

9 grade novel study touching spirit bear

9 grade novel study touching spirit bear offers an insightful exploration of the compelling themes, characters, and literary elements found in Ben Mikaelson's acclaimed novel. This study guide is designed to support 9th-grade students in understanding the complex narrative and moral lessons embedded within the story. The novel examines issues such as redemption, healing, and the power of nature through the journey of Cole Matthews, a troubled teenager who encounters a mystical spirit bear in the Alaskan wilderness. This article will provide a detailed analysis of the novel's plot, themes, character development, and relevant discussion topics that are essential for a comprehensive 9th-grade novel study. Additionally, it will highlight effective study strategies and key questions to enhance critical thinking and literary appreciation. The following sections will guide students through the main components of a 9th-grade novel study touching spirit bear.

- Overview of Touching Spirit Bear
- Major Themes in the Novel
- Character Analysis
- Plot Summary and Structure
- Literary Devices and Symbolism
- Discussion Questions for 9th Grade
- Study Tips for Students

Overview of Touching Spirit Bear

Touching Spirit Bear is a young adult novel written by Ben Mikaelson that explores the story of Cole Matthews, a violent and angry teenager sent to a remote Alaskan island as part of a Native American justice system called Circle Justice. The novel focuses on Cole's emotional and spiritual transformation after an encounter with a mysterious spirit bear. This section provides a foundational understanding of the novel's setting, background, and purpose, essential for a 9 grade novel study touching spirit bear.

Background and Setting

The story is set in the wilderness of Alaska, where nature plays a crucial role in Cole's journey. The remote island setting emphasizes isolation and the challenge of confronting one's inner demons without external distractions. The natural environment is both a physical and symbolic landscape, reflecting Cole's internal struggles and growth throughout the novel.

Author's Purpose

Ben Mikaelson wrote *Touching Spirit Bear* to address themes of healing, forgiveness, and personal responsibility. The novel aims to introduce readers, particularly young adults, to alternative justice systems and the idea that true change comes from within. This purpose is vital to consider when studying the novel in 9th grade, as it encourages reflection on real-life issues related to anger, violence, and redemption.

Major Themes in the Novel

Understanding the major themes in *Touching Spirit Bear* is fundamental to any 9 grade novel study touching spirit bear. These themes provide insight into the characters' motivations and the moral lessons conveyed through the narrative.

Redemption and Forgiveness

The theme of redemption is central to the novel, as Cole seeks to make amends for his past actions. Forgiveness, both from others and oneself, is portrayed as a crucial step in the healing process. The story demonstrates that redemption is not immediate but requires effort, patience, and self-reflection.

Nature and Spirituality

Nature serves as a powerful force for transformation in the novel. The spirit bear symbolizes purity, strength, and the possibility of renewal. Cole's interaction with the natural world encourages a spiritual awakening, highlighting the connection between humans and the environment.

Consequences and Personal Responsibility

The novel stresses that actions have consequences and that personal responsibility is essential for growth. Cole's journey illustrates how accepting responsibility for one's behavior can lead to meaningful change and self-improvement.

Character Analysis

A thorough character analysis is a key component of a 9 grade novel study touching spirit bear, helping students understand motivations, relationships, and growth throughout the story.

Cole Matthews

Cole is the protagonist whose journey from anger and violence to healing and self-awareness drives the plot. His character development is complex, showcasing his struggles, setbacks, and eventual acceptance of change. Cole's transformation is the heart of the novel.

Peter Driscal

Peter is a victim of Cole's violence and serves as a catalyst for the story's exploration of forgiveness and justice. His interactions with Cole highlight themes of pain, healing, and the possibility of reconciliation.

Garvey and Edwin

Garvey, a probation officer, and Edwin, a Tlingit elder, guide Cole through the Circle Justice process. They represent wisdom, patience, and the importance of community support in the journey toward redemption.

Plot Summary and Structure

The plot of Touching Spirit Bear is structured around Cole's experiences during his time on the Alaskan island and his interactions with other characters. This section provides an overview of the storyline to aid comprehension in a 9 grade novel study touching spirit bear.

Beginning

The novel begins with Cole Matthews facing consequences for brutally assaulting Peter Driscal. Instead of traditional incarceration, Cole is sent to a remote island for Circle Justice, a Native American alternative justice system focused on healing rather than punishment.

Middle

During his time on the island, Cole confronts his fears and anger. After being mauled by the spirit bear, Cole's perspective shifts, leading to self-reflection and a desire to change. This section details his physical

and emotional challenges, including moments of despair and breakthrough.

End

The novel concludes with Cole's continued efforts to heal himself and seek forgiveness from Peter. The ending highlights the ongoing nature of personal growth and the importance of community and support in the process.

Literary Devices and Symbolism

Touching Spirit Bear employs various literary devices and symbols that enrich the narrative and deepen its meaning. Recognizing these elements enhances understanding and appreciation in a 9 grade novel study touching spirit bear.

Symbolism of the Spirit Bear

The spirit bear is a central symbol representing purity, strength, and spiritual guidance. Its presence challenges Cole to face his inner self and inspires transformation. The bear's elusive nature reflects the difficulty of achieving true change.

Foreshadowing and Imagery

Mikaelsen uses foreshadowing to build suspense and prepare readers for key events, such as Cole's encounter with the bear. Vivid imagery of the Alaskan wilderness immerses readers in the setting and mirrors the protagonist's emotional landscape.

