

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Terrorist

by
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Book Information

Caroline B. Cooney, The Terrorist
Quiz Number: 18838
Scholastic, Inc, 1997
ISBN 0-590-22853-6; LCCN
196 Pages
Book Level: 5.2
Interest Level: MG+

Sixteen-year-old Laura, an American living in London, tries to find the person responsible for the death of her younger brother, Billy, who was killed in a terrorist bombing.

Topics: Community Life, Violence;
Countries/Regions, England; Disasters,
Misc./Other; Mysteries, Who-dun-it;
READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound
- Read Now Grades 9+; READNOW -
Renaissance Learning, RLI - High School
(Theme: Tough Decisions); Recommended
Reading, YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant
YA

Main Characters

Andrew a friend of Laura's from school; Laura thinks he is very good-looking
Bethany one of Laura's friends from school
Billy Williams an eleven-year-old American boy living in London with his family; he is killed by a bomb
Consuela Vikary (Con) a good friend of Laura's from school; she is very involved in extracurricular activities
Erdam Yafi (Eddie) a friend of Laura's from school; his family is very wealthy
Jehran a girl from Laura's school whose family is living in exile after fleeing from their country; Laura realizes she was involved in the plot to kill Billy
Jimmy Hopkins Laura's friend from school; he is concerned about Laura's behavior since Billy's death
Laura Williams Billy's sixteen-year-old sister; she is traumatized by Billy's death and becomes obsessed with finding his killer

Mohammed a good-looking guy from Laura's school
Mr. Evans a policeman who is assigned to Billy's case; he encourages the Williamses to return to the United States
Mr. Frankel the headmaster at London International Academy; he is very nervous after Billy's death
Mr. Hollober Laura's current events teacher; Laura becomes angry when he implies that Billy's death was somehow his own or her family's fault
Nicole Williams Billy's mother; she can't believe Billy is dead
Thomas Williams Billy's father, whose job is the reason the family is living in London; he begins to wonder if it is his fault Billy was targeted
Tiffany an American girl from Laura's school; she uses very little tact in her conversations

Vocabulary

barristers lawyers; in England, members of the legal profession who can argue cases in court
contravening coming into conflict with; breaking, with regard to a law
expatriate a person who does not live in his or her native country but keeps citizenship there
melodramatic in a very dramatic way; as though acting a serious part
prudent cautious; having sound judgment
queue a line of people
rational sensible; with reason

Synopsis

The Williams family has temporarily relocated to London, England, from Boston, Massachusetts, because of Mr. Williams's job. The American company he works for has decided to end its European operations, and it is Thomas Williams's task to close down the factories. He is feeling the stress of his job and is ready to go home, but the rest of the family is enjoying their time in London. Thomas's wife, Nicole, sees it as the adventure of a lifetime. Sixteen-year-old Laura has learned to love her new school and friends, and eleven-year-old

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Billy also loves living in London.

Tragedy soon enters the life of the Williams family. One day on the way to school, a man hands Billy a package, saying that one of Billy's friends had dropped it. Billy takes the package but soon realizes his mistake. He remembers all the warnings he has heard about terrorism and bombs in London, but it is too late. In an attempt to protect those around him, Billy wraps himself around the package, and it explodes, killing him.

When Laura and her parents hear about Billy's death, they can hardly believe it is true. When no terrorist group comes forward to claim the bombing, Laura becomes determined to find the killer herself. She feels the need to give meaning to Billy's death. Before Billy's death, she had been interested only in dating, clothes and friends. Now she tries to find out as much as she can about politics and terrorism. The students at her school are from many different countries, some of which are enemies with each other or are enemies of the United States. She begins to question the people who were once her friends. She no longer trusts anyone.

Soon after Billy's death, one of Laura's classmates, a Middle Eastern girl named Jehran, approaches Laura with a proposition. She tells Laura that she knows of a way to give meaning to Billy's death. She asks to use Billy's passport so that she can leave the country to go to America. She tells Laura that her brother has chosen a husband for her, but that the marriage would be a form of living death for her. Leaving the country is her only way out. Laura agrees to help her. They work out a plan to fly to New York together. Jehran will stay in New York and start a new life, and Laura will return to London on the next flight.

When the day comes to carry out their plan, Laura is very nervous. Jehran, who is small and has a boyish figure, disguises herself as Billy. As they make their way through the various checkpoints of the airport, Laura becomes more and more suspicious of Jehran. Jehran doesn't seem to be afraid. In fact, she seems to be amused about something. Laura

remembers how anti-American Jehran has always been. She begins to think it is odd that Jehran wants to go to America. Laura tells Jehran that she has decided not to continue with the plan. Jehran threatens Laura and mentions the weeks she has spent planning her escape. This is a red flag to Laura. She realizes that Jehran must have been planning to use Billy's passport even before his death. She accuses Jehran of having Billy killed.

Meanwhile, several of Laura's friends from school have also pieced together the puzzle of Billy's death and think Laura may be in trouble. They call the police. While Laura is arguing with Jehran about continuing the trip, airport security arrives and takes Jehran and Laura to a room for questioning. No evidence is found to link Jehran to Billy's death, so she is placed in foster care, only to walk away a few months later. The Williams family moves back to Boston. They know that their lives will never be quite the same without Billy and that they will always miss him.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What are several things Jehran does at the train station and at the airport that seem suspicious to Laura?

Jehran refuses to trade carry-on bags with Laura. She has a strange smile on her face, as though she is making fun of Laura. She looks neither afraid nor relieved, but rather amused as they made it past each checkpoint. She seems to be laughing about something and tries to hide her expression from Laura. She refuses to eat a hamburger and then makes a false apology to Laura. She threatens Laura when Laura says she is turning around. She mentions the weeks she has spent planning her escape.

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Literary Analysis

Would you have liked to have been friends with Billy? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. One possible response would be: Yes, I would have liked being Billy's friend. He was fun to be around and had exciting ideas. He liked adventure and made friends easily.

Inferential Comprehension

The last thing Billy thinks before the bomb explodes is "Oh, Mom!" Why do you think this is his last thought?

Billy may have been thinking how hard his death would be for his mother to handle. He may also have wished his mom were there to somehow take care of things. When kids are in trouble, they seem to want their moms.

Constructing Meaning

This story was written before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Do you think this story has more meaning for American students who read this book now? Why or why not?

Most students will probably say that the book has more meaning now. Many of them may have been like Laura before her brother was killed. They may not have known much about politics and terrorism before 9/11. People all over the country have felt the effects of the 9/11 attacks. More students will be able to identify with the feelings of Laura and her family. Although the story mentions the Oklahoma City bombing, most students who read the book today would be too young to remember it. Now the news is filled with talk of terrorism and what is being done to prevent it.

bombing or other acts of terrorism that took place in the past. They should write reports and share them with the class.

Recognizing Feelings Do some additional reading about grief and talk to the class about the different stages of grief that people go through. For example, some of the stages are denial, anger and acceptance. Have the students choose one member of Billy's family and find examples of the different ways they deal with Billy's death. The class could do this for each family member.

Comparing and Contrasting In many places around the world, the fear of terrorism is a regular feature of life. Help students select one of the countries or nationalities named in the book. Have them conduct research to find out what they can about the source of the conflict in that place and how people's lifestyles there reflect the threat of terrorism. Then have students write a brief report comparing terrorism preparedness there with terrorism preparedness in the United States.

Teachable Skills

Identifying Reading Strategies Have the students find as many British words as possible in the book. Then have them list the American word for each.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Have students do research on the Oklahoma City