



Cracked

Michele Martin Bossley

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 3.4

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AR Quiz # 114171

Book Summary

Trevor, Nick and Robyn are ready to solve another mystery. When bobsledder Josh Gantz is accused of deliberately injuring a fellow competitor, he runs the risk of being thrown out of the sport—right before the World Cup. Courtney Gantz asks Trevor, Nick and Robyn to help clear her brother's name. Can they find out who framed Josh? What is the meaning of the strange coded messages they keep finding around Olympic Park? Who eats orange bananas, anyway? The kids must unearth the clues in a race against time, before Josh's championship dreams end up on ice.

Author Biography

Like her character, Trevor, **Michele Martin Bossley** loved reading mystery novels as a child. She still has her collection of books in the Trixie Beldon series. Michele Martin Bossley is an award-winning author and has written more than a dozen children's sports books, including *Jumper* in the Orca Sports series and *Swiped* in the Orca Currents series. Michele lives in Calgary, Alberta.

Connecting to the Text

Plot Sequence

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

1. Ask students to brainstorm the succession of events in *Cracked* and summarize them using the model of a timeline. Provide poster board and invite students to draw pictures along the timeline. You may wish to have students draw their timeline in the shape of a bobsled, in keeping with the theme of the novel.
2. Ask each group to present their timeline to the class, and then discuss how each event affects what happens next.
3. When students present their timelines, use these prompts for discussion.
 - Why does Ramsey accuse Josh of sabotaging the bobsled?
 - Where does Robyn see the fifty-dollar bill? What does she do with it?
 - What happens when Trevor, Robyn, Courtney and Nick go into the storage room at the Olympic Park and run from Ramsey? What do they find?
 - What do Trevor, Robyn and Nick find in Robyn and Courtney's locker? Why is it important to their investigation?
 - Nick overhears Josh tell the two men that he isn't prepared to lend them his sled without knowing what is going on. What is going on?
 - When the counterfeiter tries to grab the video camera from Nick, Nick holds the camera over the bobsled track. What happens next?

Creating Pictures Using Metaphor and Simile

Metaphors and similes give us images that expand our understanding of situations and characters.

1. Read the following examples from *Cracked* aloud, or write them on the board. Discuss the connection that is being made and how it lends meaning to the text.
 - (p. 6) *Like a cartoon character on a banana peel, I flailed wildly before I landed on my backside...*
 - (p. 18) *Josh crumpled the newspaper in his fist, clenching the wadded paper like he was trying to squeeze the words off the page.*
 - (p. 32) *I brushed off my jeans, trying to ignore the fact that you could toast marshmallows over the heat from my ears. Embarrassment always does that to me.*
 - (p. 34) *We galloped to the stairwell and thundered down the stairs.*
 - (p. 42) *Nick sounded like a constipated buffalo, snorting and puffing.*
 - (p. 91) *I felt like I'd swallowed an icicle.*

2. Write the following sentences, which use the novel's context, on the board. Ask students to complete the sentences using similes.
 - The bobsled team has to be in top physical condition. Those bobsleds are as heavy as _____.
 - When Josh read what the reporter wrote, he was angry. He looked like a _____.
 - The bobsled track is long and winding like a _____.
 - When Nick stepped on my shoelace, I tripped like a _____.
 - That money is counterfeit! It's as fake as _____.
 - We had to run as fast as we could. We sounded like _____.
 - The storage shed was as dark as _____.
 - The helicopters above sounded like _____.
3. As students read *Cracked*, ask them to identify the use of simile or metaphor. Ask them to write their examples on the board or on a flipchart. Discuss each example. How does it help us expand our understanding of the character or scene?

Character Description

Read the following character descriptions aloud to the class:

(p. 12) *Josh was around twenty years old and angular, with the flat muscles of a trained athlete. Like me, he had sandy brown hair and wasn't overly tall. Courtney was chubby with a soft cloud of red hair. Her face was round, with curved lips and a big smile.*

1. Ask students to identify the descriptive words in the sentences. How do these adjectives expand our understanding of these characters? Challenge students to write a brief description of the other main characters in *Cracked*, based on what they know from the novel. Ask students to use at least three adjectives in each description.
 - Trevor is _____.
 - Nick is _____.
 - Robyn is _____.
 - Ramsey is _____.
 - The counterfeiters are _____.
2. Then ask students to write brief descriptions of sports or political figures, celebrities, musicians, movie stars, etc., or write a paragraph describing fictional characters of their own choosing.

