

Shreve's Promise

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Synopsis

Shreve is going through a hard time at the moment. Her mother has left her and her father to live on a commune. Her father seems to have eyes for Rachael – their much younger housekeeper. Shreve enjoys going to school and hanging out with her friends Deanna, Trudy and Matt. She feels that she has made a real connection with Zelda Harrington, the old lady that she and Deanna visit socially as part of their school programme at Mariri High. But it is because of Zelda that the trouble starts. Her son Steven has come to live with her and bans Shreve and Deanna from visiting her again. Shreve knows that Steven is mistreating Zelda – she suspects that he is simply after her money. Her fears are confirmed when Melissa, Zelda's daughter who died when she was 15, appears to her. Melissa makes Shreve promise to help Zelda. Shreve agrees to help but doesn't realise that she is becoming involved in an old family tragedy that may cost her father's trust, her friends, and when Steven threatens her, maybe even her life.

Text Type

Shreve's Promise is a fast-paced novel that would appeal to all teenagers - girls particularly. It is set in New Zealand and deals with family issues, friendship, keeping promises and the idea that maybe it is sometimes best not to know what the future holds.

Shreve is a likeable character who shows courage and commitment. She is determined to do the right thing, even if this means she may lose her boyfriend and friends.

The storyline is plausible and the supernatural elements fit in seamlessly because characters and events are realistic.

Sharing the Novel

The novel can be covered in 4-shared sessions and 3 independent reading sessions. The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1-2 (pp.1-16), Chapters 3-6 (pp.17-62), Chapters 7-10 (pp.63-101), Chapters 11-12 (pp.102-126).

During the shared sessions encourage students to think critically about the themes and concepts raised in the novel. Have them read closely and track how characters develop and change throughout the novel. Have students discuss their ideas about what happens when people die and look at the advantages and disadvantages of knowing what is going to happen in the future.

The activities that follow suit different ability groups and a range of learning styles.

Introducing the Text

Study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Why is the novel called *Shreve's Promise*?
- What is an apparition?
- What family issues is Shreve dealing with at the moment?
- What do you think the family tragedy that Shreve gets caught up in might be?
- Why do you think Zelda's son threatens Shreve?

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2

- How does Deanna's skateboard get broken?
- Who is Steven? Why is Zelda so frightened of him?
- Why are Deanna and Shreve visiting Zelda?
- Why do you think that Steven doesn't want the girls to visit Zelda anymore?
- What does Zelda give Shreve before she leaves? Why do you think she does this?
- Why doesn't Shreve like skateboarding around other people? How does her attitude differ from Deanna's?
- Who is Rachael? Why doesn't Shreve like her?
- Where is Shreve's mother?
- Who do you think the strange voice that Shreve keeps hearing belongs to?

Discussion

- Why do you think Shreve's mum left? Why do you think she hasn't contacted Shreve? How would this make Shreve feel?
- Why is Shreve so uncomfortable about her dad's budding relationship with Rachael? How would you feel if you were in her position?
- Do you believe in ghosts? Who do you think the ghost may be?
- Make some predictions about what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 3-6 (pp.17-62) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3-6 (pp. 17-62)

- Why does Mr Dench tell Shreve and Deanna that they can't visit Zelda anymore? What does he tell Shreve that she can do during this time? How does Shreve react to this suggestion?
- Who does Shreve say the car keys belong to? Why do you think she lies?
- Who rings up Shreve's father to complain about the keys? Why does James make Shreve apologise?
- How does Zelda behave when Shreve is over there with her father? Why is Shreve so concerned by this behaviour?
- Why does James think that Shreve has changed? Why doesn't Shreve tell her father about the voice?
- Why is Shreve so reluctant to go to her room?
- Describe Melissa. Who is she? How old was she when she died? Why do you think that James can't see her?
- What does Melissa tell Shreve about Trudy that scares her? What does she tell her is going to happen with Rachael and her father?
- How does Shreve confirm that Melissa really is a ghost?
- On what date did Melissa die? What else is significant about this date?
- Who invites Shreve to the dance?
- Why doesn't Shreve perform the skateboarding manoeuvre?
- Who is Tyler? Why doesn't he go and visit his dad?
- Why does Zelda like sitting in her car?
- How does Melissa convince Shreve to help her?
- How does Zelda get into the car? How does Steven react when he finds her there? How does Steven know that someone else is there?
- Why do you think that Shreve mentions Melissa? How does Zelda react when her daughter's name is brought up?
- Why does Steven throw all of Melissa's things away? What does Shreve go and salvage from the rubbish?
- Why does Shreve doubt her ability to fulfill her promise to Melissa?
- What explanation does James give Shreve for why Steven may be living with Zelda?
- What information is contained in the letter from Shreve's mother?

Discussion

- Develop a character profile for Shreve. What do we know about her so far? Why is she so unhappy? Who are her family and friends? What qualities does she possess? What are her fears? Add to your profile as you continue reading.
- Melissa tells Shreve things about the future. What advantages and disadvantages would there be in knowing what is going to happen?
- Describe Shreve's relationship with her father. Why does Shreve feel let down by him?
- Describe Steven Harrington. How does he treat his mother? Why do you think he has gone to live with her?

