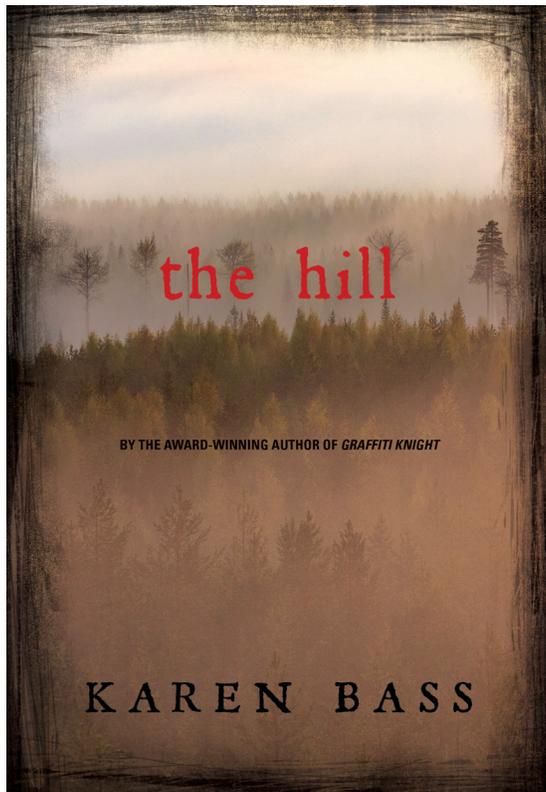


THE HILL

Karen Bass

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Created by Erin Alladin



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“The writing is descriptive and fast-paced, with an impending sense of dread overshadowing everything as the boys try to outrun and outwit the Wihtiko. A survival and buddy story with broad appeal for tweens and teens.”—*School Library Journal*

“The pace is relentless, the amply creepy threat is believable, and the setting is fully realized. There is enough Native American culture to add welcome flavor and depth... Suspenseful, fast-paced, and hard to put down.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“...a gripping story of survival and mystery...The award-winning author successfully weaves Cree mythology into the fast-paced adventure of two teens from vastly different worlds. Together, they learn that outwitting a creature from the spirit world is only possible with mutual respect.”—**Larry Loyie, Award-Winning Cree Author of *As Long as the Rivers Flow* and *Residential Schools: With the Words and Images of Survivors***

“...the best part of this book is the interplay between the two main characters. Jared is the spoiled city kid, and Kyle the tough outdoorsy one, but they are both so much more than the stereotypes would suggest.”
—*Resource Links*

“...this Hatchet meets *Lost* tale is presented in a way that’s suitable for the younger end of the YA spectrum. And, really, it’s impossible to stop reading to see if anyone gets eaten.”—*The Globe and Mail*

KEYWORDS

Young Adult, Thriller, Alberta, Survival, Horror, Cree, Wesakechak, Wihtiko, Suspense, Friendship, Contemporary Fiction

FURTHER RESOURCES

Reviews of *The Hill*: http://pajamapress.ca/resource/the_hill_reviews

Searchable map for North Americans to learn about the treaties cover their home regions: <http://native-land.ca>

Interview with author Karen Bass about writing a culture not her own: http://pajamapress.ca/resource/the_hill_interviews

Online Cree Dictionary: www.creedictionary.com

the hill

KAREN BASS

Discussion Guide created by Erin Woods

STORY SUMMARY

Jared's plane has crashed in the Alberta wilderness, and Kyle is first on the scene. When Jared insists on hiking up the highest hill in search of cell phone reception, Kyle hesitates; his Cree grandmother has always forbidden him to go near it. There's no stopping Jared, though, so Kyle reluctantly follows. After a night spent on the hilltop—with no cell service—the teens discover something odd: the plane has disappeared. Nothing in the forest surrounding them seems right. In fact, things seem very wrong. And worst of all, something is hunting them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Bass is the multi-award-winning author of four previous novels for young adult readers. *Graffiti Knight* won the CLA Young Adult Book Award, the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People, the R. Ross Annett Award, and the CAA Exporting Alberta Award. *Uncertain Soldier* is a finalist for the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young people, the IODE Violet Downey Book Award, and the OLA Forest of Reading Red Maple Award. Karen lives in Hythe, Alberta, where she was the public library manager for sixteen years before turning to full-time writing.

A NOTE ABOUT WORD CHOICE

We recognize that language evolves quickly, and words can become socially or politically charged through use and misuse. It is also problematic to choose a single label for the multitudes of unique living cultures whose ancestors inhabited North America before European colonization. Because many discussions in this guide relate to issues affecting communities across the continent, such a label was needed here. We have most frequently used "First Nations" as a phrase widely accepted in Canada at the time of writing. Where pos-

sible, we have mentioned specifically relevant nations, communities, and language groups by name.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jared find it so hard to adjust to the situation of being stranded in the forest?
2. What were Kyle's motivations for helping Jared?
3. Kyle and Jared were on edge with each other from the start. What did each boy see in the other to make him expect the worst of him?
4. What do you think are Kyle and Jared's biggest fears? How do those fears affect their response to their situation? To each other?
5. How does Jared's swim training help him survive in the Wihtiko's world?
6. What stereotypes did Jared believe about First Nations peoples before meeting Kyle? Why did he believe them?
7. Are there any stereotypes you have grown up believing about people of a certain culture, community, country, or gender? Do you ever think about why you believe them? How might you find out if they are really true?
8. When Kyle accuses Jared of being prejudiced, Jared frequently denies it. Why does Jared not believe he is being prejudiced?
9. What is the difference between prejudice and discrimination? Why is it important to recognize both of them?
10. Are there times when you notice Jared explicitly discriminating against Kyle or other First Nations peoples? What does that look like?

