



Trouble in the Trees

Yolanda Ridge

Interest level: ages 8–11

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AR Quiz # 143835

Consider the following question as you read *Trouble in the Trees*:

How hard would you work to change a rule that's unfair?

Story

Bree is happiest when she's climbing the trees at Cedar Grove, her urban townhouse complex. She's the best climber around, but when one of her younger friends falls from a tree and hurts himself, the Neighborhood Council bans all tree climbing in Cedar Grove. If Bree chooses to ignore the bylaw, her family could be kicked out of their home. But what can one girl do? She knows it's not a battle she can win on her own, but rallying the Cedar Grove troops is more difficult than she imagined.

Author

The mother of twin boys, **Yolanda Ridge** writes whenever and wherever she gets a chance. She lives in Burnaby, British Columbia, near an old-growth forest, where the trees are much too big for her to climb. *Trouble in the Trees* is her first book.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- **Focus:** *public speaking*
Invite students to choose an issue they feel strongly about and present a persuasive speech to the class about the ideal resolution. Students' issues can include something at school, in an extracurricular program, in their city or even on a national or international level. Allow students ample time to research, prepare and rehearse their speeches—and be sure to teach some relaxation tricks to the class before you get started with the presentations!
- **Focus:** *changing perspective*
When Bree first finds out about the tree-climbing bylaw, her reaction is straightforward: the bylaw is unfair because it prevents her from doing the activity she loves most. Throughout the book, Bree learns that not everyone feels the same way. Ask students to choose one character from *Trouble in the Trees* and make a list of reasons for and against the tree-climbing bylaw from that character's perspective.
- **Focus:** *retelling; note-taking*
Invite each student to choose a scene or passage from the book that resonates with him or her. Have them jot notes to help them recall the sequence of events. Then pair students up and have them take turns retelling the scene they have chosen, using their notes for reference.
- **Focus:** *poetry; lyric writing*
When Ashley and the Girly-Girls sing their skipping rhymes, it drives Bree crazy. Have students share some skipping rhymes that they've heard. Then break students into partners or small groups and have each group devise an original skipping rhyme, rap or poem based on the story behind *Trouble in the Trees*.
- **Focus:** *creative writing*
Ask students to imagine being Bree, about to do her favorite thing in the world: climb a tree! Write an account of the sensations as you climb, from the very moment you start until the point at which you stop. Include sensory descriptions to really put the reader "in the moment" as you climb (smell, touch, sounds, sights...maybe even tastes?).

Social Studies

- **Focus:** *government—bylaws*
Ashley, the leader of the Girly-Girls, tells Bree that bylaws are important when lots of people live close together. Bylaws are set by municipal governments or by bodies that govern communities such as Cedar Grove. They're made to keep residents safe. For example, your community might have a bylaw that requires cyclists to wear helmets.
 - ◆ Discuss the importance of bylaws with your students.
 - ◆ Online, look up some of the bylaws for your city or town. Discuss with students: how would our community be different if we didn't have these bylaws? What are some of the drawbacks of bylaws? What are the advantages?

- ◆ Discuss the idea that while a bylaw may restrict a small group's actions, it's usually meant to keep the larger group safe. What do students think about this?
- **Focus:** *government—civil protest*
In class, Bree learns about the protests over logging in Clayoquot Sound in the early 1990s. Have students learn about protest and civil disobedience. What are some important considerations to keep in mind for those involved in staging a protest? How is protest—or even civil disobedience, in the case of people who blocked logging roads and chained themselves to trees back in 1993—an effective route to change?
- **Focus:** *map skills*
Have students draw a map of the neighborhood they live in. Maps should include significant features such as rivers, roads, bike paths, houses, parks, schools and crosswalks. Students' maps should be clearly labeled with a legend and a scale. Post these around the classroom.

Science

- **Focus:** *reducing your carbon footprint*
In chapter 3, we learn that Sarah's father and stepmother are committed to reducing their family's carbon footprint. Discuss with students their understanding of the term. Visit www.planet-positive.org/how_2_kidscalcul.php to have your students learn more about global warming and calculate their carbon footprint.
- **Focus:** *plants and trees*
Bree names the trees that lie just outside the Cedar Grove boundary the Spoon, the Fork and the Knife. How did these trees end up growing so differently? Investigate with students the factors that influence how trees grow. Start here for a discussion and time-lapse photography that shows tree growth. <http://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/forsite/howdoes.htm>

Health/Physical Education

- **Focus:** *safety; fair play; leadership*
Bree comes up with a list of rules to make tree climbing safer for the kids in Cedar Grove. Ask the students to choose a competitive or recreational sport that they like to engage in and come up with a list of rules to make it safer.
- **Focus:** *movement skills*
Take students to a climbing wall or a ropes course so they can receive instruction in how to climb and move safely while at a distance from the ground. After the session(s), discuss with students how receiving instruction in an activity helps to make it safer for participants.

