

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Danger Zone

by
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Book Information

David Klass, Danger Zone
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When Jimmy Doyle joins a predominantly black "Teen Dream Team" that will be representing the United States in an international basketball tournament in Rome, he makes some unexpected discoveries about prejudice, racism, and politics.

Award: Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Community Life, Prejudice; People, African American; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; Sports/Recreation, Basketball

Main Characters

"G" a paroled felon who knows Augustus and Devonne

Augustus LeMay (Augie) the best player on "Teen Dream Team USA," who resents Jimmy because he thinks Jimmy has taken his cousin's spot on the team

Carrie Doyle Jimmy's seven-year-old sister

Chris McNeil one of the two "Teen Dream Team" coaches

Coach Brauner Jimmy's high school basketball coach

Devonne Saunders a friend of Augustus LeMay, who does not make the team

Dr. Anne Sutherland Janey's mother

Dr. Edward Sutherland Janey's father

Janey Sutherland Jimmy's girlfriend; a cheerleader who likes reading palms

Jimmy Doyle the main character; a seventeen-year-old basketball star from Granham, Minnesota

Mr. Sullivan a representative of the American diplomatic corps in Italy

Mrs. Doyle Jimmy's mother

Ray Thompson a second-string member of "Teen Dream Team USA" who is the team comedian; he leaves the team early after the death threat

Ruthie Doyle Jimmy's eight-year-old sister

Shawn Wright the six-foot-five-inch center for "Teen Dream Team USA"; Jimmy's roommate

Terry Griffin one of the "Teen Dream Team USA" coaches

Vocabulary

arugula a kind of cabbage

covert hidden, done without notice

eccentric odd or unusual

grimace a distorted or twisted facial expression

impromptu without preparation; spontaneous

swastika the emblem of the Nazi party in Germany (1933-1945) resembling a cross with bent ends

Synopsis

Jimmy Doyle is a seventeen-year-old star basketball player from a small town in Minnesota. Two coaches scout him in the process of putting together a ten-player team of teenage all-stars for an international tournament in Rome. When they invite him to join the team, Jimmy declines, claiming he cannot accept for "family reasons." He does not explain that he has to help his mother, a widow, at the family hardware store. The coaches later call Mrs. Doyle to repeat the invitation. She is surprised to hear of the opportunity, since Jimmy has not said anything about it to her. She perceives that he is suffering from a lack of self-confidence, so she encourages him to accept the invitation.

Jimmy has a steady girlfriend, cheerleader Janey Sutherland. Janey's father, a doctor, learns of the invitation and, like Mrs. Doyle, feels Jimmy should be a part of the team. Although Janey would like to see Jimmy have this chance, she admits she will be lonely while he is gone. Janey has an interest in fortune-telling and is currently trying palm reading. She reads Jimmy's palm and reluctantly confides

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that she sees him having a difficult trip.

Jimmy soon finds Janey's prophecies coming true. When he gets to Los Angeles for practices, he learns that the best player on the squad, Augustus LeMay, resents him. Augustus believes his cousin, Devonne Saunders, a hometown star guard like himself, deserved the spot on the team that Jimmy now has. Augustus also believes that the coaches wanted more white representation on the team, so Jimmy was picked over Devonne. Jimmy makes a real effort to be friends with Augustus and to understand him. Augustus ridicules Jimmy and rejects the offer of friendship.

Once the team is in Rome, "Teen Dream Team USA" beats Sweden, Germany, Cuba, and Italy to make it to the championship game against Spain. The German team causes them the most concern because of their aggressive physical play. Some of the spectators are skinheads wearing military clothing and swastikas. They are vocally abusive, especially toward Augustus. One skinhead throws a beer can at Augustus, hitting him in the shoulder. Augustus climbs into the bleachers ready to fight. Although the Americans win that game, newspapers feast on the conflicts. German journalists in particular deviate from basketball strategy questions in the post-game interview to attack the Americans' character.

Shortly after the game against Germany, "Teen Dream Team USA" receives a death threat. The team and its players discuss various options. Three players opt to return to America. Jimmy is one of the seven who remain. The team is cloistered in an out-of-the-way facility with heavy security. The games against Cuba, Italy, and Spain are still to be played. Jimmy is ineffective against both Cuba and Italy, as he battles insomnia caused by fear of a possible terrorist attack and death. However, Augustus carries them to victory in each game.

In the title game against Spain, Jimmy's team trails by as many as eighteen points. It is the third straight game in which "Snowman," as his teammates have come to affectionately know Jimmy, struggles to find

his rhythm. The coach benches him for the second and third quarters while Augustus does his best to keep the team close. Early in the fourth quarter, Jimmy feels like he is facing death by being in the crowded arena. He becomes physically ill and throws up. After recalling many important events from his life in his mind, a feeling comes over him that he will be able to play well again. He persuades the coach to put him back in the game, and he enters a zone, a deeper one than he had been in while playing for Granham High School. While in a zone he can go on phenomenal scoring sprees and pass the ball extremely well. He helps get the team within two points. With only seven seconds left, a misguided pass from a teammate results in Jimmy taking a desperate forty-foot shot an instant before the buzzer. It swishes through the net for victory.

