



Last Ride

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Reading level: 2.4

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AR Quiz # 143258

Book Summary

After Tom's best friend, Logan, is killed in a street race, Tom refuses to race again: yet he cannot let go of the guilt he feels surrounding Logan's death. As he seeks to put his life back together, Tom faces pressure at every juncture. His mother, Logan's girlfriend, other street racers and even his boss put unrelenting pressure on Tom. Facing questions about his car, racing and money, eventually Tom makes a decision that sets him free.

Prereading Ideas

Ask students to quickly investigate street racing on the Internet and make a list of facts that will answer the following questions: What is street racing? How is it organized and publicized? Where does it occur? What types of vehicles are used to race? What are the local laws regarding street racing? What are the consequences, both legal and moral, of street racing? Armed with information, have a class discussion and allow students to share what they have learned. Have students write a personal response to the discussion and post their responses in the classroom.

Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- When Tom's cell phone vibrates while he is driving, he pulls his car over to read and respond to the text. Ask each student to select a state or province and to investigate the local laws concerning cell-phone use while driving. Also ask students to investigate the number of accidents that have been caused by use of cell phones while driving, determining the percentages of deaths and injury. Ask students to report their information to the class using a visual aid and create a classroom display of the visual aids.
- The consequences of Tom's street racing are far-reaching and emotion-packed. Ask students to draw on those emotions as they choose one of the following writing activities. Have students present their pieces with voice and passion to the class.
 - ◆ a speech from Tom's point of view to a group of teens who have been busted for street racing
 - ◆ a letter from the guilt-ridden Tom to Logan's family
 - ◆ a eulogy for Logan
 - ◆ a recommendation letter from Mr. Lansky for Tom
 - ◆ a letter of desperation from Tom's mother to the mortgage company

Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel*Characterization*

Logan and Tom were best friends with more than just street racing in common. What does the reader learn about Logan through Tom's thoughts? What do Tom's actions reveal about his personality and his character? Ask students to draw and complete a Venn diagram with Tom on one side and Logan on the other. Then have students add two circles, one for Ray and one for Hannah, that intersect with each of the other circles in the Venn diagram. As students complete the additional circles, they should note the influence of each character on the others. Based on the information in the diagram, have students write a brief character analysis of one of the four characters, including how they influenced the other three characters. Have students share and discuss their character analysis in small groups with students who have chosen the same character.

Theme

The theme is the main idea of the story. In pairs, ask students to write a one-sentence theme for the novel and then to find a famous quote that exemplifies the theme. Students can go to the following websites for quotes:

www.quotationspage.com
www.brainyquote.com

Have students write their quote on a sentence strip and display them on the walls of the classroom.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Beginning on the first page, Tom is consumed with guilt over the car accident that killed his best friend, Logan. How did the accident occur? Why does Tom think it was his fault?
2. What unusual manifestations cause Tom to think Logan is haunting him? Is there any way to prove or disprove the existence of Logan's "presence" after his death? How does Tom's behavior change when "Logan" is near him?
3. Why does Tom refer to his car as a "steel shell"?
4. How does Ray push Tom to make a decision that he is not comfortable making? What threat does Ray make to force Tom to race again? What does the decision cost Tom? How does the pressure of the decision cause Tom to make unwise choices?
5. What role does Hannah play in helping Tom overcome his guilt? How do Logan and Cole affect Tom's actions toward Hannah?
6. Tom spends so much of his time in the past—racked with guilt—that he can't live in the present or think about his future. Why is this harmful to Tom and his mother? How does his mother try to help him?
7. What circumstances lead up to the decision Tom makes that he will race again? What rule does Tom make that will allow him to race guilt-free? How does he justify making the rule?
8. How does the title, *Last Ride*, relate to both Tom and Logan? Based on what occurs in the novel, how is the proverb "Every end a new beginning" relate to the book?

Writer's Craft

Foreshadowing

In chapter 1, Tom thinks, "... somebody somewhere is missing the turbo charger for his Lexus...or maybe his entire car is gone." What does this information tell the reader about Ray's business and his character? How does this sentence foreshadow what is to come? Ask students to find other examples of foreshadowing as they read the book. Have students read their examples and have classmates determine what is being foreshadowed and why? Have students select their favorite example of foreshadowing and create a humorous comic strip employing the foreshadowing.

Powerful Verbs

Powerful verbs help create an image in the reader's mind. Look at the following sentences in chapter 1 as examples.

The leather seat crackles when I slide behind the wheel.

I turn the key and the engine bubbles to life.

I flick on the heat, adjust the mirrors, switch on the wipers.

Ask students to find and to share with a partner ten other examples of powerful verbs. Then have students find five sentences in their own writing to rewrite using more powerful verbs. Have students select their best revision, and, as a class, prepare “before” and “after” revision displays to remind students of the potential of powerful verbs.

Author Biography

An avid reader since her youth, **Laura Langston** was raised in a family of readers and has always enjoyed visiting the library. She has wanted to be a writer since she was in fourth grade, and currently enjoys writing magazine articles, newsletters, stories and books for children and adults. In addition to reading and writing, Laura loves gardening, cycling and travelling. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with her husband and two children.