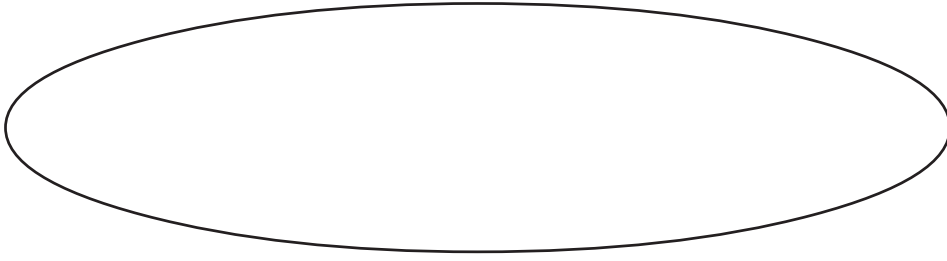
In small groups have students think of words to describe Cole's behaviour throughout the novel. Have students copy these behaviour words into the speaking bubbles on the next page, then ask them to provide evidence of the behavior by finding quotes that demonstrate the behaviour.

Examples:

"Cole laughed and spit at him even as he was held back: Pg 7
Relentless...

"Nobody crossed Cole Matthews and got away with it!" pg 7
Defiant...

SPEAKING BUBBLES



STUDENT ACTIVITY 3: T-Chart - Finding Evidence in Text

Directions: Finding evidence in the text:

1. On the left side of the t-chart, find sentences in the novel that describe behaviour, words or actions.
2. On the right side of the t-chart, explain what the sentence tells us about the person. What questions might you have?

Behaviour/Words/Actions

“Cole’s mother dusted the imaginary specks off her dress, then picked up the feather hesitatingly.” page 49

“Cole’s father raised his voice even louder.”

Response

Cole’s mom is avoiding the issue. She is afraid to speak. Why is she so afraid of her husband? Aren’t you supposed to trust your spouse? Why is she such a mouse?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 4 - Silent Write or Reflective Journal

This student activity reinforces the skill of reading for evidence and for extending student knowledge about the relationship between behaviour and character.

Silent writes allow students time to reflect and to clarify their thinking. We don't always know what we are thinking until we write it down. Early on in the novel, students should be asked how they are feeling about Cole so far and to record their thoughts in a reflective journal.

Directions for a Reflective Journal

1. Students divide a paper into three columns
2. Label the columns "What Happened"/"How I Felt"/"What I Learned"

In the first column, students describe an event from the novel that stands out for them as being particularly emotional. In the second column they describe how the event makes them feel and in the third column they explain how the event and their feelings around the event influence how they feel about Cole.

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

What Happened	How I Felt	What I Learned

STUDENT ACTIVITY 5 – Gallery Walk

Making Comparisons and Rank Ordering Preferences

Gallery Walks enable students to rank order their preferences given a selection of variables to choose from. It is important to have students recognize and acknowledge their preferences and to have the opportunity to see how these compare with those of other students. Students should be encouraged to recognize that a preference for one thing does not discount the next thing. Gallery walks, although potentially noisy, allow students freedom of movement, an opportunity to stretch and a chance to reenergize.

Using the dominant traits of characters, or recurring beliefs or themes in novels is a good way to help students prioritize their thinking about the importance of various aspects of the novel.

DIRECTIONS

1. Place four pieces of chart paper on each wall of the classroom and ask students to number in order the concept or quality written on the chart that is most important to them.
2. Each student enters a numeral from one to 4 on one of the charts and places their initial beside the ordinal. Encourage students to think about the qualities that we look for in other people and which qualities are most important to them.
3. After all students have placed their preferences have students create four simple bar graphs that shows how many one's, two's, three's and four's each quality received and discuss the trends that emerge from the graphs.

Example:

Patience

Gentleness

Strength

Honesty

Rate these qualities in order of importance to you. Which qualities do you look for in others? Which is the most important to you?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 6 – Gallery Walk

“Agree or Disagree”

DIRECTIONS

1. Draw a circle on the statement that you agree with and a square on statement that you disagree with.
2. Count how many students agreed and disagreed with each statement.
3. In a small group, make a chart that represents the opinions of your class.

Agree and Disagree Statements

- 1 Juvenile delinquents are a symptom of a broken down family or community.
- 2 Much of human communication is based on body language.
- 3 “Touch” is an essential human need.
- 4 Actions speak louder than words.
- 5 Anger involves a lot of negative energy.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 7 – Character Frames

Directions

Think of characters from other books or movies that you know well. Name the character and state both the positive and negative qualities that the character may possess.