In the bedlam that follows, the man responsible for the death threat appears, pistol in hand. He wants to shoot Augustus but hits Jimmy in the knee instead. Jimmy has an initial surgery in Rome and then travels to Minnesota to see his family and Janey and to consult with Dr. Sutherland about future surgeries. He must travel to San Diego to have a second operation performed by a famous microsurgeon. Augustus, who had not visited him since the shooting, shows up at the San Diego hospital. Augustus compliments Jimmy, wishes him well, and, finally, offers friendship.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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Initial Understanding

Why does Jimmy initially decline the opportunity to represent the United States in the international tournament?

Jimmy gives the excuse to the recruiters that he cannot leave town for so long a period of time for family reasons. Once his mother learns of the opportunity offered to him, she seems to understand better than he that he is also afraid to play outside his known area. He is not only afraid to play against international teams but also to compete with such highly skilled players on the United States team.

Literary Analysis

How does Augustus LeMay's attitude toward Jimmy change throughout the story?

*When Augustus first meets Jimmy he is very angry and antagonistic because he feels that Jimmy took the spot on the international team that should have been filled by his cousin, Devonne Saunders. After Augustus and Jimmy have their initial fistfight, Augustus has the beginnings of respect for Jimmy. Later, when Jimmy confronts Augustus about his attitude and asks why Augustus does not like him, another small change in Augustus's attitude becomes apparent. When Augustus discovers that Jimmy is reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in order to understand Augustus better, there is further change -- enough that Augustus and a couple of his friends take Jimmy on a tour of parts of Los Angeles that Jimmy would never have seen otherwise. This also helps Jimmy understand Augustus. During the time the team practices in Los Angeles, Augustus is able to witness and appreciate Jimmy's efforts on the basketball court. The ultimate change in Augustus's attitude comes in Rome when Jimmy is shot. Augustus believes that Jimmy took the bullet in his place. Finally, Augustus is willing to offer friendship to Jimmy.*

Inferential Comprehension

What causes Jimmy to play so poorly in some of the games in the international tournament?

Jimmy had been playing very well in both practice and in the early games of the tournament. The change occurs after the game with Germany when the death threat is received. Jimmy becomes overwhelmed with fear. He starts locking all doors. He cannot sleep even with locked doors because he is so worried about the death threat. He never goes outside -- even on the lawn of the protected compound in which the team is housed. He and the team no longer are permitted to go to the arena to watch the other teams play; they have to watch the games on TV. All these restrictions intensify his fear. He broods about the death threat and how much more valuable life seems to him since being threatened. Jimmy considers how his father lost his joy in life, became concerned, wary, worried, and ultimately, extremely afraid because of his failing health and impending death. Because of the fear, Jimmy suffers from extreme insomnia, and because of being so tired, he cannot play well.

Constructing Meaning

Just before Jimmy returns to the game against Spain, he feels ill, is shaking and sweating, and ultimately throws up. What does this illness represent?

Jimmy's feelings of illness and the shaking and sweating and vomiting represent his facing the fear of death that has plagued him since the death threat was first received. His vomiting and sweating shows he is rejecting and eliminating the fears. After being ill, he considers himself and his life. He remembers that sometimes before death a person's life passes before their eyes. He strangely has many distinct memories come to mind from his life. He realizes that he has now confronted his fears and has conquered them.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting Jimmy thinks the photograph of him kissing the Italian girl during

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his team's arrival in Rome presented the situation falsely. Present some pictures of ambiguous figures like the popular one in which some see a beautiful young woman and others a shawled, old peasant woman. Direct students to write what they see. Have everyone read what they wrote so the whole class can evaluate the various perceptions.

Recognizing Setting Jimmy says that he made a mental calculation before calling the Sutherlands in Minnesota from Rome. It would be eleven o'clock in the morning there. Hand out maps with the world's time zones. Ask students to determine the times in Rome, Italy; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Los Angeles, California. Have the students locate and identify the International Date Line and Greenwich Mean Time.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Jimmy states that the plane taking off from New York's JFK Airport, headed for Italy, is a retracing of the voyage of Columbus. Assign half the students to write a short summary of the actual voyage of Columbus. Students should include the route taken and travel time. The other half of the class should investigate flight paths from New York to Italy. Their report should include route options and travel time.

Understanding Characterization In many respects Jimmy is represented in the story as the "good guy" and Augustus as the "bad guy" because they start out fighting. In reality, they are probably not as different as they first appear. Divide the students into groups to make lists of ways Jimmy and Augustus are similar and ways they are different. Class discussion should compare the lists.