- Do you believe that Shreve will be able to fulfill her promise to Melissa?
- If Steven gets a trespass order against her, how will Shreve be able to help Zelda?

Students read Chapters 7-10 (pp.63-101) independently before the next shared session

Comprehension Chapters 7-10 (pp. 63-101)

- What does Shreve tell Deanna about her father? How do Deanna and Trudy react to this news?
- Why does Trudy tell Shreve that she doesn't want her to give her any predictions? What does Shreve mean when she says "truth and lies both hurt"? Do you agree with her? Why/why not?
- Why do you think that Trudy doesn't want Shreve to wear Melissa's top to the dance?
- Why is Shreve upset when she sees the advertisement for Zelda's car?
- What does Shreve tell Steven that she is going to do when he catches her in the garage? How does he react to the threat?
- How does Melissa show Steven that she is present in the garage? What makes Shreve think that Steven believes her about Melissa?
- Why does Steven call the police? Why is Shreve so mortified when the policeman shows up?
- How does Matt react to the situation? What does this tell us about his character?
- Why doesn't Shreve tell Age Concern about Melissa?
- Describe Shreve's visit to Melissa's grave on her birthday. What does she think about? What conclusions does she reach about life and death?
- How did Melissa die?
- What does James give Shreve for her birthday? What does her mother send her?
- Why does Steven accuse Shreve of being a thief? How do you think Shreve felt being accused in front of her friends and her father?
- What disappointing news did James give Shreve after the dance on Friday night?
- Describe Shreve's meeting with Steven, Mr Dench and the Youth Aid officer. Why does Shreve decide to talk about Melissa? What is the outcome of the meeting?
- What disturbing news does James give Shreve after the meeting?

Discussion

- Melissa suggests to Shreve that her mother may have left because she knew that James had feelings for Rachael. How does Shreve deal with this information? What understanding does she reach about her mother?

- Shreve decides to stop worrying about what other people think about her. This decision is symbolised by her newfound courage skateboarding. What do you believe brought about this change?
- Shreve sacrifices a lot to help Melissa and Zelda. What does her promise cost her? Why do you think she tries so hard to keep her promise?
- Why is Steven so worried about allowing Shreve to see Zelda? How has he made things difficult for her? What do you think happened between Steven and his half-sister, Melissa?
- Make some predictions about what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 11 and 12 (pp.102-126) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 11-12 (pp.102-126)

- Why does Shreve feel let down by Melissa?
- Who does Melissa suggest that Shreve talk to? How does Shreve react to this suggestion?
- How does Shreve feel after she played squash with Mr Dench? Why do you think Shreve gave up squash?
- What startling revelation does Mr Dench make after the game? What advice does he offer Shreve?
- Where does Shreve tell her father she is going? Why doesn't she tell him the truth?
- How does Shreve plan to prove that Steven is abusing Zelda?
- Where does Shreve find Zelda? How long has she been there?
- Where does Shreve hide from Steven when he comes home? What does Shreve overhear Steven saying to Zelda from her hiding place?
- What does Steven tell Zelda to give him?
- What does Steven find in the safe? What was he expecting to find?
- Where does Shreve escape to after Steven confronts her in the hall? Why does she regret telling him about the tape? What does she realise when she is locked in the bathroom?
- What does Melissa get Shreve to tell Steven to prove that she is there? How does Steven react when he hears the story? To what extent does the story explain Steven's attitude and behaviour towards Zelda?
- Why does Zelda's face begin to change as she approaches her daughter?
- How does Melissa appear to Zelda and Steven? How does Shreve feel when the light goes into her? Why doesn't Shreve want to talk about the experience afterwards?
- Who turns up at Zelda's to check that Shreve is alright?
- Where is Zelda living now? Why didn't Shreve need the taped evidence?
- What do we learn about Shreve's mother at the end of the story?

Discussion

- Describe Steven Harrington. What tragedy has he experienced in his life? Why does he treat his mother so badly? Is his treatment of her justified? Explain your answer. How do you think seeing Melissa again will change him?
- Discuss how Shreve's character develops and changes throughout the course of the story.
- Identify the climax of the story. Why is this event important?
- Identify a major theme in the novel. Explain how this theme is developed and why it is important.

Activities

Debate – Choose an issue raised in the story and conduct a class debate. Possible moots include: Ghosts do exist or it is possible to predict the future.

Letter – Write a letter from Shreve to her mother that explains the strange things that have been happening to her lately and how she feels about them.

Invitation – Design an invitation to the school dance. Remember the '60's theme.

Book Cover – Design a new book cover for *Shreve's Promise*. Explain why your design is effective.

Static Image – Design a poster that conveys a theme from the novel. Remember to combine verbal and visual features.

Epitaph - Design a gravestone for Melissa Harrington. Include dates of birth and death and an epitaph.

Psychologist Report – Imagine that you are a psychologist. Complete an analysis of Steven Harrington.

Plot – Complete a flow diagram that shows the main events in the story in the order they occur.

Epilogue – Write an epilogue for the book that explains where Shreve decided to live and how her life has changed since her experience with Melissa.