

In From the Cold

Deborah Ellis

Reading Level: 4

Interest Level: Adult

Book Summary

A story of a mother's ultimate sacrifice for the love of her daughter. Rose is on the run from the law, with her ten-year-old daughter, Hazel, in tow. Together they eke out a daily existence, scrounging by night for what food and warmth they can find and lying low during the day in the relative safety of their shack in the city ravine. At first it seemed like an adventure, but Hazel wants no more of it. She longs to return to school, a warm bed, and a normal life. One day, Hazel can no longer resist the lure of her former life and endangers their cover. Rose realizes, then, that she has a choice to make—keep running or let Hazel go.

Author Biography

Deborah Ellis is an award-winning author and a long-time peace activist. She has worked as a women's mental health counsellor and volunteered at refugee camps in Afghanistan. Deborah's bestselling series *The Breadwinner Trilogy* is based on a story told to her by a refugee. Deborah lives in Simcoe, Ontario.

Note to the educator: The following activities are suggestions only. Please choose and adjust the projects and questions according to the specific needs and level of your students as well as their experience with doing novel studies. Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

Book Cover and Title

- (a) Read the title to the students. Ask them to describe what they see on the front cover. Explain that the picture on the cover is from the opening scene of the book. Ask them to predict what happens in the back alley.
- (b) Ask students to predict what kind of story this will be (e.g., adventure, mystery, true crime) and explain their prediction.

Homeless People

Tell students that the two main characters in this book are homeless people. Have students discuss the following questions:

- Do homeless people live in your community?
- How do you feel and act when you see a homeless person?
- When a person loses their home, what else do they lose?
- What are some myths about homeless people?
- How can you help the homeless?

Making Sacrifices

Have students define the term “making sacrifices.” Have students discuss why people make sacrifices for others. Ask students to give examples of sacrifices that people might make in the following roles: (a) as a parent or caregiver, (b) as a spouse or partner, (c) as a son or daughter, and (d) as a friend.

WORKING WITH THE BOOK

Characters

Tell students that readers can learn about the characters in a novel in three ways—from (1) what the writer tells us, (2) what the characters say, do, and think, and (3) what others think and say about the characters.

As students read the book, have students note examples of how the writer develops the character of Rose. Encourage students to make inferences where possible.

How do we make inferences?

Active readers use their experience and knowledge to make educated guesses about characters and their motives. Readers who make inferences use clues in the text together with their own experiences to help them figure out the author's meaning.

What the writer tells us about Rose

Inference

What Rose says, does, and thinks

Inference

What others say or think about Rose

Inference

Plot

As they read, have students compare and contrast Rose and Hazel’s life as a homeless family and their life as part of a middle-class family.

Rose & Hazel’s Life	Homeless Family	Middle-class Family
How did they meet their basic needs (e.g., food, water, sleep)		
Did they feel safe?		
Did they have freedom and independence?		
Who were their friends?		
Did they have a routine? Did they feel normal?		
Other		

After students read the book, put them in groups and have them discuss the following questions:

- (a) In what ways did Rose have success in making a home for Hazel in the ravine?
- (b) In the end, Rose realizes that she cannot give Hazel what she needs. What does Hazel need that Rose cannot give her?
- (c) Compare Rose's life living in the ravine and her life living with her husband. In what ways were the two lives similar? Different? How did Rose try to live with dignity in both "lives"?
- (d) Rose was trying to escape her old life. To what extent did she have success? Explain your answer.

Setting

Have students read the description of the ravine on page 16. Ask them to discuss the questions below with respect to the following quote: "The streetlights didn't reach the waste land. Rose and Hazel had to walk in the dark." (page 16)

- (a) Why is this part of the city ravine called a waste land?
- (b) Think about the time Rose and Hazel spend in the ravine. Why else is this part of the ravine called a waste land?
- (c) Rose and Hazel had to walk in the dark because the city lights did not reach the waste land. In what other way(s) were Rose and Hazel walking in the dark?

