



Impact

James C. Dekker

Interest level: grade 7 and up

Reading level: 3.8

978-1-55143-995-2 PB

978-1-55143-997-6 LIB

Book Summary

Jordan's brother, Mark, is Mr. Cool with the girls; everyone likes him, he's great at sports, and his grades are better than average. When he starts dating Shannon, the beautiful new girl with the jealous ex-boyfriend, Mark has met his match. He is found beaten to death--murdered--in a parking lot. Jordan and his family must face the devastation and the lengthy court battle, doing their best to overcome the pain of unjust loss. Tried and convicted, the four boys who killed Mark, one of them a next-door neighbor and friend, are given varying degrees of punishment based on their involvement in the murder. But Jordan knows the real truth, the hidden secret he hopes no one discovers.

Prereading Idea

Jealousy plays a major role in the motivation of the characters in *Impact*. Share with students a variety of poems dealing with the subject of jealousy. Then ask students to convey, in free-verse poetry, a serious or humorous time when they felt jealous. Students can share their poems with the class.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

Ask students to research victim impact statements. In what types of cases are they allowed and in what types of courts? When are they read, who listens to them and what is the intended purpose? Ask students to write a one-page letter explaining the procedure and purpose of such statements to a victim in a way that they will understand what is expected of them.

Jordan did not write a victim impact statement, and although his mother did, the reader does not know what it says. Ask students to write a VIS from one of these characters' point of view to share with the class.

Jordan is conflicted about his feelings for Mark. While he loves Mark for being a great brother, he hates him for being the person that Jordan can't be. Ask students to write a poem in two voices, both Jordan's, revealing his conflicted feelings toward his brother. Students may choose to work with a partner. Then ask students to share their poems with the class.

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

Point of View

The novel is written in past tense from Jordan's point of view. The reader sees very little of what other characters actually feel or think, with the exception of his father's victim impact statement. The importance of this point of view comes to light when the reader discovers Jordan's conversation with Kyle, in which he tells him where to find Mark. Ask students to select another character's point of view and to select a scene. Have the student relate the events of that scene from his or her character's first-person point of view, including the character's thoughts and feelings. For a very powerful class presentation, point-of-view writings can be grouped and presented by character, to provide focus on that character, or by scene, to focus on all the various characters involved in the scene.

Conflict

All fiction is built around conflict, and in this particular novel, the author uses both internal and external conflict. Ask students to create a storyboard, listing and illustrating the external and internal conflicts Jordan is facing, and to write the resolution to each conflict as they see it resolved. If there are unresolved conflicts, ask students to include original panels depicting how they perceive the conflict will eventually resolve itself. Students can then post their storyboards around the room.

Characters

Most of the characters do not change from the beginning of the novel to the end, since the reader sees the characters only through Jordan's eyes. In small groups, ask students to make a list of the major characters in the novel that play a role in Mark's death. With each character, have students identify and discuss the role they played and how Mark's life and death affected the character's life. Ask each group to share aloud their insights on at least one of the characters.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Even though Jordan's friends were there for him and tried to comfort him when Mark died, Jordan expresses the inadequacy of their comfort and his all-consuming feelings about the loss of his brother. On page 23, he says, "[T]hey didn't think about it every minute, not every minute of every day like I did." Why does Jordan deal with his grief alone? Who could he share his feelings with? Why doesn't he?
2. In his victim impact statement, Mark and Jordan's father reads, "When we heard that the police had arrested the people who killed our son, we thought it would ease our pain. But it didn't," (p.26). Why didn't it? What, if anything, could have eased the pain of the loss of losing their first-born son?
3. As the family faces Mark's death, the reader knows Mark's dad begins to drink and his mother stays in bed, too depressed to get up. But what does Jordan do? How does he cope? What role does Jordan's aunt play in helping the family get through the pain of the tragedy?
4. At the annual beginning-of-summer street party, Kyle's parents were excluded. Why do the Mercers' neighbors of twenty years blame them for something their son did? How do the Mercers suffer for what happened?
5. What role, if any, does Shannon play in Mark's death? How could she have helped prevent it? Why does her testimony help the prosecution?
6. What is the right thing for Kyle to say on the witness stand? Why does Kyle leave Jordan out of his testimony? Why doesn't Jordan acknowledge what Kyle has done for him?
7. What responsibility does Jordan take for Mark's death? Does Jordan play a role in Mark's murder?

8. Why doesn't Jordan write and then read a victim impact statement to the court? Does he show any remorse? Why or why not?

Writer's Craft

The author uses considerable dialogue to tell the story, enabling the readers to stay focused on the plot and the characters. Ask students to write a conversation with a partner, using the dialogue in the story as a model: (1) between Jordan and his parents, revealing his involvement in Mark's murder, or (2) between Jordan and Kyle, explaining Jordan's or Kyle's decision not to tell what each of them know of their conversation about Mark's job and the hours he worked.

Author Biography

Impact is the second book **James C. Dekker** has written for the Orca Soundings series. He lives in Toronto, Ontario.

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