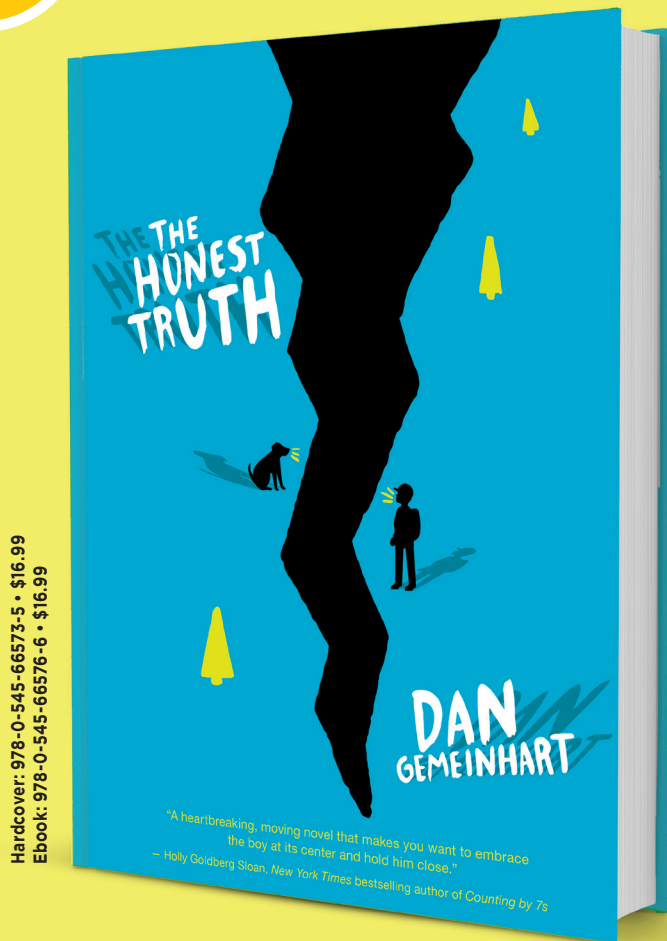


DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grades
3-7



THE HONEST TRUTH

BY
DAN
GEMEINHART

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE FOR THE
ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME.

IN ALL THE WAYS THAT MATTER, Mark is a normal kid. He's got a dog named Beau and a best friend, Jessie. He likes to take photos and write haiku poems in his notebook. He dreams of climbing a mountain one day.

But in one important way, Mark is not like other kids at all. Mark is sick. The kind of sick that means hospitals. And treatments. The kind of sick some people never get better from.

So Mark runs away. He leaves home with his camera, his notebook, his dog, and a plan. A plan to reach the top of Mount Rainier. Even if it's the last thing he ever does.

The Honest Truth is a rare and extraordinary novel about big questions, small moments, and one incredible journey.

★“Gemeinhart debuts with an emotionally hard-hitting survival story . . . a gripping page-turner.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Undeniably moving... a rousing riveting two-hanky read.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

 SCHOLASTIC

Meets Common Core State Standards—SEE INSIDE

GUIDE TO THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS CITED IN THIS GUIDE

READING LITERATURE

Key Ideas and Details

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4-8.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4-8.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4-8.3

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

Craft and Structure

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4-8.5

Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Comprehension and Collaboration

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4-8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss the novel with students using the questions below. **SL.4-8.1**

1. Mark destroys his late grandfather's silver pocket watch at the beginning of his journey. He thinks, "Here's what I don't get: why anybody would want to carry something around that reminds you that your life is running out." What does this scene reveal to the reader about Mark's reason for heading to the mountain? **RL.4-8.1**
2. Author Dan Gemeinhart structures the story so that chapters about Mark's journey to the mountain alternate with chapters about the search for Mark. How did this affect the way in which you read and experienced the story? **RL.4-8.5**