Vocabulary Enhancement—Reading Comprehension

1. The following words or terms are found in *Cracked* in the context of the bobsled National Trials at the Olympic Park. Invite students to write a brief overview of the plot of *Cracked*, using at least six of the words below.

athlete	ice pick	sprinter	bobsled	Olympics
steel runner	brakeman	practice	trials	crash helmet
push track	training	driving cables	rocketing	World Cup

Option: Using *Cracked* and other bobsled resources as their guide, ask students to draw maps of the Olympic Park bobsled track. Under their pictures, ask students to include a paragraph which summarizes *Cracked*.

Vocabulary Enhancement—Drama Exercises

Courtney wants to help Josh buy specialized sled runners from Germany, so she coordinates a fundraising raffle where she sells tickets for a prize television. Unfortunately, she does not collect enough money to pay for the television. The following words were used on pages 74–76, when Courtney explains what happened.

answers	gulped	offered	cheating	horror
police	crook	meet	steal	desperately
money	surrender	fraud	note	swear

1. Distribute the words above to the students, either as a handout or written on the board or a flipchart. Designate two students to act as scorekeepers.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Ask each group to write a short skit which uses all the words listed, and which can be performed in one minute or less. Encourage students to be as creative as possible, but note that skits should have a coherent, logical plot sequence. Remind them that they don't have to use a crime theme; many other themes would work as well.
3. Ask the students to perform their skits in front of the class. Ask one scorekeeper to keep time using a stopwatch. Each time the performers use one of the listed words, the other scorekeeper should make a mark on a score sheet. Once all skits have been performed, the scorekeepers can announce the winning group.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts—Writing Exercises

1. When Robyn finds an ice pick in her locker, she and Nick debate its significance:

(p. 55) *“Nick, an ice pick is a weapon,” Robyn hissed. She held the handle of the pick gingerly, the wicked-looking metal spike protruding from her fingers. “No, it isn’t. It’s a tool. Courtney probably had some of Josh’s bobsled in her backpack and it fell out...,” said Nick.*

As a group, discuss this scene, then ask students to write a paragraph in which they defend their argument for tool or weapon, using the example of an ice pick, or other tools of the students’ choice. Invite students to consider the following questions:

- When does a tool become a weapon?
- Is it only a weapon when it is used as a one?
- Is it a weapon when it’s an implied threat, as is the case with the ice pick planted in Josh’s bag?
- If the ice pick didn’t have a threatening note attached to it, would it have been perceived as a tool?

Option: You may wish to ask students to also reflect on any rules your school has regarding what students are not allowed to bring to school.

2. Courtney invented the J. G. Foundation to raise money to help Josh. Unfortunately, she didn’t realize that the prize television she had offered to ticket buyers would cost more than the amount she had collected. To reflect on Courtney’s situation, ask students to choose one of the following to write about:
 - Write a letter to Courtney, advising her about what to do. Give her at least three clear steps to follow. First, you must...
 - Courtney will have to go door-to-door to give back the money to the ticket buyers. Write a script for Courtney to follow. What should she say? Imagine at least two different scenarios that might take place for her.
 - What Courtney did was fraudulent, and against the law. Is it still fraud if she had good intentions to begin with? Imagine that Courtney must face a jury and that you are her lawyer. Write an opening argument to read to the jury, explaining your point of view. Or imagine that you are the prosecuting lawyer. What will your opening argument be?

Current Events

When Ramsey accuses Josh of sabotaging his bobsled, Courtney is sure Josh isn't the culprit, and she doesn't want her brother to go to jail. Nick says,

(p. 13) *"Don't be so sure...There was a case about ten years ago, where a figure skater paid some guy to smash another skater's knees so she couldn't compete. It was all over the papers."*

As a research project, have students investigate historical cases of crime or accused crime in professional sports and write a short report. Examples could be:

- The Chicago White Sox baseball team were accused of throwing the 1919 World Series.
- Pete Rose, a Major League baseball player and manager, was alleged to have bet on baseball.
- Ben Johnson, an Olympic sprinter, was accused of using steroids to enhance his performance during the Olympic Games.
- Nancy Kerrigan, an Olympic figure skater, was clubbed in the knee before an important skating competition.

Topics to explore in students' reports could include:

- When did this happen?
- Who was involved?
- Was there a conviction, or just rumor or accusation?
- What happened as a result? How did this affect the athlete? (physically, professionally, their standing records, reputation, eligibility for Hall of Fame or Olympic medals, etc.) How did the event affect their future in professional sports?
- Besides the athletes directly involved, were other people effected? What about the fans?

Language Arts—Newspapers and Reporting

1. Josh was asked by a newspaper reporter to comment on what happened to his bobsled. Because Josh didn't comment, the resulting newspaper article did not show him in a very good light, saying,

(p. 18) *"Fellow bobsledder Joshua Gantz has been suspended from competition until the incident has been reviewed. No charges are pending at this time."*

After reading this, Josh said:

"I guess I should have told that reporter my side of the story when I had the chance...Now look at the mess I'm in."

