

Quicksand Pond

By Janet Taylor Lisle

Reading Group Guide

A Reading Group Guide to

Quicksand Pond

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About the Book

When twelve-year-old Jessie and her family arrive at a rented cottage for a New England beach vacation, Jessie is immediately drawn to the freshwater pond nearby—Quicksand Pond—and not to the beach. An old raft and a new friend lead to happy times floating among the reeds, yet shadows from the past are lurking behind the bushes far up onshore.

A crime from long ago still affects the local community, and trouble starts to suck Jessie down into the mire of deceit and prejudice. What happens to Jessie is a turning point in her life, leading to a summer vacation like no other.

Discussion Questions

1. At the end of the introduction when Terri tells Jessie that she had been watching her and her family, what did you think would happen next? What was the mood or tone of the story at that point?
2. When Jessie first sees the pond, why do you think she feels perfectly happy? Why had she not been feeling happy before this point?
3. Henrietta says that it takes “lightness in both body and mind” to ride a raft. What does she mean by that?
4. How is Henrietta’s mind described? Why is that important to the story?
5. What are the different points of view that the author uses to tell the story? How do these multiple perspectives affect the structure of the story? Why do you think that the author chose to tell the story in this way?
6. Compare Jessie’s, Henrietta’s, and Terri’s relationships with their fathers. How do those relationships

affect these characters?

7. Why do you think that Henrietta feels a bond with Terri?

8. Did you think that Terri set the fire? Why or why not?

9. There are varying theories presented in the story for how the garage burned down. How are they similar, and how are they different. Which version is the truth? Did any character stick to the total truth? Discuss the slippery nature of truth.

10. How would Terri have explained what happened when the garage burned down?

11. What do you think happens after Henrietta goes down to the pond at the end of the book? Explain your answer. What evidence in the text supports your prediction?

12. Reread the poem at the beginning of the book. Was this poem a good choice for the beginning of the story? Why or why not?

13. Who are the “captives” in the story? Their dungeons are both metaphorical and real. What are they, and how do the dungeons affect the captives’ actions?

14. Review the map of Quicksand Pond at the beginning of the book. How does the map pull together the plot threads of the story?

15. What are some of the differences between the locals and the summer people? How do these differences affect the friendship between Jessie and Terri?

16. Terri’s situation forces Jessie to think about her family’s prejudices, as well as her own. What is behind their intolerance? Do you think that these views are justified? Think about your own community, or other nearby communities. Do you see any prejudice? How are your observations similar to or different from the prejudices that Jessie has discovered?

17. Describe the moment when Jessie is frightened of Terri. When does that happen? Why is she scared? Connect this with another tense moment that either you have read about or experienced.

18. What are the dynamics of Jessie’s family at the beginning of the story? How about by the end of the story? Did anything change? If so, what was the cause of this shift? Support your answers with evidence from the text.

19. Identify the main characters in the story. Which characters have complexity or development throughout the story? Which ones do you relate to the most? Sympathize with? Support your answers with evidence from the text.

Extension Activities

1. The teacher should divide the class into small groups to create book trailers encouraging others to read *Quicksand Pond*. Then present the trailers to the class. How are the trailers different for each group? What persuasive techniques did each group use in order to convince their audience to read the book? Consider using the following platforms to create your trailer:

Book trailer with iMovie: <http://www.techlearning.com/default.aspx?tabid=100&entryid=8604>

Book trailer with Microsoft Photo Story: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-creating-c-30914.html?tab=3>

2. Write a description of Quicksand Pond. Then, respond in one of the following ways to bring your description to life.

Draw or paint a picture of Quicksand Pond.

Create a short soundtrack of what you think Terri and Jessie heard while rafting on Quicksand Pond. Consider using <http://nature.ambient-mixer.com/>.

Write a haiku poem about the pond. Check out the following for assistance:
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/seasonal-haiku-writing-poems-39.html>.

3. Examine the map of Quicksand Pond. Identify details on the map. Create a map of a place where you live, or of a place where you went on vacation. Write a short story using the place that you chose as the setting of your story. Be sure to incorporate the details from your map into your story.

4. Use the following resource to learn how to best write and format a newspaper article:
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/creating-classroom-newspaper-249.html>. You can also use: <http://www.extranewspapers.com/newspaper-template-pack-word-school/>.

Then, look at sample newspapers from the past on <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Next, the teacher should divide the class into three small groups. Group 1: Create the front page of a local newspaper about the murders and trial from *Quicksand Pond*. Group 2: Create the front page of a local newspaper that would have been written if the police had interviewed Henrietta at the time. Group 3: Create the front page of the newspaper that would have been written after the police interviewed Miss Cutting at the end of the story.

Share the newspaper articles with your class.

5. Research the history of rafts. What other works of literature feature rafts? Have there been any famous journeys using rafts? Present your findings to your class in a multimedia slide show.

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