



## Rebel's Tag

K.L. Denman

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 2.2

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AR Quiz # 118646

### Book Summary

Sam's grandfather vanished the day Sam's father was buried. Now, ten years later, Grandpa Max wants to make amends. He sends letters that lead Sam on a scavenger hunt. Sam follows his grandfather's bizarre instructions although he's still not ready to forgive. To alleviate his anger at his grandfather, Sam turns to his favorite stress release: climbing onto roofs and leaving his tag, a spray-painted zodiac symbol for Aquarius. When he gets caught by an elderly couple, Sam learns a valuable lesson about forgiveness. He's ready to forgive his grandfather, but is he too late?

### Author Biography

**K.L. Denman** began writing young adult fiction after reading the books of some talented authors and discovering the evolution of this fascinating, multi-faceted genre. With her teenaged children and their friends providing abundant raw material and re-kindled memories of this challenging passage, writing for teens became an irresistible venture. Her first novel, *Battle of the Bands*, has been nominated for the ALA 2006 list of Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers. Also in the Orca Currents Series is *Mirror Image*. She recently moved to Powell River, BC, with her family of people, dogs, cats and horses.

## Connecting to the Text

### Plot

The plot tells us the story. Each situation or event that occurs affects what happens next until the conclusion of the story.

1. Ask students to brainstorm the succession of events in *Rebel's Tag*. How does one event affect what happens next? Have students choose three examples from the novel to build on. Then encourage them to imagine alternate plots. For example:
  - When Sam and Indi go to the Café Soleil, they expect to find a treasure, maybe even a ruby ring. Instead, Joe gives Sam the antique cradle.  
 Prompt: Sam's mom finds the opening on the secret compartment of the cradle, which in turn leads Sam to the next letter.  
 Prompt: The image of a red ruby leads Sam to choose red spray paint at the hardware store.  
 Prompt: What if Sam had been given a ruby ring and had sold it to buy a car?

Other examples to consider:

- When he learns about the zodiac, Sam is taken by the idea of being an Aquarius, which is ruled by Uranus. He makes the symbol for Uranus, his "tag." He says, "The thing that stuck with me was that Uranus is connected to rebels—exactly what I was looking for" (p. 42).
- Max describes the gold watch as a "bridge at the garden, only this bridge goes from the past to now" (p. 57). This link to the past "changes his mind" and Sam "knows what he [has] to do" (p. 58).

### Theme

Theme, the broad idea of the story, is sometimes revealed in the lessons learned by the characters.

1. Ask students to work in small groups to complete the following activity. Encourage students to draw comparisons from *Rebel's Tag* when they are brainstorming.

### Forgiveness

(p. 70) *These questions kept repeating in my brain: Why were Norman and Mary so nice to me? Did they forgive me? How? I'm just some kid they don't even know who messed with them. I don't think it's that easy, forgiving someone.*

Norman and Mary were able to forgive Sam for leaving his tag on their roof. Sam was afraid of what they might do, but all they asked of him was that he paint their shed. The three even became friends!

- Imagine that someone has spray-painted something important to you (for example, your bike, your backpack, your jacket) and that person has come to you because, like Sam, they want to explain.

- What does it take to forgive this person? What factors contribute to your willingness to forgive? As a group, brainstorm your responses.  
Does it depend on:
  - whether the person apologizes?
  - whether it was an accident or an intentional act?
  - how genuine their remorse seems to be?
  - how much time has passed?
- Imagine that you, like Norman and Mary, are willing to forgive this person. Decide on a task the person can perform that will compensate you in some way.
- Prepare a short skit to present to the class in which you act out the whole event—from the initial act of spray-painting to the confession, and forgiveness.

After each group's skit, encourage the rest of the class to ask questions, referring back to their brainstormed notes.

### Vocabulary Enrichment through Creative Writing

1. The words and terms below are found in *Rebel's Tag*. Invite students to use the words below to write a short story or skit, working in pairs or small groups. Students may choose from the ideas below or write a story or skit on their own. Students should be prepared to share their stories or skits with the large group.

Option: You may wish to give students points for each time they use the vocabulary words and then award a prize to the group who uses the most.