First-Person Narrative

The novel is narrated from Cole's perspective, providing intimate insight into his thoughts and feelings. This narrative style allows readers to connect with his struggles and growth on a personal level.

Discussion Questions for 9th Grade

Engaging with thoughtful discussion questions is essential in a 9 grade novel study touching spirit bear to foster critical thinking and deeper analysis.

1. How does Cole's attitude toward himself and others change throughout the novel?
2. What role does nature play in Cole's transformation?
3. How does the concept of Circle Justice differ from traditional punishment, and what are its benefits?
4. In what ways do forgiveness and redemption appear as interconnected themes?
5. What does the spirit bear symbolize in the context of the story?
6. How do Garvey and Edwin influence Cole's journey?
7. What lessons about personal responsibility does the novel teach?

Study Tips for Students

Effective study strategies can enhance comprehension and retention when exploring a 9 grade novel study touching spirit bear. The following tips support academic success and deeper engagement with the text.

- **Annotate while reading:** Highlight key passages and make notes about themes, character traits, and literary devices.
- **Create character maps:** Track relationships and developments of main characters like Cole and Peter.
- **Summarize chapters:** Write brief summaries to reinforce understanding of plot progression.
- **Discuss themes:** Participate in group discussions or write reflections on major themes such as forgiveness and redemption.
- **Answer study questions:** Use provided questions to test comprehension and encourage critical thinking.
- **Research Circle Justice:** Explore the background of this restorative justice system to contextualize the novel.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of the novel 'Touching Spirit Bear' studied in 9th grade?

The main theme of 'Touching Spirit Bear' is healing and redemption, focusing on personal growth through forgiveness and facing one's past mistakes.

Who is the protagonist in 'Touching Spirit Bear' and what challenges does he face?

The protagonist is Cole Matthews, a troubled teenager who faces the challenge of overcoming anger and trauma through a unique form of restorative justice on a remote Alaskan island.

How does the setting of the Alaskan wilderness contribute to the story?

The Alaskan wilderness serves as a harsh but transformative environment where Cole confronts nature and himself, symbolizing isolation and the opportunity for self-discovery.

What role does the Spirit Bear play in Cole's journey?

The Spirit Bear represents nature's power and spiritual guidance, teaching Cole lessons in respect, humility, and healing as he encounters the bear during his time on the island.

How does the novel portray the concept of restorative justice?

The novel portrays restorative justice through Circle Justice, emphasizing healing for both victims and offenders rather than punishment, promoting accountability and reconciliation.

What are some significant character changes Cole undergoes throughout the novel?

Cole evolves from a violent, angry youth to a more self-aware and empathetic individual who learns to take responsibility for his actions and seeks to make amends.

Why is the theme of forgiveness important in 'Touching Spirit Bear'?

Forgiveness is crucial as it enables Cole to release his anger and pain, facilitating personal healing and allowing him to rebuild relationships and move forward.

How does the novel address the impact of trauma on behavior?

The novel explores how Cole's traumatic past influences his aggressive behavior, highlighting the need for understanding and healing rather than mere punishment.

What lessons can 9th grade students learn from reading 'Touching Spirit Bear'?

Students can learn about the importance of accountability, empathy, the power of nature, and how facing one's problems directly can lead to personal growth and positive change.

Additional Resources

1. *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson

This novel follows Cole Matthews, a troubled teen sent to a remote Alaskan island as part of a Native American justice program. There, he encounters a spirit bear and begins a journey of self-discovery, healing, and redemption. The story explores themes of anger, forgiveness, and the power of nature.

2. *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

Hatchet tells the story of Brian Robeson, a thirteen-year-old boy stranded alone in the Canadian wilderness after a plane crash. With only a hatchet, Brian must learn to survive against the odds. The novel highlights resilience, self-reliance, and the relationship between humans and nature.

3. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell

This classic novel follows Karana, a young Native American girl left alone on an island off the California coast. Karana's struggle for survival and connection with the natural world is both heart-wrenching and inspiring. Themes of courage, solitude, and respect for nature permeate the story.

4. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie

This semi-autobiographical novel centers on Junior, a Native American teenager who leaves his reservation school to attend an all-white high school. Through humor and honesty, the book addresses identity, cultural conflict, and the challenges of adolescence. It provides a contemporary perspective on Native American life.

5. *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

This touching story follows a young boy named Billy and his two hunting dogs in the Ozarks. The novel explores themes of friendship, determination, and loss, illustrating a deep bond between humans and animals. It is a heartfelt coming-of-age tale about love and perseverance.

6. *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George

Sam Gribbley runs away from his New York City home to live in the Catskill Mountains. Through ingenuity and a deep connection to nature, he learns to survive and thrive in the wilderness. The book

emphasizes independence, environmental awareness, and personal growth.

7. *Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War Two* by Joseph Bruchac

This historical novel tells the story of a young Navajo boy who becomes a code talker for the U.S. Marines during WWII. It combines Native American culture with the realities of war, highlighting bravery and cultural pride. The book offers insight into a unique part of history and identity.

8. *The Birchbark House* by Louise Erdrich

Set in the mid-19th century, this novel follows Omakayas, an Ojibwe girl living near Lake Superior. It portrays her family life, traditions, and struggles as they face changing times and challenges. The story honors Native American heritage and the importance of community.

9. *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson

This historical novel is about Matilda Cook, a young girl living in Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic. As the city falls into chaos, Matilda must find courage and resilience to survive. The book offers a gripping look at history, survival, and personal transformation.

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