Example:

Harry Potter: Harry is so patient. He puts up with so much from his aunt and uncle without using his powers to harm them.

Ponyboy: Ponyboy is a gentle character. He belongs to the gang known as the Greasers. Even though he has a tough life, he is not violent and looks for the gentle or right solution. He stays 'gold' always.

STUDENT ACTIVITY - Character Frames

Today as you read, find examples of positive and negative qualities in four different characters found in the novel. Copy the names of the characters you have chosen into the boxes below. Write three or four sentences that describe the positive and negative qualities of the characters you have chosen.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 8 - Using Nonlinguistic Representation

Using Icons for Characters “Learning Moments”

Nonlinguistic representations are very effective in aiding comprehension, especially with struggling readers. Nonlinguistic representations may include graphic organizers, story boards, icons and Venn diagrams to name a few.

The following student activities are geared to exploring the growth of characters throughout a story. The plot in a novel often follows a path of conflict building to a climax followed by a resolution. Characters along the way learn lessons or have learning moments that allow them to change their behaviours and to become better persons than they were before.

Cole has definite learning moments throughout the novel. By the end of chapter 8, he has learned a great deal about himself. The following icon activity represents places in the plot where Cole might have encountered road blocks, found the way difficult, changed or redirected his energies, looked for ways to carry on, felt out of control or finally moved forward in his life.

DIRECTIONS

1. Discuss these different stages with your students and how they relate to the icon on the student activity page.
2. Have students cut and paste the icons onto a sheet of paper and find evidence or passages from the novel that describe these particular stages in Cole’s learning journey.

Another approach might be to have students complete the same activity but this time they are asked to draw their own icons that represent the challenges and changes that occur for Cole.

Venn Diagrams

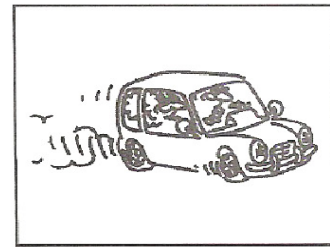
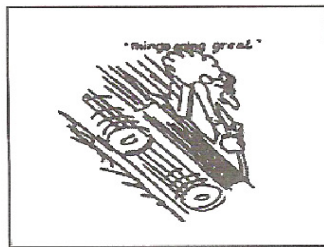
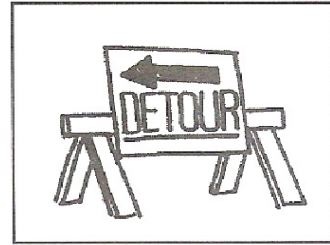
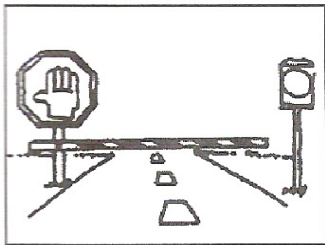
Venn Diagrams are great for looking at similar and different traits in different characters. Again as non-linguistic representations, they are a great alternative for struggling readers to demonstrate understanding. When using Venn Diagrams encourage students to make comparisons between substantially different things, that way they really have to think about what they have in common.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 8 - Using Icons

Characters “Learning Moments”

What is Cole starting to realize by the start of chapter 8? What has he learned?