- You open your lunch bag one day and there is a note in it. It reads *Important, Take Notice! Don't eat your lunch! You must follow these instructions to find out why...*
- One morning, you notice that one of the classroom desks is missing a leg. The next day, every fourth letter from the poster on the wall is missing. The third day, there is an envelope taped to the classroom door. It's addressed to your class...
- Every second Monday, your class has a substitute teacher. It's always the same teacher and he often teaches using magic tricks. The trouble is, each time he does a trick, he makes something in the classroom 'vanish'. One Monday, there is a new substitute teacher. She shows the class an envelope addressed to them. "Dear students," it begins. "If you want to find the 'vanished' items, you must..."

envelope	official	secret compartment	explanation	promise
shocked	instructions	recognized	treasure	midnight
scavenger hunt	mystery	twenty-dollar bill	sealed	valuable

### Connecting to the Characters

1. Sam's mom was angry at Sam's grandfather because he abandoned Sam after Sam's father died. She said, "He knew how much you loved him, and there you were, just a small boy, losing both your heroes at once. I was so shocked at how cruel it was" (p. 7). Imagine that you are Sam's mom and you've just learned that Grandpa Max wants to see Sam, after all that has happened. Write a diary entry in the voice of Sam's mom. How does she feel? Could she have mixed feelings about it? Describe them.
2. Sam receives a series of letters from his grandfather. Imagine that you are Sam. Choose one of Grandpa Max's letters, and write a letter in response. How do you feel about Grandpa Max writing after all this time?

### More Ideas for Discussion and Exploration

1. When Sam opens his first letter from his grandfather, the smell from his grandfather's pipe brings back vivid memories for him. Often smells can be evocative of moments from our past. Think of two smells that really bring back memories for you, good or bad. Write a poem or journal entry which describes the smell and the associated memories. Use powerful descriptive words.  
To prompt students, you may wish to suggest smells associated with childhood (such as bubble gum or cotton candy), or cooking (such cinnamon or the family's favorite dish) or other associations (such as grandma's perfume).
2. Grandpa Max's friends share with Sam some of the adages Grandpa Max used:  
(p. 22) *The world is a better place when met on a full stomach.*  
(p. 23) *There's more than one way of starving to death.*  
(p. 32) *What comes out of the heart of a tree is known by the heart of the tree.*  
(p. 52) *Wisdom is better than rubies. All the things that may be desired can't be compared to it.*  
(p. 55) *I looked into the water. My destiny was drifting past.*

Sam has some pretty meaningful things to say too:

- (p. 49) *Sometimes it's just easier to deal with things—especially when those things are like slivers festering under your skin.*
- (p. 85) *I [found] out that forgiveness feels like being on a roof. Like freedom.*

Discuss these adages as a group. Consider their relevance to students in the context of their school, social and home lives. How do adages help us? Can you think of others that are meaningful to you?

Option: Invite students to consider the relevance of these adages to a youth whose reality is much different from their own. Choose what is appropriate to the students, and encourage them to think of their own examples of another youth's different "reality":

- A young person living in a developing country, one whose family is starving?
- A young person who is homeless?
- A very rich young person who lives in luxury and privilege?
- A young person who lived a hundred years ago?
- The Sumerians, who lived four thousand years ago? (p. 55)
- A young person who lives a hundred years from now?

### **Connecting to the Curriculum:**

#### **Science and Social Studies**

1. Sam and Indi visit Café Soleil after reading Grandpa Max's second letter. At Café Soleil, they serve great burgers—and light therapy. This is described in Chapter 3:
  - Have students research Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Why do some people have less energy or feel depressed at certain times of the year, and not at other times? In what parts of the country or world is it more common? What are some treatments? Invite students to share their findings with the large group.
  - Lead students in a group discussion on sources of light. Brainstorm a list which includes both organic and human-made light sources (prompts could include: sunlight, flame, firefly, glow-worm, gulper eel, halogen bulb, glow stick, candle).
  - Ask students to choose one organic source and one human-made source, and describe each in detail. Ideas for exploration: brightness, access, ability to cast shadows, intensity, etc. Are these sources of light helpful in treating SAD? Why, or why not?
2. On page 35, Sam describes the "pumped up" feeling he gets when he goes roofing:

"My whole body feels hyperalive, my muscles are strong, my reactions sharp. I tune into everything around me, pick up on every sound, check out every movement. It's like being in a hunt where we constantly shift roles. We're predators stalking our prey; we're prey on the lookout for predators."

What Sam is describing is his body's fight or flight response—the moment when the body produces the hormone adrenaline to prepare for a quick response to a situation.

  - Where does adrenaline come from?

- When it is released into the bloodstream, what effects does it have? It escalates some functions, and decreases others—what are they?
- Name three situations when you might experience this kind of a reaction.
- Sam enjoys this “pumped up” feeling. Can you think of safe, legal and fun alternatives to climbing to the top of a house?  
Ideas could include a roller coaster ride, rock climbing, snowboarding, mountain biking, diving at the community pool, reading an adventure story, etc.

### **Current Events—Personal Reflection**

Sam and Indi share a special bond. They have been neighbors and friends since they were very young. One of the things they do together is “going roofing,” which involves climbing up the side of people’s houses and sitting on the roof. Although Indi disapproves, Sam spray paints his “tag” identifier on each roof.