3. Compare the dangers Mark encountered in a seedy part of downtown Seattle to the dangers Mark faced during the storm on the mountain. What did each dangerous situation reveal about Mark's character? **RL.4-8.3**
4. Though Mark has carefully planned his journey to the mountain, he encounters people who grow suspicious about a 12-year-old boy traveling alone. The waitress at the restaurant in Seattle, the shuttle driver taking passengers up to Mount Rainier, and Wesley, the biologist for the park service, all sense that something is not right with Mark, yet none of them discover the full truth about why Mark is traveling alone. Wesley is the only one who seems to realize Mark's identity, though he, too, lets Mark continue on his way up the mountain. Why do you think that none of these adults did more to help Mark? **RL.4-8.1**
5. Loyalty is a strong theme throughout the story. Mark's best friend Jessie realizes why Mark is missing and to where he has probably gone, but she chooses not to tell Mark's parents in the beginning. Mark's beloved dog Beau is equally loyal to Mark, risking his life as they climb the mountain. How far do you think loyalty should go when the person you are loyal to is in danger? **RL.4-8.2**
6. Mark packs supplies for his journey, including clothing and food. What is the importance of bringing along his camera and his journal? **RL.4-8.1**
7. At one point in his journey, Mark breaks down and calls the tip hotline. He is in pain and has been robbed of his money. He is almost ready to give up, but instead he gives the police misleading information about where "the missing boy" is. Why do you think Mark changed his mind about what to tell the police? **RL.4-8.1**
8. Jessie and Mark communicate with one another by writing haiku poems. Haiku poems are brief, just three lines, and have a precise number of syllables in each line. Why do you think Jessie and Mark prefer to capture their feelings and observations in this style of poetry? **RL.4-8.5**
9. Mark's dog Beau suffers during the climb up the mountain. First, Beau is nearly swept away as he and Mark are trying to get to the island in the river. Beau also falls in the crevasse as he is trying to warn Mark. In both incidents, Mark struggles to rescue Beau. How do you think these scary episodes with Beau affect Mark's original plan to die on the mountain? **RL.4-8.3**
10. How was Beau instrumental in ultimately rescuing Mark from the stormy mountain? **RL.4-8.1**
11. Mark awakens in the hospital battered, weak, and very sick. The doctors share that he should have been dead already. Jessie snaps back, "He shouldn't be dead at all!" Why do you think Jessie had such a strong reaction to the doctor's statement given that she already knew that Mark was terribly ill with cancer? **RL.4-8.1**
12. At the end of the novel, Mark entrusts Jessie with the telling of his story. As they look through his journal and his photographs, Jessie thinks about the different kinds of "truth." What do you think it means for Jessie to write a truthful tale of Mark's journey to the mountain? **RL.4-8.3**

Kathryn Stevens



A WORD ABOUT *THE HONEST TRUTH* FROM AUTHOR DAN GEMEINHART



The Honest Truth is about a boy and a dog who share a life-and-death struggle, an unforgettable adventure, and an undying friendship.

Although the story is entirely fictional, there are smooth rocks of truth at the bottom of it. It is written in honor and memory of a friend of mine, Mark, whom the main character is named after. Mark was one of the finest, most generous people I've known. He loved books—he worked at an independent bookstore—and he loved mountain climbing, and he loved dogs. When I first heard that he'd been diagnosed with cancer, I couldn't make sense of it; Mark was one of the healthiest, most active and energetic people I knew. But life doesn't always make sense, and it doesn't always play fair. Mark fought the cancer valiantly, but in the end it proved too much. We lost Mark, but we were left with the memories of his character, his unshakable good nature, and his adventurous spirit.

This story is not at all based on Mark's life—it is not written about him, but for him. Mark loved a good story. I've tried to write a book that he would have liked. I hope I found some measure of success.

I did not want it to be a story about disease, or about sickness, or about despair. I wanted it to be about loyalty and bravery and love in the face of those things. I did not want it to be a sad story, but a triumphant one. Because when I remember Mark, the real Mark, I don't remember cancer. I remember courage and friendship and getting to the top.

And that's what this book is about. It is not about dying. It's about living.

DAN GEMEINHART

Dan Gemeinhart lives in a small town in the middle of Washington State with his wife and three young daughters. He works as a teacher-librarian in an elementary school and loves sharing books with kids. *The Honest Truth* is his first book.

For more information, visit his website, dangemeinhart.com, and follow him on Twitter: @DanGemeinhart.



scholastic.com