Study the icons below

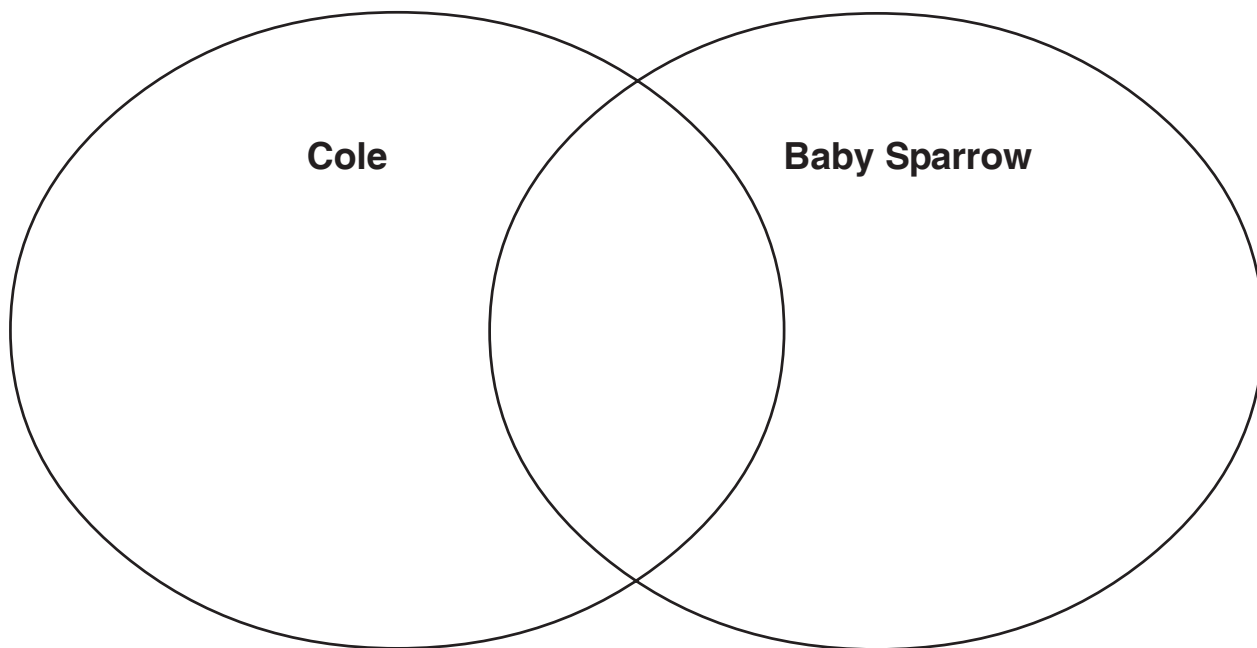


1. Up to this point, what has Cole learned?
2. When have his learning moments occurred? When did he have moments of realization?
3. Which roadblocks did Cole meet?
4. When did rejuvenating or 'fill-up' moments occur for him?
5. Which uphill climbs did he face?

Cut apart and glue your icons on a paper and write examples of each from the novel and provide a quote as evidence.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 8 - Venn Diagram

What does Cole have in common with a baby sparrow?
Complete this Venn diagram in pairs.



STUDENT ACTIVITY 9 - Cole's Learning Journey

Finding evidence in groups or partners.

Find the quote on the left in your novel.

On the right, add your response as to what you think Cole is realizing or learning or questioning. Then **find 5 more** quotes.

Ask yourself, "What is Cole feeling or realizing?"

Quote

Response

"Believe me champ, you're not o.k."
Cole forced a nod. "I am okay," he
grunted again. page 102

Cole is learning that he can survive.
He can possibly survive anything,
and he **wants** to survive.

A bitter loneliness swept over Cole
as tears clouded his vision. He felt
so small here, puked up on a
remote forgotten shore and left to
die. Page 73

STUDENT ACTIVITY 10 - Role Play Hotseat

Hotseat is an excellent activity as students will remember a great deal more of the story when they have been involved in a role play. For some students working with a partner or a small group is preferable to role playing in front of the whole class.

Directions

Students are shown a variety of contentious questions that could be asked of the characters in the novel. They assume the role of the character and answer the questions according to how they believe the character would answer them.

Rather than having individual students on the “Hotseat”, this activity could also be done as a walk around, where students collect various responses from their classmates while trying to guess which character their classmate is portraying in the answer.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 10 - Hotseat

Do you ever feel overwhelmed?

Do you ever blame others for what you do?

Is your life balanced?

How is your health?

How do you feed your spirit?

Do you like to be alone sometimes?

How do you connect with nature?

Does what you do matter?

STUDENT ACTIVITY 11 - Biographic Poetry

Biographic poetry helps students to understand the emotions of a character. This writing strategy works best after the study or investigation of a character. There are a variety of resources that may be used including biographic videos and DVD's, the internet, pictures, etc.

Example:

Martin Luther King, Jr.

After watching the biographic videotape on Martin Luther King Jr.

Student Example

Name:	Martin Luther King Jr.
Four traits:	Black, Proud, Leader, Strong
Related to:	Alberta Williams King
Who cares deeply about:	Fairness and freedom for his race
Who feels:	Racism is not right
Who needs:	People to see beyond colour
Who gives:	Leadership to all people
Who fears:	Judgement from colour won't end
Who would like to see:	Blacks and whites together
Resident of:	Atlanta Georgia

DIRECTIONS

Have students use the following frame to write a biographic poem about Cole or another character from the novel.

