



Skate Freak

Lesley Choyce

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 2.9

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Book Summary

Dorf is all about skateboarding, and so far that's worked out fine. But now that he's in a new city, the terrain has changed. He's no longer free to skateboard where he wishes, school is more difficult, and his passion for skateboarding gets him the nickname and reputation as a freak. With his daring stunts, he gains the grudging respect of local troublemakers, but he needs to tap into another kind of courage to effect real change.

Author Biography

Lesley Choyce has published nearly 60 books for adults and kids. Lesley's Young Adult novels revolve around subjects like skateboarding, surfing, racism, environmental issues, organ transplants and rock bands. He's worked as a rehab counselor, a freight hauler, a corn farmer, a janitor, a journalist, a lead guitarist, a newspaper boy and a well-digger. He also hosts a nationally-syndicated TV talk show on Vision TV. Lesley's books include *Refuge Cove*, *Thunderbowl* and *Wave Warrior* from the Orca Soundings series and *Sudden Impact* from the Orca Currents series.

Connecting to the Text

Character and Novel Study

To engage students with the main characters in *Skate Freak*, use the following as group discussion topics, individual novel study or writing exercises:

1. Hodge calls Dorf an “A-one skate freak” who doesn’t “back down” (p. 43). When Hodge challenges Dorf to jump off the roof of his house, Dorf says Hodge “...awakened the maniac who lived in my brain” (p. 44). Why didn’t Dorf just refuse to jump off the roof? What could he have done differently—and still maintain his dignity?

2. Dorf wanted Jasmine to be his friend but worried that “once she realized who I really was, she’d lose interest” (p. 32). Dorf seems to have little self-confidence. What events have contributed to Dorf feeling low about himself?

Prompt: moving to a new city, feeling rejected by his mom, his dad being out of work.

3. Dorf’s skateboard is very special to him. He says skateboarding makes him “feel in groove, totally chilled and high-wired at the same time” (p. 3). What other evidence from *Skate Freak* demonstrates how Dorf feels about his board?

Prompt: He has no other ambitions but to skateboard; when the cop takes his skateboard, he feels naked without it; when he gets it back, he feels “the universe lock back into place” (p. 22).

4. Jasmine says that Dorf is “not a very good judge of character” (p. 50) because Dorf took on Hodge’s challenge. *Is Dorf a poor judge of character? Why, or why not? Give evidence from *Skate Freak* to support your answer.*

Prompt: Perhaps Dorf sees Hodge as he is, but makes a poor decision anyway. What does Dorf think of Jasmine’s character? Of his mom and dad’s?

5. Like Dorf, Jasmine is being raised by a single parent who can “never get over the loss” of the other parent. Jasmine says, “Now I’m realizing nothing can change the past. And I need to get on with my life” (p. 57). Compare this attitude to Dorf’s attitude in early chapters. What can Dorf learn from Jasmine?

6. After Hodge’s accident, Dorf says Hodge might “think twice before making bets again and doing something stupid...” (p. 91). Do you think the accident will change Hodge’s attitude? Will he be less confrontational or territorial?

- When Dorf's parents decide to move again, Dorf decides to "Take charge" (p. 98). Dorf says, "It was what skateboarding had taught me. You either let things happen and just cruise along. Or you take charge. And *make* things happen" (p. 98). What does Dorf do? What are the implications—for Dorf, his parents, and Jasmine?

Vocabulary Enrichment through Writing Exercises

- The following words, terms and expressions are used in *Skate Freak* in the context of Dorf's skateboarding experiences. Invite students to use ten or more of the words/terms/expressions to:

- Write a short essay or report about three skateboarding techniques. Include illustrations or pictures from magazines or appropriate websites.
- Write a song, poem or rap about skateboarding or a similar sport or hobby.
- Choose skateboard terms from the list and provide dictionary definitions. Use the format of a dictionary definition for each.
- Write a short story or skit which has skateboarding, mountain biking or rollerblading as its theme.
- Write a "how to" manual on skateboarding. Include instructions on how to use, maintain and store a skateboard and the safety precautions to take.
- Create a crossword puzzle with clues incorporating a skateboard theme.

