

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Maze

by

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Book Information

Will Hobbs, The Maze
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Rick, a fourteen-year-old foster child, escapes from a juvenile detention facility near Las Vegas and travels to Canyonlands National Park in Utah, where he meets a bird biologist working on a project to reintroduce condors to the wild.

Award: Edgar Award/Honor Book

Topics: Adventure, Runaway; Animals, Birds; Family Life, Foster Children; Places, National Parks; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks; Recommended Reading, YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant YA

Main Characters

Gunderson Nuke's dimwitted partner

Janice Baker Rick's social worker

Jasper Nuke's vicious pit bull

Josh a biologist in charge of the Arizona Condor Project; he brings supplies into Lon's encampment

Killian a severely abused and disturbed boy at Blue Canyon Detention Center; he warns Rick that Rick is about to be beaten up

Lon Peregrino the biologist in charge of the Condor Project in Canyonlands National Park in Utah; he becomes a friend and advocate for Rick

M4 (Maverick) an independent-minded condor that breaks away from the safety of the flock

Mr. Bramwell (Mr. B) the kind librarian at Blue Canyon Youth Detention Center

Nuke Carlile an anti-government extremist who seeks revenge after losing his grazing rights in Canyonlands National Park

Rick Walker a fourteen-year-old boy and the main character of the story; a victim of foster care and the court system who finally finds direction for his life

Samuel L. Bendix the no-nonsense judge who sentences Rick to the Blue Canyon Youth Detention Center for a minor offense

Sky an injured bald eagle that Lon attends

Vocabulary

arroyo a dry gulch; a deep rut cut by the flow of an intermittent stream

cadence the rhythm and flow of the voice

cairn a mound of stones erected as a marker

carabiners metal rings with clips used to attach ropes

commissary a place where food and/or equipment is kept

confluence a flowing together of two or more streams

keel the main structural component of an aircraft or boat, running lengthwise from front to back, to which the frame is attached

pillage to loot or steal

precocious showing unusual mental maturity

Synopsis

Rick has just been sentenced to Blue Canyon Youth Detention Center near Las Vegas, Nevada, for a minor offense. Raised by his grandmother until her death when he was ten, he is basically a good boy struggling with being an orphan. He has spent the last four years moving from foster home to foster home, then to a group home, before being sentenced to the Center.

Rick avoids trouble in the Center by keeping busy in the garden, lifting weights, and reading. The garden, however, is taken away as the juvenile detainees lose interest. Rick, who had enjoyed working there and seeing things grow, resents the destruction of

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the garden by the maintenance men. He informs his social worker that guards are being bribed by the maintenance men so equipment switches and thefts can occur. Rick is warned by a fellow classmate that he is in trouble and about to get beaten up. Fearing for his life, Rick escapes from the Center and hitches rides, trying to avoid suspicion and being turned in, until he reaches Canyonlands National Park in Utah.

He finds himself at the encampment of Lon Peregrino, a bird biologist who is in charge of a condor project in the national park. Lon allows Rick to stay with him, even though he suspects Rick is running from something. When Lon takes to the cliffs to observe his birds, Rick stays behind in the camp. Seeing an old Humvee approaching, he hides on the periphery of camp. Two men step out, leaving a vicious pit bull inside the vehicle. Under the pretense of obtaining water, these men, Nuke Carlile and Gunderson, look through Lon's camp and talk about getting their "stuff" out of the canyon. When Lon returns, Rick reports what he overheard from the men, and Lon contacts the ranger station, indicating the possibility of looting of the Native American treasures in the canyon.

During the next few days, Rick helps Lon with the feeding and tracking of the juvenile condors, especially M4, or Maverick, who tends to leave the flock. While working together, Rick and Lon find they have much in common. They spent time in foster homes and both have had dreams of flying.

Lon does not just dream of flying, though. He is a long-time hang gliding instructor and invites Rick to watch him fly. Rick is fascinated, and ultimately, Lon teaches Rick to fly, too. As the two become close, Lon challenges Rick to forgive people in his past and to move on with his life.

While Rick learns about the condors and flying, Nuke and Gunderson have remained a threatening presence, camping near Rick and Lon. Joe Phipps, a conscientious park ranger, explains to Lon that Nuke is very bitter about losing grazing rights in the area that became the national park. Lon hopes

Nuke will remove his "stuff" soon, as the success of the condor project is being undermined, especially when Nuke's pit bull attacks and kills M4.

On a hike after his first tandem flight, Rick discovers Nuke's "stuff" is really a cache of ammunition and weapons. Knowing the men are very dangerous, he descends into a section of the park called the Maze to avoid detection. With a storm breaking, and in a precarious situation, Rick encounters Nuke, Gunderson, and the pit bull. Rick asks for their help in getting off a ledge, but Nuke and Gunderson abandon him. Rick barely escapes.