11. Why was Jared upset over Kyle calling him Moniyaw? Do you think it was reasonable for him to be upset?

12. Would it be more unacceptable for Jared to call Kyle “Brown Man” than for Kyle to call Jared Moniyaw? Why or why not?

13. What helped the boys finally start seeing eye to eye?

14. What can Jared’s relationship with his shoes tell us about his development as a character?

15. What can Kyle and Jared’s relationship teach us about avoiding or resolving conflict in our own lives?

16. What was the most important thing Jared learned in *The Hill*? What was the most important thing Kyle learned?

17. Karen Bass, the author of *The Hill*, is not Cree. Are there any problems that might arise in writing about a culture that is not your own? Are there any benefits? Suggest some best practices for a writer in this situation.

DRAMATIC ACTION (WRITING, READING COMPREHENSION, ELEMENTS OF STYLE)

Directions:

Ask students to consider the following sentences from *The Hill*:

Jared vacuumed air. (8)

A grunt-like noise burped out of the cave’s mouth. (51)

Jared’s pulse slammed in his own ears. (94)

Discuss:

What do you notice about the verbs Karen Bass chooses in scenes of dramatic action?

How do these unusual and descriptive verbs affect the way you read the scene?

How can you apply this technique in your own writing?

Invite students to rewrite the following sentences with unexpected verb choices:

He crashed through the undergrowth.

She fell down the hill.

My heart pounded in my chest.

The door slammed shut.

TREATY PEOPLE (SOCIAL STUDIES, CHARACTER EDUCATION)

Much of the conflict between Jared and Kyle stems from Jared’s ignorance of Kyle’s culture and experiences. The following activities are intended to guide students toward the knowledge and understanding that will help them build relationships more easily than Jared and Kyle.

Directions:

Enter your school address into the search field on native-land.ca (this site covers all of North America) to find out if your region is covered by a treaty. If so, read and discuss the treaty with your class. What conditions does it require of each side? Have all of those conditions been met? What are the consequences of any conditions that have been neglected? What actions can be taken to mitigate those consequences? How can students influence the government to mend broken relationships?

If you have any First Nations students in your class, ask if there is any aspect of their culture they would like their classmates to better understand. Offer the opportunity for a presentation or discussion on that topic, led either by the student(s) or by a guest.

Contact a local First Nations cultural center to learn about opportunities for students to attend a presentation or event. Prepare them beforehand so that they know what behavior is respectful.

Share clippings or videos from a news story about an issue affecting a First Nations community near you.

Discuss: Where is this problem rooted? Who has the power to solve it? Is it being solved? Why or why not? Whose responsibility is it? How can we influence the issue? Why should we influence it?

WRITING HORROR (WRITING, READING COMPREHENSION)

Discuss:

Why is it enjoyable to read books in the horror or thriller genres?

Is there a difference between creepy and scary in this kind of fiction? How would you describe the difference?

Is it more effective for a book to include creepiness, or scariness, or both? What does each one contribute to the reader's experience?

Which event in *The Hill* did you find to be the creepiest? The scariest?

Directions:

On the board, have students rate different events in *The Hill* on a continuum from creepy to scary.

Discuss:

Which events helped set the scene?

Which events made you feel most engrossed in the story?

Which events were the most memorable?

Have students write a short piece of horror fiction, keeping in mind their observations from this discussion.

THEMES, MOTIFS, AND SYMBOLS (WRITING, ELEMENTS OF STYLE)

Directions:

Introduce your students to the definitions of literary themes, motifs, and symbols. Using a Venn diagram, have students help you classify the differing and similar characteristics of each.

Ask students to respond to the following in writing:

Using your own words, explain what a theme is in literature.

Identify a theme present in *The Hill*.

Describe three pieces of evidence that support your choice of this theme.

Using your own words, explain what a motif is in literature.

Identify a motif present in *The Hill*.

What does the use of this motif communicate to the reader?

Using your own words, explain what a symbol is in literature.

Identify a symbol present in *The Hill*.

Do you believe the author used this symbol deliberately? Does the author's intent matter? Defend your position.

WĪHTIKO (COMPARATIVE TEXTS)

Directions:

Karen Bass' foremost sources for Cree language and stories were from the Kelly Lake Community and Sucker Creek First Nation, both in northern Alberta, but the *WĪhtiko* (also *Windigo*, among other spellings) appears in legends from cultures across the United States and Canada. Have students research other portrayals of the *WĪhtiko* in story, art, or other media. Have each student choose one portrayal to present to the class, addressing the following questions:

To whom is this portrayal attributed? What was his/her/their source?

How is this portrayal similar to or different from that present in *The Hill*?

What theme does the portrayal communicate?

How does this portrayal relate to the time and place in which it was created?