agro guys	crouch down	halfway	performance	split second
arched wall	curve	hang there	power moves	surface
audience	custom/homegrown	high-wired	railings	sweeter slide
ball bearings	flat-out speed session	hit the top	razors	swerved
bowl	freewheelers	indy-style	ripped	top lip
bruises	gracefully	intense	rolled	tricks
cautiously	gravity	launch	skateboard	trucks
concrete	half-pipes	ollie	sloped	zigzagging

Connecting to the Curriculum

Writing and Creative Work

- Dorf has a lot to deal with. He's moved to the city with his father who is out of work and appears depressed; he misses his mom; and he's the new kid at school who is being tested by the local troublemakers. Ask students to write letters to Dorf, offering advice or sharing experiences. For prompts, share the following with students: *Dear Dorf*,
 - I had a similar experience when my family moved too...

- I know just how you feel. My parents split a while ago, and...
- It's hard to make new friends at a new school. Why not try this...
- I'm not into skateboarding, but I'm really into...
- Your dad thinks it's time to "move on" and quit skateboarding. One thing you can do to convince your dad skateboarding is okay is to...

Social Studies

1. Dorf loved Willis Harbor, a small sea-side town. Now he lives in a city, and it's hard for him to see anything to like; the city, to Dorf, is an "ugly place" (p. 2). Challenge students to make a tourism brochure for their city, town or neighborhood, including three or more great things about living there. Students should imagine their audience is someone like Dorf, an outsider who is viewing their community for the first time.
2. Dorf says, "Funny how older people think that anyone with a skateboard is a troublemaker. I just don't get it" (p. 64). As a group discussion, brainstorm ways that adults may make negative assumptions about youth. What are these impressions based on? (Prompts: clothing, loud music, etc.). As students contribute ideas, write them on the board or a flipchart or have a student act as a scribe. When the list is complete, challenge students to make a similar list which describes negative assumptions kids make about adults or seniors. Compare and contrast the two lists.

Reflections, Personal Planning

1. When Dorf lived in Willis Harbor, he was the only skateboarder and had a lot of freedom to skateboard undisturbed. Now that he lives in a city, he shares a skate park with many other skateboarders who are territorial and unfriendly. Sometimes it's difficult to move from a place that is comfortable to a place where everything is new or to go from being "the best" to being one of many in. Ask students to share similar experiences they've had. You may wish to provide the following examples:
 - She moved from a small elementary school to a large high school. It was rough because...
 - Everyone told him he had a great voice, and he really liked singing. Then he tried out for the high school musical production. It was scary because...
 - His school team's coach said he had a shot to get on the regional team and should try out. He was nervous because...
 - She liked writing stories and poems, but so far she'd never shown them to anyone. Then she saw the ad in the high school paper, asking for submissions. She was uneasy because...

2. Dorf is the new kid in school, and he's having trouble making friends and fitting in. He misses the town he used to live in. It was much smaller and he knew more people. Being the new kid at school can be very difficult.
 - As a group, brainstorm ways to help new students feel welcome in your school or classroom. Record the ideas on a flipchart or on the board, clustering into themes where possible. If you expect new students to join your class or school, have students write ideas they can commit to in their day planners.
 - For a small group activity, create welcome kits for new students. Arrange to have class ambassadors distribute them, or mail the welcome kits to the new students at their homes before their first day. Students who have been "the new kid" may wish to provide insight into what could go into the kits.
3. Dorf and Jasmine take the bus to Willis Harbor, which is an hour's ride. Using bus schedules or online resources, ask students to map out bus routes which are an hour in length. Using a local map, have students mark as many routes as possible. Do some routes which take one farther in an hour (i.e., non-stop rides) as well as shorter distance routes with many stops. How much does each trip cost?