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Have students answer the following questions and discuss their answers:
 - (a) Rose makes two major decisions in the novel. What are they?
 - (b) Summarize and compare the events that lead to Rose making each of these decisions. Which decision, do you think, is more difficult to make? Explain your answer.
 - (c) Compare the outcomes of each decision. What other options does Rose have, if any?
 - (d) Describe a time when you made a major decision. What events led up to making the decision? Was it a hard decision to make? Why? Did the decision turn out to be the right one? Why, or why not?

2. “And then there was a knife in her hand. The knife went into her husband. And her husband fell to the floor.” (page 47)
 - (a) Do you think Rose was right or wrong to kill her husband? Give reasons for your answer.
 - (b) Society, at times, is prepared to accept the killing of a person (e.g., assisted suicide, war). Do you think killing a person is ever acceptable? When? Give reasons for your answer.

3. They’d have to do another shoplifting trip soon, for coffee, hand sanitizer, and matches.” (page 31)
 - (a) Was Rose right or wrong to shoplift? Do you think Rose should have included Hazel? Give reasons for your answers.
 - (b) Is it ever acceptable to steal in the following cases? Give reasons for your answers.

paying taxes	sneaking into a movie
taking home small items from work	keeping money from a lost wallet
not paying a library fine	accepting an item you know is stolen

4. “By the end of that day, Rose knew what she had to do.” (page 65)

What did Rose decide? What led Rose to this decision? What gave Rose the strength to carry out her plan?

5. “ ‘Childhood friendships don’t matter,’ Rose said. ‘Adult friendships don’t even matter’... The sooner Hazel learned that, the better.” (page 38)
 - (a) Why does Rose say these words to Hazel at this point?

- (b) Does Rose believe what she is saying? Explain your answer.
- (c) Do you think childhood friendships are important? Why, or why not?
6. “You show them with pride, honey. We did something very special, so you hold your head up high when you’re talking about it.” (page 67)
- (a) What is the “something very special” that Rose is talking about?
- (b) Do you think Hazel understands the phrase “something very special” in the same way as Rose? Do you think Hazel will ever understand what Rose meant? Explain your answers.
7. “‘You really should grow up,’ Rose told her.” (page 40)
- (a) What do adults mean when they tell their children to “grow up”?
- (b) Was Rose right to tell Hazel to grow up? Explain your answer.
8. “Please, Mom, can’t we go back?” (page 52)
- (a) What does Hazel mean?
- (b) How possible is it for Rose and Hazel to go back to their old life? What do you think will happen to Rose and Hazel? Would the end result have been different if Rose had gone to the police right after she killed her husband?
9. “Rose was scared to go into the city in broad daylight, but she had to do it. It would be safer for her to leave in the middle of the night, but not safer for Hazel. She had to think of her daughter...” (page 67)
- (a) Why was Rose scared to go into the city in broad daylight?
- (b) What other sacrifices did Rose make for Hazel?
- (c) What sacrifice(s) was Hazel willing to make for Rose?
10. “Why didn’t I leave then? Rose asked herself. Why didn’t I take Hazel, climb onto a bus, and head out of town back then, back before all this happened? We would have left with nothing, but what do we have now? At least we’d be together.” (page 71)
- (a) Why do you think Rose stayed in her abusive relationship?
- (b) Do you think Rose should regret the fact that she didn’t leave her husband? Why, or why not?
- (c) Should people ever regret their actions (or inaction) in this type of situation? When? Explain your answer and give specific examples.