STUDENT ACTIVITY 11 - Biographic Poetry Framework

Name:

Three traits:

Related to:

Who cares deeply about:

Who feels:

Who needs:

Who gives:

Who fears:

Who would like to see:

Resident of:

STUDENT ACTIVITY 12 - Gallery Walk and Quick Write

Topic - Anger

1. Think of a time when you were angry. What did it feel like? What did it look and sound like?
2. Gallery Walk - agree or disagree?
 - ◆ Actions speak louder than words.
 - ◆ People never change.
 - ◆ It's not important what others think.
 - ◆ Kids whose parents mistreat them will probably, in turn, mistreat their own kids.
 - ◆ "Anger is a memory never forgotten."
3. Write a paragraph stating why you agree or disagree with the above.

Paragraph Writing:

Writing a paragraph about a character.

Choose one character.

What did the character do of significance?

Why do characters do what they do?

Study the character's actions and words.

Choose a quote or two that shows what they do and perhaps why.

Talk about or role play that character's possible motivations or actions.

Literature Circles Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

1. What is the role of a jail?
2. Does Cole deserve to go to a remote Alaskan Island instead of jail?
3. What do you suppose “Circle of Justice” hopes Cole will learn?
4. What do you think about Cole’s character when he ‘laughs’ as he sees fear in his victim’s eyes?
5. Why does Cole blame his parents for the mess he’s in?
6. Why do you suppose ‘Cole hated being touched’? (page 11)
7. How do you feel about Cole’s character when he ‘acts’ remorseful by ‘using the innocent childish voice that has served him countless times before?’ (page 12)

Chapter 2

8. Why does Cole think or believe his dad “agreed to pay all the expenses” of the banishment?
9. What useful advice does Garvey give to Cole about survival?
10. What do you suppose Cole will do with the “At.oow” later in the story?
11. What do you think of all Garvey’s advice and wisdom that he gives to Cole?
12. Why do you think Cole immediately set his shelter and supplies on fire?

Chapter 3

13. What was Garvey trying to make Cole understand when he gave him the cake ingredients?
14. Why is Cole so mad at everyone else? Shouldn’t he be trying to let people help him? Why isn’t he?
15. “As the searing flames surged and rolled high along the sides of the shelter his laughter grew hysterical.” What does hysterical mean? Has your sense of not knowing whether to laugh or cry ever made you feel hysterical?

Chapter 4

16. Why does the Aboriginal People's philosophy and approach involve circles?
17. Why do you suppose Cole was worrying about seeing Peter 'for the first time since the beating'?
18. According to the Circle of Justice, what does jail do? Do you agree?
19. Why does the Circle carry only two obligations – honesty and respect?
20. "Tonight the group wanted to believe he was sorry, he could see it in their eyes." Do you suppose Cole ever thought about whether or not the people in the circle could read his eyes?
21. When you read the reasons for each of Cole's parents that they give for being there, what do you notice? Why are each of them there? What does each person want to get out of the meeting? Read their words and then read between the lines. What message is Cole getting?
22. What do you think Cole is beginning to realize when you read the last paragraph of chapter 4?

Chapter 5-6

23. Do you think you would try to escape on the first day?
24. Why do you suppose Cole confronted his parents at that particular time?
25. What is the purpose of the "feather passing" in the Circle of Justice?

Chapter 7

26. What smart things did Cole do in chapter 7?
27. What is the significance of this quote when Cole meets Spirit Bear in the rain? What does this tell you about what Cole believes? Why do you suppose Cole believes he can make the bear run away from him?

“He could easily back away from this bear and not a single human being on the planet would ever know.”

28. Why do you think Cole asks, “was this how the world was going to get rid of him?”

Chapter 9

29. Why do you suppose Cole feels the way he does about the baby birds and their mother? Do you think he really feels this way, deep down?
30. “ Please, no more! No more! No more!” Cole begs to the night, the bear and the storm. Do you, the reader, feel sorry for him? Why or why not?

Chapter 10

31. What different emotions does Cole feel towards the birds?
32. Which question does Cole wonder about with regards to the baby bird’s death that proves he feels empathy?
33. What does it mean that, “Cole knew he had used ‘fake power’ many times”?
34. What were Cole’s reasons for choosing to live? Do you think other teenagers feel powerless or angry like Cole? How do teenagers cope?

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