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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Tears of a Tiger

by Sharon M. Draper

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Notes

While it was originally written to stand alone, *Tears of a Tiger* has since become known as the first part of Sharon Draper's acclaimed "Hazelwood High" trilogy. In 1998, 1995's *Tears* was followed by *Forged by Fire*, which was, like *Tears*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. *Forged by Fire* looks more deeply into the life of Gerald, a minor character in *Tears of a Tiger*. The trilogy came to a conclusion with 2001's *Darkness Before Dawn*. This third installment takes Keisha—Andy's girlfriend in *Tears of a Tiger*—as its main character. While reading the trilogy in its entirety is not at all necessary to a full understanding and appreciation of *Tears of a Tiger*, teachers may want to recommend the second and third books to students curious to find out what happens to the Hazelwood High students after Andy's death.

Note to Teacher: While *Tears of a Tiger* deals with the subject of drinking and driving, the negative consequences of this action are pointed out graphically. The novel begins with an automobile accident, explores the ramifications on the main characters and their friends and families. Additionally, near the end, one character commits suicide. These topics are covered in a mature manner, and we can wholeheartedly recommend this book, not only for its message, but also for its readability and high-interest level.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the novel's format and what it achieves in *Tears of a Tiger* that a traditional narrative style could not have.
2. discuss the novel's title and how it applies to both Andy and Monty.
3. define metaphor, simile, irony, symbol, tone, allusion, omniscient narrator, and foreshadowing and point out examples of each in *Tears of a Tiger*.
4. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
5. write paragraphs contrasting Rhonda and Tyrone's relationship with Keisha and Andy's.
6. track Andy's decline over the course of the novel and identify the factors contributing to his suicidal depression.
7. discuss the importance of race in *Tears of a Tiger* and the different ways in which racism affects Andy, Monty, Gerald, Dr. Carrothers, and Mr. Jackson.
8. discuss Draper's use of informal English and slang and how it contributes to the novel's verisimilitude.
9. discuss Draper's use of student poems and essays as a method of characterization in the absence of more traditional forms.
10. explain what functions the minor characters Marcus and Gerald serve in the novel.
11. evaluate the efforts Andy's friends and the adults in his life make to help Andy through his depression.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Why do you think Draper decided to use a documentary-like style in writing *Tears of a Tiger*? How does the style affect the novel's pacing and plot? How does it affect the novel's "verisimilitude"—that is, how "real" the characters and story seem?
2. Do you think Andy's story would be *more* or *less* effective if a single omniscient narrator related it? Which (if any) other novels that you have read and that were delivered by a single narrator might be more effective if told in the style of *Tears of a Tiger*?
3. There are no outright descriptions of the settings in *Tears of a Tiger*. How does Draper create a sense of key settings (like Hazelwood High and the mall) through conversations and newspaper clippings?
4. Andy feels that he is given too light a sentence for his crime. Do you agree? Would a harsher sentence have helped Andy to cope better with his grief and guilt?
5. Discuss both Andy's comment that his friends would talk about him if he won academic awards ("like all the white kids") and the high-achieving Marcus's unpopularity. Is academic failure or apathy built in to teenagers' notions of what is cool? How does this differ among the races? What effect does it have?
6. How is *Tears of a Tiger* a critique of the grief counseling establishment?
7. Does all of Andy's depression stem from the crash or does the crash merely touch off Andy's depression? What factors other than guilt over Rob's death contribute to Andy's sense of hopelessness?
8. Discuss the ways in which Monty functions as a figure of innocence throughout the novel. How does the fact that, at six, he already believes that white people are more beautiful than black people complicate that innocence?
9. Why do you think Draper makes Monty's the last voice we hear in *Tears of a Tiger*? On what sort of note does it end the book?
10. Why do you think Draper chooses not to include the reactions to Andy's suicide of Ms. Blackwell, Dr. Carrothers, Coach Ripley, and other key adult characters?
11. Discuss the importance of race in *Tears of a Tiger* and the different ways in which racism affects Andy, Monty, Gerald, Dr. Carrothers, and Mr. Jackson.
12. How does Mr. Jackson's story of how he came to call himself E.J. affect your opinion of him and his parenting skills? How does his conversation with Ms. Blackwell affect it? Is Mr. Jackson a bad father? Is he, as Andy believes, a "sell-out"?

Tears of a Tiger

CRASH, FIRE, PAIN

VOCABULARY

Good Samaritan – a helpful person
retaining wall – barrier

1. Why was Robert Washington unable to escape from the car like the others boys?

2. What sports team did Washington captain?

3. What can we assume the accident was due to?

“DEAR LORD”

1. What is B.J. most worried about?

2. What reason does B.J. give the boys for why he abstains from drinking? What is the real reason for his abstinence?

3. Why do you think B.J. lies to his friends about his reason for not drinking?

4. What effect does B.J. think the knowledge that Rob’s death was due to drunk driving will have on the other kids?

5. Why did B.J. not insist upon driving Andy’s car?

FEROCIOUS FRUSTRATION

VOCABULARY

enhanced – heightened; improved
requirements – what is needed for a specific purpose

1. What metaphor does Andy use to describe his grades?

2. Why do the kids at school hate Marcus?

3. Which students apparently win most of the academic awards on Awards Day? Why would it embarrass Andy to be among them?

4. What assumption did his guidance counselor make about Andy?