Art

- **Focus:** *drawing/sketching*
At several points in the book, Bree reflects that Ms. Matheson has that certain “principal” look about her. Draw Ms. Matheson based on the image created by Bree’s words.
- **Focus:** *drawing/sketching; creative processes*
After reading *Trouble in the Trees*, have students draw or create a new cover selecting the images they felt to be the most powerful from the story. Ask each student to provide a paragraph explaining his or her choice.
- **Focus:** *drawing/sketching; retelling*
Divide *Trouble in the Trees* into six to eight sections and have groups of students tell the story through illustrations. Display the illustrations in the order that they occur. Have each group explain their choices of illustrations.
- **Focus:** *principles of design*
Using mixed media, have students create a model of the perfect tree for climbing.

Connecting to the Text

1. **Focus:** *sensory detail; showing vs telling*
In chapter 1, the author shows us Bree’s mother’s impatience with the following description: “She was standing with her feet apart and her arms crossed.” How is this more effective than simply telling the reader Mom looked mad? Have students find other examples of how Ridge uses showing instead of telling. Challenge them to rewrite a section of their own writing by using this same technique.
2. **Focus:** *plot; conflict*
Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It’s what makes things interesting! Typically, story plot follows one of four basic patterns of conflict:
 - ◆ Person against nature. Tension comes from the character’s battle against strong forces of nature.
 - ◆ Person against person. Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
 - ◆ Person against society. Tension comes from the main character’s struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
 - ◆ Person against self. Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.

Guide students in a discussion of the kind of conflict pattern in *Trouble in the Trees*. Is there more than one, depending on which part of the story you look at? Which one predominates?
3. **Focus:** *understanding characters*
Bree misjudges a lot of the other characters in this book. Pick one character and explain what Bree learns about that person throughout the story.

4. **Focus:** *theme*
Like plot, setting and characters, theme is an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *Trouble in the Trees*.
5. **Focus:** *analyzing a work of fiction*
Fiction (even fantasy) has to be believable to work. If anything in the text suddenly reminds readers that the story or the characters aren't real, the story loses its credibility and its ability to affect us emotionally. For example, characters who behave differently for their age than they would in real life, or sudden coincidences that wrap up the plot in a "just-so" manner can make the story feel really fake. *Trouble in the Trees* is a very believable book. Break students into small groups and have them discuss why the story works. They should support their findings with examples from the book. Have each group share their reasoning with the class. Can students think of a book they've read where the events, characters or actions do not feel believable?

Connecting to the Students

Discussion questions

Focus: *constructing, monitoring and confirming meaning*

1. Tyler says Bree's habit of climbing trees is dangerous in that it encourages other kids to take risks. What do you think?
2. Bree decides to take up her concerns with the Neighborhood Council. They are happy to hear her thoughts. How important is it for kids to have a voice like this? What would happen if no one spoke up for what they believed in?
3. Bree's mom says you always have two choices: follow the rules or change them. Do you agree? Why or why not? Why is it not a good idea to break the rules?
4. During the first meeting of the Cedar Grove kids, Bree warns the group that the Neighborhood Council should be stopped from making more bylaws before they end up taking away other fun things like hockey and basketball. Ashley tells Bree she's blowing things out of proportion. What does that expression mean?
5. Cedar Grove has a lot of bylaws that Bree and her friends feel are unfair to kids. Can you think of any rules you have to follow that seem unfair? At home? At school?
6. Of the different ways Bree fights the tree-climbing bylaw, which is most effective? Why?
7. Michael tells Bree that Tyler resents her for being a natural leader. In a small group, develop a list of qualities that good leaders have. Share these with the class.

8. Bree finds her first appearance in front of the Neighborhood Council to be intimidating. But by the second meeting, she feels more confident. Explain how facing up to challenges helps make you stronger.
9. Why is it such a significant moment when Bree's mother tells her she's proud of her?

Text-to-self connections

1. Bree wants to climb every tree in Cedar Grove so she can prove to Tyler that she's a better climber than he is. Do you have a sibling or a friend that you're quite competitive with? Have you ever felt that kind of rivalry?
2. Bree's family lives in a townhouse complex, which means they have to follow rules that help everyone get along in harmony. Have you ever lived in a community like this? What are some of the really great things about it? What are some of the drawbacks?
3. Public presentations freak Bree out. She's worried about her slight British accent popping up and making her feel silly. And she's nervous about presenting her tree climbing case to a group of adults! Does public speaking worry you? What do you dislike about it?
4. Tree climbing makes Bree feel free. What kinds of things do you do that make you feel free? Explain.
5. Bree is an amazing tree climber. She has it down to an art form! Write about something that you're really good at. It doesn't have to be sporty. Maybe you make a mean blueberry waffle, or can play Mozart on the harmonica. Tell us.