1. Ask students to complete the following in pairs or small groups. To prepare for this exercise, bring copies of local, regional and national newspapers to class for students to peruse.
  - Use the newspapers to find stories about young people involved in dangerous activities, such as roofing, or illegal activities, such as spray painting on private property.
  - Choose a story that interests you. Share it with the large group, giving a brief summary. What happened? Who was involved? What was the impact on the young people involved and their families or communities?
  - Now imagine an “alternate” newspaper story in which the young people are applauded for contributing to their community in a positive, meaningful way. Be sure to give your imaginary story a powerful, eye-catching headline. For example, Local Youth Applauded for Cleaning Graffiti off the Community Daycare’s Front Door or Youth Group Collects Blankets for City’s Homeless Shelter or Local Youth Recognized for Raising Funds to Help Stray Animals Find a Home.
  - Share your “alternate” story with the large group, providing a brief summary which includes the impact on the young people and their families and communities.

Option: As the groups share their imagined stories, record their “headlines” on the board or have the students design a poster with all the headlines. Hang the poster in a prominent place in the classroom.

## Art

1. Read the peace prayer of St. Francis (p. 101–102) aloud to the class, then distribute copies to the students or write it on the board. Invite students to design an art project which incorporates this poem (or another inspirational poem). Ideas could be a poster, greeting card, stationery, postcard, collage, stencil, etc. If creating stationery, postcards or greeting cards, you may wish to have the students engage in an exchange with another school.

## Connecting to the Students: Ideas for Discussion and Exploration

1. When Sam is on a roof, he says it makes him feel good, and Indi calls it her Deva time.

(p. 38) *I've tried to figure out why being on a roof makes me feel so good. It's as if I've just escaped from suffocating. The air feels free. It even seems I've become part of space, in space...It just that it feels that way, like a different place and time.*

The time that Sam and Indi spend on the roof is one of calm reflection and relaxation. They “soak it in.” As a group, complete the following.

- Brainstorm situations where we can capture that same feeling, but in an environment that is safe and legal. Record these on the board. Ideas might include: visit a Chinese garden; hike to the top of a hill; watch the stars at night; lie on your back in middle of a field and watch the clouds; practice yoga; try journal writing; listen to calming music.

Option: As a field trip or class exercise, engage in one of these activities. Be sure to debrief afterward. How did it feel?

2. The second letter Sam receives from his grandfather directs him to visit the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese (Scholar's) garden. Challenge students to complete one of the following exercises, either working in pairs or small groups. Students should be prepared to present their work to the large group.
  - Research Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, answering the following.
  - Where was he born? When he was your age, what was he doing?
  - He lived in many countries. Point them out on a map.
  - What professions did he have?
  - He wanted to transform China. Why?
  - He is known as the “National Father” of modern China. Can you say and write this title in Chinese?

- Make a small Chinese garden, using a shoe box lined with plastic or a clean plastic food container or tray. Decorate the sides of the container, and be sure to use as many authentic materials as possible. Ideas could include small pebbles, moss or pine needles, and wood chips or chopsticks. Describe how each item has significance to a Chinese garden.
3. Sam is interested in the zodiac. His sign is Aquarius, which is ruled by the planet Uranus. As a class project, complete the following. You may wish to assign the twelve zodiac signs to individuals or pairs.
- Research the twelve signs of the zodiac. Which planet rules each sign?
  - What are the characteristics of each sign?
  - What is the symbol for each sign?
  - Take a poll of the signs of your classmates and your teacher. Which sign has the most members in your class? Which sign has the least?
  - Make a poster or brochure which shows the twelve signs. Include a short description that is positive and empowering. For example:  
Aquarius ~ January 20–February 18 ~ The Water Carrier ~ Aquarius is creative and honest. Hang the posters in a prominent place in the classroom.
  - What is your sign? Do its characteristics ring true?

Option: The zodiac described in *Rebel's Tag* is a western zodiac. Invite students to investigate other zodiac systems such as Hindu astrology or Chinese astrology.

**Web Resources:**

**[www.vancouverchinesegarden.com](http://www.vancouverchinesegarden.com)**

Official website of the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese garden in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. According to the website, this garden is the first of its kind outside of China. The website includes information on the elements of a Chinese garden (weathered rocks, jade green water and mystic architecture) as well as information on Feng Shui, garden design and symbolism. See the General Information/Educational Resources, which include an interactive virtual tour of the garden.

**[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac#Zodiac\\_in\\_astrology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zodiac#Zodiac_in_astrology)**

Wikipedia's 'Western Zodiac' reference. Includes the symbols, dates and characteristics of each zodiac sign. For additional websites, type 'zodiac' into any search engine.