



The Color of Bones

by Tracy Edward Wymer

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Ages: 9 and up | Grades: 4 and up

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About the Book

Twelve year-old Derby Shrewd lives in a divided town. Lights live on the Northside of the Line, Darks live on the Southside. Hillside has been that way ever since the Line appeared naturally from the ground, much like a spring welling up from deep inside the earth. Now the Line controls the town, keeping Hillside separated, zapping those who come near it and killing those who dare cross it. But when Derby, a Northsider, finds a pile of bones stacked on the Line, he sets out to uncover the person's identity. While doing so, he befriends a Southside girl and soon begins to challenge the Line and the town's rules. And then, before he can turn back, Derby goes too far.

About the Author

TRACY EDWARD WYMER writes fiction in an underground office with strange noises. He teaches English and creative writing and lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children. *The Color of Bones* is his first novel.

Pre-Reading Discussion Topics

- Introduce and define *segregation* and *discrimination*. What factors and elements keep people divided? Race? Religion? Socio-economic status? Government?
- Throughout our history, who has been treated unfairly? Why were they treated this way? What could people have done to change this mindset?
- Make a list of separated groups and list factors that keep them divided.
- Why is it important to respect your parents and their rules? Why do young people have to follow rules in the first place?
- There are also rules at school. Which rules are fair and necessary to keep order? Which rules are unfair?

For Book Discussion and Classroom Use

- Have you ever broken a rule to help someone else? Discuss what happened.
- Talk about traditions at your school and in your town. Which traditions do you like and why? Which traditions could be rethought or abolished completely? Are there any traditions that are unfair to others? If so, how would you change them?
- Power can be used in many ways, good and bad. What does it mean to have power? Who holds the most power in our society? Discuss the ways people, including leaders, can use power to make the world a better place. What ways do leaders use power?
- Love is an important truth. What does it mean to love someone? Are there different kinds of love? What's the difference between loving your parents and loving a friend? Can a relationship, including a special friendship, survive without love?
- Without using words or violence, in what ways can you stand-up for what you believe in?
*Hint: think about your actions and how they represent yourself.
- Have you ever experienced a Magical Moment? Think about a time when something 'magical' happened in your life? Tell what happened.

Important Literary Terms

- point of view
- flashback
- personification
- foreshadow
- theme
- symbolism
- metaphor
- irony
- epiphany

Reading Comprehension Questions

- What is the difference between first person and third person point of view? From whose point of view is the story told?
- In the first chapter, Derby and his best friend Miles find a pile of bones and a skull on the Line. How did Derby react to this? How did Miles react? What is unique about the skull?
- What is your first impression of the Line? In your own words, describe the Line.
- When he gets home, Derby notices the scar on his dad's face and it triggers a flashback. What is a flashback? In your own words, tell what happened to Derby's dad.
- How does Derby first meet the girl? How does Derby describe her? What happens during their rock throwing game?

For Book Discussion and Classroom Use

- What happens to Derby when Mrs. Ruby makes him read the note aloud to the class? Think about a time when you were uncomfortable and tell what happened.
- How does the Line react to Derby and the Girl's game of catch? Why do you think the Line acts this way?
- According to Nails, who was Russell Thornsberry and what happened to him?
- Describe Mr. Shrewd's office. What does this tell you about him?
- What is Mr. Shrewd's ultimate plan? Why does he think the plan is important and necessary for the people of Hillside?
- Define personification? Using specifics from the chapters titled "Bone Man" and "Scarred Forever," how does the author personify the Line? Why did the author choose to make the Line a living entity?
- Describe Derby's injury and tell why he "hides" the injury from his parents.
- How does Derby feel when he sees his father's sketch of the Wall?
- In your own words, tell Mrs. Ruby's story. How is it similar to Derby and Zora's situation? How is it different?
- What is the white heat? When does it appear and how does it affect Derby?
- Research the book *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. What is the story about? Does it relate to Derby's town of Hillside? If so, how?
- When Derby climbs the half-built Wall, what major decision must he make? What does he decide to do and why? What are the consequences to his actions?
- Why does Derby decide to run for his life? At that point in time, what does he fear the most?
- What is the Reminder and why does it float in the creek?
- Who sends the Stampede after Derby? How do Derby and Zora escape the wrath of the Stampede and its fearsome leader?
- Using sensory details, describe Zora's world (the Southside). Take your description beyond the pages of the book. Use your imagination and be creative.
- Who is the boy with the missing tooth in the photo? What is an epiphany? What epiphany does the photo cause Derby to have?
- How did Derby get his name? How did Zora get her name?
- Why is Zora always so dirty? What is ironic about Zora playing in the mud?
- Derby apologizes to his parents for breaking their rules. Do you think he means it? When is saying "sorry" not enough?
- In the chapter titled "The Town Gathers," how does the Line react to what's going on around it? Does it change from the beginning of the chapter to the end? If so, how?
- Whose skull and bones are on the Line? How can Derby be so sure about this? How are the skull and bones related to the story? Why do the skull and bones show up suddenly?