WRITING ABOUT THE BOOK

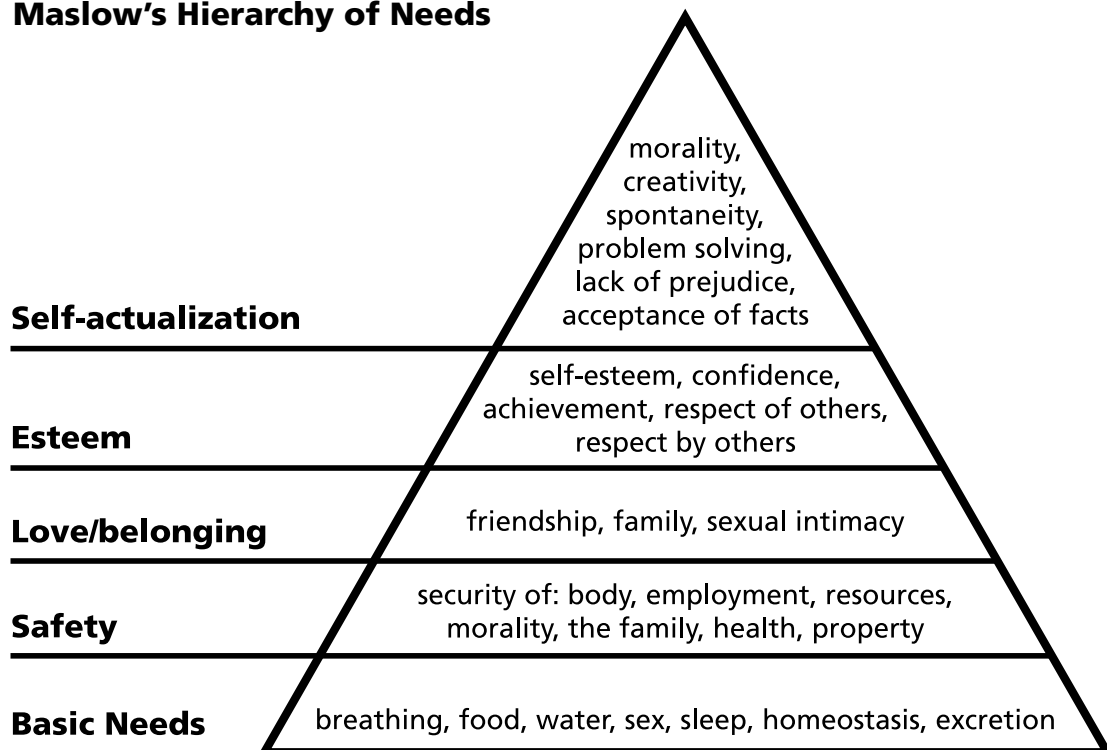
1. Imagine you are Hazel. Write a journal entry describing the 24 hours after Rose left you in the schoolyard. Include what happened as well as your thoughts and feelings.
2. Imagine you are Rose. Write a letter to Hazel explaining why you lied to her about going to Vancouver.
3. Write an email to someone who made a sacrifice for you. Tell the person when you realized the sacrifice was made, what the sacrifice means to you, and how it changed your life.
4. Rose had two turning points in her life. Write a paragraph about a turning point in your life. What was the turning point? How did it come about? How did it change your life? If you could go back to that point, would you change it in any way? How and why?

PROJECTS and ACTIVITIES

1. What we need in life

Put students into groups. Have them brainstorm a list of things human beings need and hope for to live a full life. Encourage them to brainstorm a list of at least 25 to 30 items. Then have them group the items from most important to least important. Ask them to explain their groupings. Hand out a model of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and briefly describe the hierarchy. Have students compare their groupings with the model.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



2. The lives of others

Have students watch the one-hour film *Carts of Darkness* (available to watch on the Canadian National Film Board website), in which director Murray Siple follows the lives of a group of men who are bottle collectors. Have students discuss how the main characters and the director of the film live lives of dignity.

3. Rebellion

Have students share (a) how they rebelled as teenagers, (b) why they rebelled as teenagers, and (c) how their parents (or primary caregivers) responded. Then have students think about how young people rebel today. Ask students who are parents how their teens rebel and how they handle it. Then have students compare their rebellious teen years with rebellion among today's youth.

4. Homelessness

Have students prepare questions about homelessness they would like to have answered. Invite a local resource person to speak to the students about homelessness in your community or city.

FURTHER READING

(Available from Grass Roots Press)

If students liked this book, they might also enjoy:

A Dream Come True, Maureen Lee, Quick Reads (GRP)

Not Just for Christmas, Roddy Doyle, Open Door Series (GRP)

Anne of Green Gables, L.M. Montgomery, Oxford Bookworms (GRP)

Frozen Tears, Don Sawyer, Novels for Adult Learners (GRP)

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