2. Ask students to imagine that Josh did tell the reporter his side of the story. The subsequent newspaper article would have been quite different. Ask students to write the newspaper article which includes Josh's side, referring to *Cracked* to answer the five W's: who, what, when, where and why. These details should be briefly summarized in the first paragraph, and then expanded on in the following paragraphs.

Option: You may wish to have students write a newspaper article based on what happened at the end of the novel. Encourage students to include interviews with other characters as well (Ramsey, Mr. Kowalski, Courtney, Nick, Robyn and Trevor).

More Ideas, Topics and Activities for *Cracked*

1. One of the ways that Trevor, Nick and Robyn help Josh is by learning the true meaning of the coded messages left by the counterfeiters. Challenge students to create their own coded messages, and exchange with others to decode. You may wish to have students research simple cryptography, demonstrate a code, or research the use of codes in history. Why do people create codes? When are they useful? How are codes used today?
2. When Robyn found the fifty-dollar bill, Nick suggested they buy pizza. Robyn said they should turn it in. What would you do? If you wanted to turn it in, who would you give it to? Would where you found it make a difference? Consider if you found it in your classroom, at the movie theater, at the mall, on the bus, in a coat that someone gave you, on the street, in a book from the library, at a concert, etc.
3. Challenge students to write short stories using one of the sentences from *Cracked* below as their first sentence:
 - (p. 35) *I groped for a light switch and flicked it on. Blinking in the sudden brightness, I saw a bunch of money scattered on the floor...*
 - (p. 55) *Robyn pulled her head out of the locker, her eyes wide. "There's an ice pick in my locker."*
 - (p. 57) *I unfolded the paper. It was the message we'd found on the bulletin board at the Ice House last night... I held out the note so the others could see.*
 - (p. 81) *"You're just kids. Keep out of it." Josh gritted his teeth.*

Cracked Word Search

d	d	e	t	e	c	t	i	v	e	v	b	g	j	l	m
y	c	l	r	a	c	s	g	r	o	t	a	r	u	c	m
h	o	f	l	m	a	n	e	u	v	e	r	w	q	o	j
l	m	a	h	g	d	t	r	e	d	n	e	r	r	u	s
p	p	s	a	c	c	u	s	a	t	i	o	n	w	n	g
e	e	p	h	l	y	m	k	h	p	g	v	e	c	t	b
c	t	e	c	f	g	r	e	d	i	s	n	o	c	e	r
a	i	l	u	t	v	h	f	a	s	f	f	d	x	f	s
n	t	r	u	t	s	l	t	f	m	x	i	g	w	e	g
e	i	o	h	a	y	t	s	h	h	g	v	n	c	i	b
m	o	d	r	f	e	t	a	e	t	x	b	z	i	t	n
d	n	c	p	m	u	i	b	g	y	v	o	g	t	s	m
y	p	l	p	a	c	s	o	v	h	t	b	s	r	o	h
h	n	t	l	u	b	f	t	e	r	a	s	w	a	b	j
p	e	r	f	o	r	m	a	n	c	e	l	z	i	m	n
o	l	p	u	t	v	b	g	c	s	x	e	d	a	t	s
i	t	r	a	t	h	l	e	t	e	i	d	y	l	f	s

accusation

performance

finish

crash

bobsled

surrender

menace

detective

counterfeit

athlete

rhythm

maneuver

curator

competition

trial

Cracked Word Search Answer Key

d	d	e	t	e	c	t	i	v	e	v	b	g	j	l	m
y	c	l	r	a	c	s	g	r	o	t	a	r	u	c	m
h	o	f	l	m	a	n	e	u	v	e	r	w	q	o	j
l	m	a	h	g	d	t	r	e	d	n	e	r	r	u	s
p	p	s	a	c	c	u	s	a	t	i	o	n	w	n	g
e	e	p	h	l	y	m	k	h	p	g	v	e	c	t	b
c	t	e	c	f	g	r	e	d	i	s	n	o	c	e	r
a	i	l	u	t	v	h	f	a	s	f	f	d	x	f	s
n	t	r	u	t	s	l	t	f	m	x	i	g	w	e	g
e	i	o	h	a	y	t	s	h	h	g	v	n	c	i	b
m	o	d	r	f	e	t	a	e	t	x	b	z	i	t	n
d	n	c	p	m	u	i	b	g	y	v	o	g	t	s	m
y	p	l	p	a	c	s	o	v	h	t	b	s	r	o	h
h	n	t	l	u	b	f	t	e	r	a	s	w	i	b	j
p	e	r	f	o	r	m	a	n	c	e	l	z	a	m	n
o	l	p	u	t	v	b	g	c	s	x	e	d	l	t	s
i	t	r	a	t	h	l	e	t	e	i	d	y	e	f	s

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