



Shadow

Mere Joyce

Reading level: 3.6

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Book Summary

Fourteen-year-old Preston Craft is organizing a film festival for his school's film club. When one of the films goes missing two days before the festival begins, Preston is convinced it was stolen and is determined to get it back. The only indication of the theft is a suspicious shadow that Preston noticed right before he discovered the film was gone—but Preston is legally blind and no one quite believes him. But Preston, not unlike the gritty private eyes in the classic black-and-white films he adores, refuses to give up. Can he solve the mystery based on such a shady clue?

Author Biography

Mere Joyce writes short stories as well as novels and holds a Master of Library and Information Science from the University of Western Ontario. As both a writer and a librarian, she understands the importance of reading and the impact the right story can have on young minds. She lives in Kitchener, Ontario, with her family.

Connecting to the Text***Character and Plot Study***

To engage students with the characters and their journeys in *Shadow*, use the following as large-group discussion topics, individual novel study or paragraph-writing exercises.

1. Preston is a person who is blind, and he understands and interprets the world around him using his other senses. He says, “I focus on sounds and feelings” (chapter 1). Find two scenes that illustrate how Preston perceives things around him. Examples:
 - Preston can sense how Vi is feeling (anger, frustration, joy) about situations.
 - He knows there was a person in the theater when Vi was in the booth and Nico was getting popcorn: “The shadow of whoever came in here and deleted Abbi’s film.”
 - Early on, Preston smells lemon cleaning solution, and later he realizes Constance has lemon-scented perfume. What does he deduce from this?
 - Preston can tell a movie’s genre from conversations people have when exiting the theater.
2. Share this statement with students: *A disability is something a person has, but it’s not who the person is.* Ask students to reflect on this, then make connections to the novel. Which characters believe this to be true, and which do not? How do you know? *Prompts:*
 - Preston described Abbi’s chances of winning: “Abbi’s a fantastic filmmaker. And she also happens to have Down syndrome” (chapter 2).
 - Bradley thinks that his film shouldn’t be judged against Abbi’s—a “pity entry” (chapter 5).
3. Preston thought Bradley wanted to make sure Abbi didn’t win the film festival. He jumped to conclusions about Bradley’s intentions and actions (stealing the file). On what was Preston’s assumption based? Did you think so too? What changed Preston’s mind?

Building Vocabulary

The following words were used in *Shadow*, in the context of Preston, Vi and Nico discussing the missing film (chapter 5). Ask students to use four or more of the words listed below in paragraphs that describe scenes from the novel.

Ideas:

- Preston thinks the number-one suspect is Bradley, and so ...
- The file is missing. The reasons could be ...
- Preston will need to build a case because ...
- Preston said, “We can’t accuse anyone but we still need to solve the mystery.”

accuse	deliberate	proof
against	evidence	serious
allegation	foul play	suspicious
competition	jump to conclusion	tampered
crime scene	missing	valid point

- **Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Discussion and Exploration**

1. Preston watches movies in his own way: “It doesn’t matter if I can’t really see them. I don’t have to. There’s a lot to a movie besides the actual picture” (chapter 1). Ask students, working independently, to imagine enjoying their favorite movie without sight. Then, in a large group, experience a movie with audio only. Close the exercise with a debrief.
 - What surprised you? What was interesting? Same and different?
 - Discuss Preston’s descriptions of experiencing movies (chapters 1 and 2).
2. Preston alludes to Sam Spade, a charismatic detective developed by American author Dashiell Hammett. As well as featuring in the 1930 novel *The Maltese Falcon* (later a movie), Sam Spade and other Hammett characters were put in radio plays. Invite students to listen to one of the radio plays and then reflect on the experience.
 - Without visuals, space is filled with sounds and music. What was that like for you?
 - With radio plays’ reliance on dialogue and audible clues, can you see how they might be enjoyable to Preston?
3. If you were able to hang out with Preston, what questions would you have for him? What are you curious about? *Prompts:*
 - Preston doesn’t “dwell on trying to understand or remember sight” (chapter 2).
 - Did he feel scared when he was alone in the theater and heard shuffling behind him?
 - Preston wants to be a movie critic one day. How will he get there? What does he have that others don’t?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

Using appropriate terminology to describe people who have disabilities is important. Ask students to consider the following sentences. Which are more respectful and inclusive? Focus on the words in italics. How do they connote meaning and judgment? Afterward, invite students to research terminology for describing people with disabilities, then write sentences about Preston or Abbi using correct terms.

- Preston *is impaired*, so his mom sometimes uses the *handicapped* parking spot.
- Preston *has low vision* and his mom sometimes uses the *accessible* parking spot.
- Abbi *is mentally slow*, but Vi *is normal*.
- Abbi is a person *who has Down syndrome*.

Arts

1. Preston’s favorite movie genre is horror. Ask students to consider why Preston might enjoy this genre over others (chapter 6).
2. Invite students to share their favorite movie genres, describing why and providing movie choices. What makes this genre fun or special for you? What movies would you recommend for someone new to this genre?
3. Invite students to compile a list of five movie genres (comedy, musical, sci-fi, horror, drama, action, etc.) and include descriptions, images and examples for each.
4. For a service project, invite students to coordinate and host a movie screening.

Students should write a proposal with a plan that includes steps like obtaining permission, advertising, admission costs, copyright, etc. The plan should have clear goals and a post-event debrief that looks at those goals and describes lessons learned. Students may wish to use admission fees to make a donation to an organization that provides vision screening and care for children and teens.

Social Studies

Preston uses a white cane to help him navigate. Invite students to research the white cane, answering two of the questions below.

1. Who was responsible for developing it in the United States? When and why?
2. The white cane comes in three types. Describe each one's function.
3. Where you live, what laws protect people who are blind and use a white cane?
4. What are two other tools people who are blind use for safety, mobility or learning?
Note: Preston uses voice controls and a screen reader on his computer.
5. Imagine you are a person who is blind, and you take a bus to a cinema to enjoy a movie. What challenges might you face along the way?

Creative Writing

Ask students to use one of the following quotes (or another of their choosing) for creative writing prompts. Students may wish to reflect on themes from the novel, or write stories, poetry, lyrics, blog posts, diary or journal entries, etc.

Connect the quote to the novel: Who is speaking? What is the context?

- ch. 2: *If flowers still grow at night, then I can still grow too.*
- ch. 3: *I hate the quiet...Two is perfect company. But one is too dark and lonely.*
- ch. 6: *How do you catch someone you didn't actually see committing the crime?*
- ch. 6: *And sometimes the scariest moments happen when the music stops.*
- ch. 7: *A shadow's not enough.*
- ch. 10: *I cringe because I now realize I've gotten it all wrong.*