For Book Discussion and Classroom Use

- What does Mrs. Ruby say about the power of love? What happened in her past to allow her to know about this topic?
- What does Derby finally realize about the power of the Line? How does Mama react to what Derby says? How does Zora feel about Derby's plan?
- The pieces of the Line disappear. Do you think the Line is now gone forever? If it came back, what would happen to Derby and Zora?
- Is the ending of the story a *hopeful* or *happy* ending? Or could it be both? Explain.
- How do Derby's feelings toward Zora, and Southsiders in general, change as the story progresses? How do Zora's feelings toward Derby change?
- Make a prediction about the town of Hillside. Will the town go on as usual? How will the people react to what has happened? Will there be positive change? Negative change?
- What is symbolism? Is the Line a symbol of something greater and stronger than itself? Does the Line symbolize an element of our current society? If so, what could the Line represent?
- The themes of love and power are woven throughout this story? What other themes are present in the story? Give specific examples of each theme?
- Review the early chapters in the story. Can you find examples of foreshadowing? Write about how these examples give clues to the reader about later events.

Writing Prompts

- From first person point of view, write about you and one of your friends finding something strange, like a skull and bones. For an extra challenge, create a living entity like the Line. Use narration, dialogue, and character's reactions.
- Using what you've learned from the story, write a conversation between Derby, Zora, and the skull on the Line.
- Write a short story from Russell Thornsberry's or Mrs. Ruby's point of view. Write about what happened between them when they were Derby and Zora's age. Make sure to include the Line and the Big River.
- Derby and Zora refer to heroes several times. Write about what being a hero means to you. What kind of people are heroes? What character traits do all heroes have in common?
- Death and dying play a major part in Derby's experiences. He wants to find out who the skull and bones belong to and he fears what will happen to him after crossing the Line. What does the afterlife mean to you? Do you believe in life after death? Write about your beliefs.
- Write an additional final chapter and tell what happens to Derby and Zora after the pieces of the Line rain down around them and disappear.

Activities

- Divide the class in half, perhaps down the middle of the room. Give one half of the room a list of favorable rules. Give the other half a list of oppressive rules. Have them “live” by these rules for an entire class period. The last ten minutes of class, give students the opportunity to write down their reactions to the rules.
- Have two students hold a rope down the middle of the room. Tell the students to hold it high and make waves with it, so the rope ripples back and forth. Let the other students gently toss beanbags or soft, spongy balls over the rope. If the rope hits your ball, you’re out. The last throwers remaining are the winners.

Projects

- Have students choose their favorite scene from the story. Use magazine cut-outs and glue or tape to create a collage of the scene. The pictures or cut-outs can be representative or symbolic as opposed to precise.
- Using colored pencils, markers, pastels, or watercolors, draw a picture depicting the final scene of the story.
- Zora says she is named after a famous writer. Conduct a little research and find out who she is named after. When did this person live and what did she write?
- Cut-out a long strip of paper representing the Line. It will need to be about a foot wide, thick enough to hold your students’ artwork. Hang the Line above or below the front board with tape or staples. Have students create their own artwork, a drawing or art piece that represents a moment in the story, and tape them to the Line.