

Max the Mighty Discussion Guide

The Book

In this much anticipated sequel to the critically acclaimed *Freak the Mighty*, readers once again encounter Maxwell Kane. Mac, the giant-sized but mild-mannered young man who in the earlier book befriended a tiny disabled genius named Kevin, in this book finds himself coming to the rescue of another outcast nicknamed "Worm" because of her interest in reading. When Worm's well-being is threatened by her abusive stepfather, Max joins in her search for her real father, little suspecting the danger and adventure that await them both in Chivalry, Montana.

Theme

One word that recurs frequently throughout the story is truth. Each character in the novel, however, has a different idea of what the truth is. Explore the meanings of the word "truth" as used by: The Undertaker (Worm's stepfather), Max, and Worm. Refer to some of the following pages for references to this important word: pp. 18, 23, 24, 71, 79, 83, 166.

Conflict

Conflict operates on many levels in this novel. Of course, there is the conflict between Worm and her stepfather and the conflict between Max and Worm and the bullies. However, the inner conflict experienced by Max is perhaps the most pointed of all. Why is Max uncertain about his actions? (pp. 13-14). Why does he question whether or not he should interfere in Worm's life?

Setting

The setting in this story shifts from one place to another with great rapidity. Construct a map that traces the route taken by Max and Worm as they hitchhike out of town and later jump a train to Chivalry.

Characterization

In the opening pages of the story, it becomes readily apparent that appearances can be deceiving. For example, even though Max is a large person, he does not like to fight; he is quite different from the bullies he confronts. Compare the outward appearance of Max, Worm, The Undertaker, the Hippy Dippy, and/or other characters with their inner selves.

Discuss

1. What is so special about the helmet Worm is wearing when Max first encounters her (p. 5)? What clues are provided by the author as to the literal and symbolic meaning of the miner's helmet?
2. This book is a sequel. Does it stand on its own as a story? Do readers need to have read *Freak the Mighty* in order to fully appreciate this story?

3. Max says, "when you get into trouble, head for home" (p. 27). Is home the best place for Max? For Worm?
4. Like Huck Finn, Max breaks the rules when he assists Worm in her escape from The Undertaker. Is it ever right to break the rules and disobey the orders of an adult? Under what circumstances would it be permissible for someone to do something illegal?
5. Worm reports that there is magic in the world (p. 63). She insists that book magic seeps into the real world (pp. 121-122) and believes in people even if people do not believe in magic. What does she mean? What kind of magic can transfer from the world of the story to the real world?

Other books to compare and contrast

Maniac Magee, by Jerry Spinelli (love of books, family problems, unusual friendships)

Walk Two Moons, by Sharon Creech (death of a parent, denial by child)

Others See Us, by William Sleator (family relationships)

About the author

Rodman Philbrick is the author of several novels for young adults, plus works for adults including articles, essays, and reviews. *Freak the Mighty* has been made into a feature film, *The Mighty*, starring Sharon Stone. *The Fire Pony* won the 1996 Capital Choice Award. Rodman Philbrick divides his time between his homes in Maine and Florida.

Discussion guide by Kylene Beers, Lecturer, Department of Library Science, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.