

On My Honor

Marion Dane Bauer ♦ Teachers' Guide ♦ Book Group Discussion Guide



Clarion Books

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This teaching guide
was prepared by
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Prediction Guide—Pre-Reading

On the way to the park, Joel's best friend Tony challenges him to take a swim in the treacherous Vermillion River. Both boys have been warned never to go near the river, but Joel gives in. He doesn't want Tony to think he's scared. It isn't until Tony disappears that Joel comes to a terrible realization—Tony can't swim.

Pre-Reading

What does it mean to be on one's honor? What is honor? Have you ever been on your honor for anything? What?

-or-

What is peer pressure? Have you ever been influenced to do something by a friend that you later regretted? Why do friends have such influence over us?

Prediction Guide

Great readers keep themselves involved in the story while they're reading by making predictions about what they think may happen next. They look for clues to help them make these guesses. As you read *On My Honor* answer these questions AS YOU GO and don't worry whether your answers are right or not. Also, create at least one prediction or question by the end of each chapter with one of these phrases:

"I wonder whether..."

"I think that Joel will probably..."

"I think the next event to happen will be..."

Chapter 1

Will Tony convince Joel to climb the bluffs once they are at the park?
Why do you think so or not?

Chapter 2

Will Joel swim in the river?

(Continued on page 2)

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Prediction Guide (cont'd)

(Continued from page 1)

Chapter 3

Will both boys follow through with the dare?

Chapter 4

How will Joel find Tony?

Chapter 5

What happens next? Will Joel find help?

Chapter 6

Will Joel go to the police? What will he say to them?

Chapter 7

What will Joel and Tony's parents say?

Chapter 8

Will the truth come out? How?

Chapter 9

What will Joel say to Tony's mom?

Chapter 10

What will happen next? What makes you think so?

Chapter 11

How will Joel's parents deal with the truth? Will he be punished?

Comprehension Check

1. Describe Tony's personality.
2. What happens at the river?
3. Why does Joel blame his father?
4. Why does Joel smell the stink of the river on his skin even after his shower? Does anyone else smell it? Why or why not?
5. Does Joel face punishment from his family? Why or why not?

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Discussion Guide

1. Tony and Joel have been friends since they were babies even though they rarely wanted to do the same things anymore. "Joel wondered, sometimes, why they stayed friends." (p.2) Why do we keep some friendships alive while we let others slip away? Why do you think Joel and Tony remained companions even though they often had disagreements?
2. Joel tries to involve his dad asking permission so that he'll refuse the boys plea to bike out to the park. Why can't Joel just stand up to Tony's demands and refuse to go? How does Tony exert such influence over his friend? Is this typical of boys' behavior or all friendships between kids? Could Joel have found a way to save face without going on the ride?
3. Joel's dad makes Joel promise "On your honor? You'll watch for traffic, and you won't go anywhere except the park? You'll be careful the whole way?" (p. 8) Has your opinion about honor or responsibility changed after reading the novel?
4. Joel makes up a series of lies and excuses for what has happened at the river which he feeds to his parents that evening. Why, do you think, his lies and excuses ultimately don't work? Do you think the truth would have eventually come out regardless? Which would be worse: living with everyone knowing the truth or hiding it? Why?
5. Do you agree with Joel's statement: "Bad wasn't something that could be locked out. Bad was something that came from inside you when you didn't even know it was there."(p.83) Why or why not?
6. "We all made choices today, Joel. You, me, Tony. Tony's the only one who doesn't have to live with his choice." (p.88) How do you think Joel and his father will live with their choices? Will the events of that day change Joel? How? What do you think his father will be like from then on?
7. The entire novel of On My Honor occurs over the course of one day. Why do you think the author chose this dense timeline to tell the story? What does it add to the events? How would it be different if the storyline were spread across a year, or even a decade? What did you learn about storytelling that you could apply to your own writing?
8. Knowing what you do about Joel's and Tony's characters, discuss how the story would have been different if the events in the river had been reversed and it was Joel who was not found. What would Tony have done? Would he have felt as much responsibility and guilt? Would anyone feel guilty? Why?

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Projects

Make a cause and effect diagram that charts the choices and decisions that characters made along the path to and from the river. After that step is complete, add sticky notes wherever an alternative choice could have been made and what that might have been.

Share the book *On My Honor* with your own family. Discuss how you can create an atmosphere where you can reveal the pressure you feel from others. Perhaps you can create a signal that alerts your parents to something that you are uncomfortable with and would like to discuss in private.

Write a letter from Joel to Tony's parents about the events in the book.

Research the topic of water safety and create an illustrated pamphlet about what you learned. Be sure to put the information into your own words so that kids can understand your pamphlet.

Create an abstract piece of art inspired by one of the following words: guilt, regret, honor, responsibility, peer pressure or blame. Give particular attention to the palette of colors you choose and be deliberate in your use of lines and shapes. Explain your piece in a short paragraph that you attach to the back.

After a brief class discussion on the purpose of chapter titles (why they are included or not, what they add to a text, how to write a compelling one), create chapter titles for *On My Honor*. Make them compelling, of course, but without giving away the story.

Write a chapter 13 for *On My Honor*. You can change the ending of the story to be whatever you wish would happen next, including Tony's being discovered alive, Joel's attending Tony's funeral or any other event you would like to explore further.