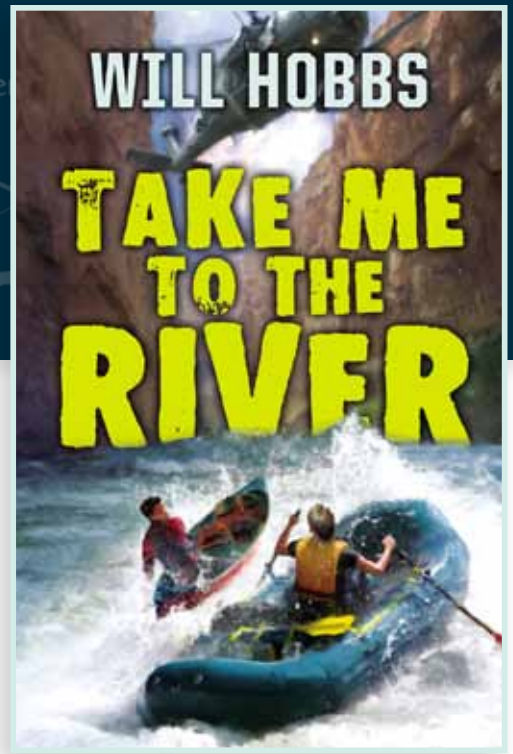


TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

By Will Hobbs
DISCUSSION GUIDE



About the Book

A hurricane, a fugitive, and a kidnapped boy are not in the plans Dylan and his cousin, Rio, make as they chart a rafting trip down the Rio Grande. They haven't traveled very far when a vicious hurricane hits the coast of Texas, bringing torrential rains that flood the river and turn the rapids wild and unpredictable. But the river waters are just the beginning of their trouble, as the boys are soon overtaken by a drug criminal who has kidnapped a young boy. Dylan and Rio must do their best to keep themselves and the boy alive as they continue their voyage under the threat of death. Facing the trial of their lives, only Rio's knowledge of the river and Dylan's determination can lead them to safety.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is Dylan's first clue that something is not right with his trip to visit his uncle and his cousin, Rio? Why does he agree to hitchhike to his cousin's home in Terlingua? Would you have made the same decision in Dylan's place?
2. What is Dylan's immediate reaction to the news that his uncle has gone to Alaska to work? Why does Rio deceive Dylan? Can you think of a reason that would justify purposefully deceiving someone?
3. Dylan does not tell his parents about the change in plans. Is not telling the whole truth the same as lying? Why or why not? Have you ever not told the whole truth in a situation? What happened?
4. On page 73, Dylan reads what the guidebook says about the Lower Canyons. If he had read the guidebook before he agreed to go with Rio on the trip, would he have changed his mind? Justify your answer with Dylan's remarks throughout the book.
5. Dylan repeatedly gets "a feeling" that he is on a slippery slope, but he forges ahead with Rio. Why doesn't Dylan pay attention to his gut feeling and decline the river trip? Do you ever have gut feelings about certain situations? Do you think it's important to follow them?
6. Ariel knows that the Lower Canyons are challenging and potentially dangerous. Why doesn't she attempt to stop them? What could she have said? Do you think she should have tried to stop them?
7. Once the boys are on the river and the weather starts deteriorating, they are forced to focus and use all of their skills. How do Rio and Dylan use their experiences to summon the skills they need to survive? Why is it best that Dylan is in the canoe and Rio is on the raft?
8. When Carlos and Diego first approach Dylan and Rio, Carlos tells one lie after another. What is Dylan and Rio's response to Carlos? What are their concerns about Carlos and Diego? How do Dylan and Rio help Diego? What would you have thought and done in their place?
9. As Hurricane Dolly's intensity grows, what weather hazards do the boys encounter? How does the weather affect them physically? What danger do they encounter due to the weather? Have you ever been caught outside during a bad storm? How did it affect you?
10. When Carlos and Diego catch up to the boys again, the truth comes out—along with Carlos's gun. What is Dylan and Rio's initial reaction? How do they obey Carlos's demands but still maintain safety on the raft?
11. On page 123, Carlos gives the boys a piece of advice, calling it gangster wisdom: "Trust your best friend as you would your worst enemy." What does he mean by this? How do you think you would feel if you lived your life by this philosophy?

Questions for Discussion continued on the next page . . .

12. What does Carlos fail to understand about the river and the rapids that makes it so difficult for Rio to take him where he wants to go? How does Rio finally help Carlos understand their dire situation?
13. Why do Rio and Dylan decide to stash the canoe so they can come back and get it later? What does Carlos do to prevent them from returning for the canoe? Why?
14. Dylan and Rio realize that Carlos will probably kill them when they reach a road into Mexico. What is Rio's plan to assure that Dylan's and Diego's lives are safe?
15. Think about the expression "All's well that ends well." How does this saying apply to the conclusion of *Take Me to the River*? Briefly discuss the major conflicts in the story and how they are resolved.

Extension activities

1. **Hurricane + River = The Perfect Storm.** Ask students to investigate instances of hurricanes that have come into contact with rivers. Have students work in pairs to create an illustrated cause-and-effect chart that explains the weather-related occurrences that can be created when a hurricane comes ashore and floods a river. Students should include appropriate weather terms and information, such as precipitation, wind speeds, barometric pressure, etc.
2. **Cost of Doing Business.** The recent rise in activity of the Mexican drug cartels has been well documented in news accounts. In *Take Me to the River*, Will Hobbs examines the cost to innocent victims, but what are some of the other costs? In small groups, ask students to read recent news reports of the violent clashes between police and drug lords, making a list of the costs in loss of innocent lives as well as economic expenditures. Have each group select a genre through which to powerfully convey these costs: a collection of letters from victims or concerned citizens, an original song or poem, a photo collage, or others. Students can share and display their projects.
3. **Crossing into a Better Life.** Ask students to research the number of Mexican nationals crossing the border illegally into the United States, including statistics conveying the rise and fall through the last ten years. Have students create a pictorial timeline and mural depicting the trends of illegal immigration, important political and social events in both countries that have impacted the immigration, and documented tragedies surrounding illegal immigration. Display the mural throughout the year.
4. **Rafting through Wild Water.** Dylan and Rio have enough experience to survive the extraordinarily rough rapids. Ask students to investigate white water rapids: skills needed to navigate them, suitable watercraft for white water rafting, the dangers inherent in the sport, and even locations of particularly turbulent river rapids. Have students use their information to create a safety brochure, a tourist brochure, or a "how to raft" brochure. Have students share and post their products.
5. **News from the Rio Grande.** Divide students into groups of three and ask each group to write a news item based on one of the elements in *Take Me to the River*. The reports can include news stories about events in the novel, weather reports, feature sports articles, or letters to the editor. Appoint two students as editors to collect and compile the stories in a newspaper format.

About the Author

Will Hobbs is the author of eighteen outdoor adventure novels for upper elementary, middle school, and young adult readers, as well as two picture book stories. Seven of his novels have been named Best Books for Young Adults by the American Library Association. Will's first mystery, *Ghost Canoe*, won the Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Young Adult Mystery. ALA's list of the "100 Best Young Adult Books of the 20th Century" included two of Will's titles: *Far North* and *Downriver*. A graduate of Stanford University and a former reading and language arts teacher, Will lives in Durango, Colorado. You can visit him online at www.willhobbsauthor.com.



Photo by Billy Miller

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