Text-to-text connections

1. Michael, one of the boys who lives in Cedar Grove, sometimes gets caught between trying to please Tyler and saying what he actually thinks. Have you ever encountered another book or movie character who has the same problem—they're too intimidated by someone powerful to do the right thing?
2. What other stories are you familiar with where the main character takes a stand for what he or she believes in? Explain.
3. Would you say Bree is a bit of a tomboy? Write about a character from another book who gravitates toward things that other kids of the same sex generally don't.
4. Tyler eventually comes around, and actually seems to be supporting Bree in her quest to have the bylaw overturned. In what other stories have you seen characters come together who were originally in opposition to one another?

Text-to-world connections

1. When the Cedar Grove protest gets underway, Mrs. Leary yells at the kids from her window. Bree wonders whether Mrs. Leary was ever a child, since she seems so out of touch with what the kids feel is important. Have you ever had the same feeling—that adults don't remember what it's like to be a kid? Give an example of a time when you felt that way.

2. Have you ever seen other groups protesting—maybe on the evening news, or maybe even nearby, in your community? What were these groups trying to achieve?
3. Write about a bylaw (or a law) that has helped to keep you safe. As an added challenge, write about one that you think is unnecessary.
4. Parents tend to worry a lot, don't they? Do you think the level of safety-worry in our society is too high? Explain, using examples from your own life.

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

It was a bear that first inspired me to climb trees. Strange, I know! I was camping with my family when our dog started barking frantically—his way of telling us there was a black bear in the tree above our tent. My parents rushed us into the car. My sister and I were both younger than eight—no match for the cub, never mind an angry mama bear! I don't remember being scared but I do remember watching as the cub calmly climbed out of the tree. He made it look so easy! I had to find out what he could see from up there. Almost thirty years later, I'm still climbing, but I now prefer mountains to trees. I love the view, the change in perspective, and the freedom I get from being in high places.

The idea for *Trouble in the Trees* started when my friend Claire's townhouse complex really did ban tree climbing. For Claire, also an avid tree climber, the story ended there. She found other places to climb. But it continued to bother me how much our freedom was being limited by rules like this. As the mother of active twin boys, I understood the desire to keep kids safe, but I wasn't sure this was the right way to go about it.

The issue played around in my head until I knew I had to create a character that was willing to fight a tree-climbing bylaw. I based the physical location and layout of Cedar Grove on Claire's townhouse complex. For the dynamics of the neighborhood, I drew on my experience living in a highrise condo in downtown Vancouver. I also spent time researching tree-climbing safety and sports injuries, and I learned a lot about strata law, information that was used in the creation of the Neighborhood Council.

Bits of Bree's character have been borrowed from real people, including myself, but Bree herself isn't like anyone I've ever met. She is much braver than me! She's the social activist I've always wanted to be. As each of the characters in Bree's story developed, I was amazed how much I learned from their perspective. They each helped me understand the arguments for and against the tree-climbing bylaw and other rules like it.

I hope you enjoy Bree's adventure. I also hope you will be inspired by her ability to make change happen. We all have a voice—we just need to find our own way of being heard.

Happy Climbing!

Yolanda

P.S. In Spring 2012, look for *Road Block*, a new book about Bree.

Resources

Books

Fiction

- Banks, John. *Doorway to Darkness*
Bell, Alison. *Zibby Payne and the Wonderful, Terrible Tomboy Experiment*
—*Zibby Payne and the Drama Trauma*
—*Zibby Payne and the Party Problem*
—*Zibby Payne and the Trio Trouble*
Brink, Carol Ryrie. *Caddie Woodlawn*
Konigsburg, e.l. *T-backs, T-shirts, Coat and Suit*
Lewis, Linda. *The Tomboy Terror in Bunk 109*
Tate, Nikki. *Trouble on Tarragon Island*
Timberlake, Amy. *That Girl Lucy Moon*
Van Draanen, Wendelin. *How I Survived Being a Girl*
Williamson, Debbie Sue Bass. *Journals of the Big Mouth Bass: Keeping Secrets: Book One*

Nonfiction

- Hardy, Sheila. *Extraordinary People of the Civil Rights Movement*
Johansson, Philip. *The Temperate Forest: A web of life*
MacDonald, Fiona. *You Wouldn't Want to be a Suffragist! A protest movement that's rougher than you expected*
Partridge, Elizabeth. *Marching For Freedom: Walk together children and don't you grow weary*
McAllister, Ian and Nicholas Read. *The Salmon Bears: Giants of the Great Bear Rainforest*
Severance, John B. *Gandhi, Great Soul*
Turck, Mary. *Freedom Song: Young voices and the struggle for civil rights*

Online

Tree Climbers International
www.treeclimbing.com

Preventing Injury in Sport
www.parentscanada.com/well-being/articles.aspx?listingid=608

Physical Education Class Injuries
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/124/3/918>

Clayoquot Biosphere Trust
<http://clayoquotbiosphere.org/web>