Science

1. Dorf's friend Jasmine wants to be a geologist. Invite students to research an occupation in science, such as geologist, answering the questions below. You may wish to present a list of occupations, such as conservation scientist, epidemiologist, food scientist, geographer, lab technician, marine biologist, medical researcher, etc.
 - What education and training is required? Where could you receive this education and training?
 - What kind of skills and interests are required for this occupation? (For example, communication skills, computer skills, enjoy working outdoors or in a lab, etc.)
 - What kinds of activities are typical for this occupation? (For example, collecting data or samples, assessing and investigation, writing reports, etc.)
 - Would you enjoy this occupation? Why, or why not?

Art

A number of art projects drawn on themes from *Skate Freak* are listed below.

Option: Dorf enjoys music and creates his own “soundtrack” by singing lyrics from his favorite bands while he’s skateboarding. Ask students to bring CDs from bands they enjoy. Play the CDs as background music while working on the art projects.

1. Invite students to recreate one of the settings or scenes from *Skate Freak*, choosing from the list below or another of their choice:
 - Dorf pictures himself as “...the boy with wings. The Wingman” (p. 2). Create an art project that captures Dorf as the Wingman. You may wish to portray Dorf when he is “in groove, totally chilled and high-wired” (p. 3) or when he has “lost his wings” and is “grounded” (p. 6).
 - The Ledges at Willis Harbor were an “ultra-smooth, sea-sculpted rock formation by the ocean...Parts of the Ledges were smooth and slick and rounded with small hills and valleys. Other parts were layered and, in places, looked like steps. Some parts of the formation looked like waves” (p. 71–72).
2. Early in *Skate Freak*, Dorf’s motto is *If it’s worth doing, do it. If it’s not worth doing, do it anyway* (p. 1). Later, he says, “Hang onto the good stuff. Let the bad stuff go. And don’t hold grudges” (p. 105). Have students create posters which illustrate their personal mottos. When complete, place the posters around the classroom. Encourage students to compose their own mottos or choose a famous quotation (some samples are below). Once posters are complete, ask students *What does your motto say about you?*
 - Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new. (Albert Einstein)
 - What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
 - You must be the change you wish to see in the world. (Mahatma Ghandi)
 - It’s not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog. (Archie Griffen)
 - No one can make you feel inferior without your consent. (Eleanor Roosevelt)
 - Don’t bunt. Aim out of the ballpark. (David Ogilvy)
 - If you can imagine it, you can achieve it; if you can dream it, you can become it. (William Arthur Ward)
 - If you train hard, you’ll not only be hard, you’ll be hard to beat. (Herschel Walker)

Film and Popular Culture

1. *Dogtown and Z-Boys* is a documentary about the origins of skateboarding and skateboarding culture in Santa Monica, California, in the 1970s. Narrated by Sean Penn, this documentary includes footage of many now-famous skateboarders. You may wish to show this documentary to demonstrate skateboarding, its culture and history. **Note:** this movie was rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for language and some drug references. Be sure to preview the movie to ensure that it is suitable for your students. Discussion topics could include the personal and cultural impact of the Z-Boys' rise from teenage "street punks" to corporate-sponsored, world famous celebrities and their influence on skateboarding as a recognized sport.
2. Ask students to imagine that *Skate Freak* is a movie. Invite students to design the movie's poster. Movie posters should include the title, eye-catching imagery and an engaging tagline (slogan).

More Ideas to Explore:

1. Dorf is very good at skateboarding and knows a lot about it. Have students choose a skill or hobby to share with the class—preferably one where the students can provide a demonstration and/or instruction. Ideas could include skateboarding, rollerblading, scrapbooking, playing a musical instrument, first aid, magic tricks, camping skills, etc. Students should present their skill or hobby to the group in an organized fashion, answering the following questions:
 - Why did you choose to present this skill/hobby?
 - Where did you learn this skill/hobby?
 - Do you need special equipment? Where can one get it?
 - Provide a short (and safe) demonstration, followed by opportunities for others in the class to try (if appropriate).