Lon observes that M1 has lost its bearings one day near Nuke's camp and then hears a shot that drives M1 further away. He goes to capture it and instructs Rick to drive for help if he does not return by evening. Rick discovers their fuel tank has been drained, so driving out is impossible. He sneaks up on Nuke's camp and overhears that they shot at the bird and at Lon because Lon was near another cave full of ammunition. Rick discovers that Nuke and Gunderson managed to trap Lon on a ledge in a dead-end canyon. A fierce storm is approaching, and Rick knows Lon is in danger. He decides to fly to rescue him. Nuke sees him preparing for flight and nearly prevents his take-off by siccing the dog on Rick, but Rick gets off. He makes a frightening and incredible flight in the approaching storm and manages a rough landing on slippery rock in pouring rain. Despite a broken arm, he is able to rescue Lon from the flooding canyons.

The scene switches to a courtroom in front of the same judge Rick faced before. This time, with the support of Lon and the Blue Canyon librarian, Rick is able to speak more confidently about himself and about the changes he has gone through to get past his feelings that he was trapped in a dead-end life. He is given a new start in Arizona with the requirement that he continue work on the Condor Project under Lon's supervision.

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Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

How does Nuke Carlile accomplish most of his "dirty work"? Why does he do this?

Nuke commands his dog, Jasper, to do things in various situations. He also orders Gunderson around. Nuke uses Jasper because he can easily claim the dog acted independently, which would free Nuke from any consequences. Although Gunderson could testify Nuke ordered him to do something, Nuke could claim his innocence and probably have the backing of the sheriff, since they are old friends.

Literary Analysis

Why did the author choose *The Maze* as the title to this story?

The image of a maze permeates the entire narrative. Rick's experiences in his foster homes led from one dead end to another. In Blue Canyon Youth Detention Center he feels stuck with no way out. When he finally escapes, his rides away from Blue Canyon seem to end abruptly until he finds himself in an area literally called the Maze, a series of canyons carved into the earth with few outlets. He lives in fear of being caught and returned to the Detention Center, which would again be like being trapped in a maze. References are made to the mythological story of Daedalus and his son, Icarus, escaping a maze, as well as to the expression "rats in a maze," which has ties to psychological research. Rick does physically become trapped one time but is able to climb out. Flying seems to give him a new perspective of the Maze, just as Lon is able to give him a new perspective on the dead ends he had confronted in his life. Finally, at the end of the story, Rick is able to tell the judge that he has found his way out.

Inferential Comprehension

Many parallels exist between Rick and Lon. What are some?

The similarities occur on many levels: in physical and intellectual traits, in family background, and in interests. Physically, they have scars on their faces and are muscular. They are intelligent and are able to improvise when things do not go as planned. Their backgrounds include living in foster families and having to live with bad decisions made by members of the legal system. Librarians influenced them both: Lon, by his foster mother and Rick, by Mr. B. They share a mutual interest in flying and have tremendous respect for the condors.

Constructing Meaning

A maverick is one who acts independently and does not necessarily follow the crowd. It is also a term for an unbranded or orphaned calf or colt. In what way is Rick a maverick?

Rick first shows the reader his independent qualities while at Blue Canyon. He steers clear of the main group and finds healthy activities for himself while he bides his time. He does not keep quiet about the corruption he witnesses, and he knows when he must leave. When his rides dead-end at Lon's encampment, he again shows his spirit. He is levelheaded in thinking and gets out of tough situations, yet he is willing to take risks to rescue a friend. Rick is also an orphan, although he does not like the term. He was raised by his grandmother and then placed in a series of foster homes and never formally adopted.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Even though Rick did not spend his early years in a traditional home with two parents, he did have a caring, concerned grandmother with whom he could live until he was ten years old. Unfortunately, not all children live in homes that have healthy environments. When this is the case, placement in foster or group homes is an option. Although child abuse is a difficult topic, it

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may be good for the students to look at the issue in a constructive manner. Perhaps a social worker from a local agency can come and talk to the class about various placement options for abused or neglected children. Encourage the students to ask questions about how placement is determined and qualifications for being foster parents.

bison or wolves in Yellowstone National Park, wolves in Wisconsin, moose on Isle Royale, Michigan, and Peregrine falcons in New York City. Students may be able to find websites for these projects or check the website mentioned in the book (<http://www.peregrinefund.org>).

Recognizing Details Lon stresses the importance of learning the theory as well as the steps involved in hang gliding. Have the students investigate these two aspects of hang gliding. Assign them to draw a diagram of a hang glider, label all its major components, and explain each part's function. Students should also be able to explain something about the physics of flight, including the aspects of lift and drag as it relates to air pressure and velocity. Then have them give a simple demonstration to illustrate these scientific principles.

Understanding Sequence Lon suggests Rick leave trail markers along his path to show him the way to get out of the Maze. Trails are sometimes marked with universal symbols that allow others to read them and know what is ahead. Students may be able to find a hiking guide or Girl Scout or Boy Scout handbook and learn how to mark trails. They could then mark a trail in a nearby preserve or forest so that other students can follow. If there are no trails available, have them draw various symbols on index cards and quiz each other on their meanings.

Recognizing Cause and Effect Rick becomes fascinated with Lon's project of reintroducing condors into the wild. As people have become more environmentally aware, support has been growing for the reintroduction of species into areas where they had once ranged. Have the students research a past study or investigate a new study whose purpose it is to reintroduce animals to a particular region. Report on the success or failure of the project and any problems the teams of scientists faced. Try to find out how the residents of the area responded to the project and if they cooperated with the study. Some possible studies to investigate include: