



## Overdrive

Eric Walters

YALSA Quick Pick

Interest level: grade 7 and up

Reading level: 2.8

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AR Quiz # 78318

### Book Summary

Jake helped his brother Andy work on the Chevy until it was running hot and fast. Naturally, the day Jake gets his driver's license, Andy loans him his car, so he can cruise the drag to celebrate. But Jake and his friend Mickey run into trouble when Luke, a former friend, challenges him to a street race. Jake knows he shouldn't, but he can't resist the urge to show Luke how fast the car is and shut him up. Moments later when Luke's BMW crashes into another car and bursts into flames, Jake leaves the scene to escape trouble. After much deliberation, he makes a decision to do the right thing—to call the police and take responsibility for his actions.

### Prereading Idea

Discuss with students the anticipation of turning sixteen and the responsibility that comes with obtaining a driver's license. Ask students to research teen drivers and the statistics surrounding automobile accidents involving teens. This website will be helpful:

[www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/teenmvh.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/teenmvh.htm)

Compile a list of statistics and ideas students found in their research and display the facts and ideas on a poster to post in the classroom and hallways.

### **Connecting to the World—Writing and Research**

Street racing is illegal throughout the United States and Canada, but the law doesn't prevent teenagers from racing cars on the back roads of many cities. Ask students to work in small groups to research illegal street racing: reasons authorities have outlawed it, the penalties of illegal racing, statistics surrounding deaths and injuries, and alternatives offered in various locations. The groups should produce a public service announcement with charts and pictures about the dangers of street racing. Videotape the announcements and distribute them to school-sponsored and private driver's education classes, local Department of Public Safety offices, car dealerships, the school and public library, local radio and television stations, or other community organizations who would be willing to show and/or distribute copies of the video.

Jake experienced some emotional highs and lows: for example; the exhilaration of getting his driver's license and driving his brother's car, the anger he feels at Jake for taunting him to race, the concern for the people injured in the accident, and his distress and final decision to turn himself in. Ask students to select one of these emotional situations or choose another and write a poem that expresses Jake's feelings. After reading their poems to the class, students can display them in the classroom.

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

#### **Theme**

The author Eric Walters has said, "I believe two themes run through my stories. One is a sense of belonging—people want to belong somewhere. The second theme is that, whether you're female or male, you have some power to make changes in your life." Ask students to select one of these two themes as the theme of *Overdrive* and have them write a letter to the author. Each student should explain why that theme pertains to the student's personal life and what he/she learned from the book in relation to his or her experiences.

#### **Setting**

The setting of this story could have been almost anywhere. Based on clues in the story, discuss aspects of the town in which Jake lived such as size, location to larger cities, types of restaurants, availability of varied entertainment, and the size of the high school. In small groups, ask students to create a Chamber of Commerce brochure based on the information gleaned about the city from the story. The groups can compare their brochures and display them in the room.

#### **Point of View**

*Overdrive* is told from Jake's point of view, so readers know only what he tells us and how he feels about people and situations. In small groups, ask each student to choose another character, such as Andy, Mickey, Luke, a policeman or hospital employee. Have students write about the events surrounding the automobile racing and wreck incident

from the viewpoint of another character. In the groups, combine the viewpoints—cutting, splicing, and rearranging to produce a skit—a collection of voices. Present the skits to the class and discuss the impact point of view has on different characters.

### **Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. What makes Jake's relationship with his brother so strong? How do you think Andy will react to the news about Jake's involvement with the accident? How do you think it will alter their relationship?
2. How does Mickey's influence over Jake affect his life? How is Mickey's influence both positive and negative? Which influence is stronger? Why?
3. The reader can see that Jake's decision to race Luke affects many people? Who does it affect and how does it affect them?
4. Jake struggles to make the decision to do the right thing. What does the decision cost him? What does he gain?
5. On page 100, Jake's counselor tells him you learn about the character of a person if they do the right thing only when it's easy. What does the reader learn about Jake's character?
6. How does the title relate to the story? Try giving more than one explanation.

### **Writer's Craft**

#### **Dialogue**

The author uses considerable dialogue to tell the story, enabling the readers 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 Jake and his brother or his parents revealing his involvement in the accident, or (2) between Jake and Mickey explaining Jake's decision to turn himself in.

#### **Author Biography**

When he is not writing, **Eric Walters** is coaching his children's soccer and basketball teams. In addition, he plays the saxophone and enjoys music. He enjoys presenting to children—blending drama, storytelling, audience participation and interaction. Eric strives to motivate his audience members, not only about his books, but also about their own personal writing process.