



Racing for Diamonds

Anita Daher

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Consider the following question as you read *Racing For Diamonds*:
Is it always a good idea to follow your instincts?

Story

What Jaz thinks of as an adventure, her mom and dad call trouble, but Jaz just can't seem to help herself. When she joins the Junior Canadian Rangers and is teamed up with an annoying partner, she has no idea that all her new-found skills will soon be put to a life and death test.

Author

Anita Daher began her life in a small town on Prince Edward Island but left at the age of five, remaining something of a gypsy ever since. Many of her favorite childhood memories involve roaming over rocks by Hudson Bay and fishing on the tundra in the Northwest Territories. Her writing reflects the places she's been blessed to spend time. Her earlier thrillers for young readers are *Flight from Big Tangle* and *Flight from Bear Canyon* (Orca). Anita lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with her husband, two daughters, one Basset Hound and a Westfalia camper van named Mae.

Curricular Connections

Language Arts

- Colley accuses Jaz of asking too many questions! Have students write questions in one of the following ways: about selected chapters in *Racing for Diamonds*, in a list as they read or as a way to introduce the novel and what it is about.
- Using student-designed dogsled teams as inspiration, have students write descriptive paragraphs introducing each of the team members and driver. Add these to the art display described below.
- In *Racing for Diamonds*, teams must perform tasks at each checkpoint. Divide the class into small groups and have each group design an activity to do at their checkpoint. Groups then travel to each checkpoint completing the task at each one.
- “It was time to recharge and breathe in the colors; the sky was as blue as a painted ocean on a globe. The scrub lining the trail was a collage of winter gold, brown and green” (p. 35). Read this passage aloud and ask students to visualize the scene it describes and then write a poem to connect with the passage.
- Create poems about cooperation, honesty and respect using the slogans created below (see Drama) or passages from *Racing for Diamonds*.
- Learn some simple dog mushing terms or have students make up their own terms to mean such things as: turn to the left, right, slow down and stop. Divide the class into groups and see which group can follow their directions the best around a course or route set up for that purpose.

**Mathematics**

- Diamonds are weighed in units called carats. One carat equals 0.2 grams or 200 milligrams. Find items that weigh one carat and display them beside a picture of an actual one-carat diamond. Find out the monetary value of each item.

Art

- Have students draw a dogsled team. Use large poster-size paper and display the teams around the room or hallway.
- Draw a portrait of one of the main characters. For example: Colly, Jaz, Gunther, Joe or Sergeant Sugar.
- The Northern Lights or aurora borealis are bright lights seen in the northern skies in early fall and spring. Share pictures of these with students, then have them create their own using a paint wash or pencil crayons. Display with the dogsled pictures from above.
- The Junior Canadian Rangers Program is for young people living in isolated northern locations. It began in 1994 and offers participants a range of learning opportunities including first aid, environmental protection and survival skills. Using the information found on its website listed below, have students design and create posters advertising this exciting program.

Drama

- Have students create short skits based on *Racing for Diamonds*, using only questions as dialogue.
- Divide the class into small groups and have them create and perform a conversation between the sled dogs as they are preparing for the race.
- Play charades using vocabulary from *Racing for Diamonds*. For example: harness, snowshoe, dogsled, husky, snowmobile, bullhorn, towline and trail.
- Cooperation, honesty and respect were qualities highly held by the JCRs. Divide the class into small groups and have them create slogans that reflect the meaning of these words.
- The Junior Canadian Rangers use “The Sharing Circle” model to run their meetings. Brainstorm topics that might be of interest to the class, and after choosing one, conduct a meeting. These guidelines are: everyone is equal in the circle, everyone gets a chance to share, including the leader, anyone can choose not to speak, there are no interruptions, probing, put-downs or gossip, time is shared equally and the circle is closed by thanking everyone for being there.



Science

- Research how diamonds are made and mined. Have students write a how-to manual that describes the process of creating a diamond from its raw to finished state.
- Invite a member of St. John's Ambulance or another organization that offers basic first aid training and instruction to speak to your class.
- Using either pictures or actual samples, have students look at a variety of rocks and minerals and describe their similarities and differences.
- The Mohs Scale is a measure of rock and mineral hardness developed by German mineralogist, Friedrich Mohs. Have students use the scale to help them identify rocks and minerals.
- There are three basic types of rock: sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic. Display pictures or samples of each and have students write the different qualities of rocks in each group.

Social Studies

- *Racing for Diamonds* takes place along the Canol Trail. The trail was named for "Canadian Oil" and was built to link the oilfields near Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories, to military bases in Alaska. Find out more about how it was built and its actual route.
- On a blank map of Canada have students label the provinces, territories and capital cities. Include the Mackenzie River, Franklin and Mackenzie Mountain Ranges, Arctic Ocean, Carcajou and other locations found in *Racing for Diamonds*.
- Have students draw a map of the route Jaz and Colly take in the race.
- The first known diamonds were discovered in India around 800 B.C. On a world map, label the different countries and specific locations where major deposits of diamonds have been discovered since then.
- The proceeds of the sale of "conflict" or "blood" diamonds are used to fund wars in places like Angola and Sierra Leone. Find out more about where these places are and why their diamonds are being used in such a way.
- Jaz makes bannock while out on the trail (p. 34). Locate a recipe for bannock (or use the one below) that contains actual measurements for the ingredients and make some in the class.
- The JCRS are trained in some traditional aboriginal skills (setting snares, making bannock). Research some other aboriginal skills that might be useful in isolated northern locations.



Small Bannock (Serves 6–8)

3 cups flour
Dash of salt
3 teaspoons baking powder
2 tablespoons oil or shortening
1 cup water or milk (approximately—enough to make dough)

1. Combine dry ingredients in a bowl
2. Make a little well and pour the water in.
3. Mix into a dough and knead it.
4. Flatten into biscuit shapes and put them in the frying pan,
or cook on hot ashes over open fire
or cook in oven, 20–25 minutes at 400 degrees Celsius

Especially good fresh, with butter or margarine.

For a sweet variation, add raisins and sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon.



Suggested Resources

Fiction

- Adler, David. *Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the Stolen Diamonds*
 Blake, Robert J. *Akiak a Tale from the Iditarod, Togo*
 Bunting, Eve. *A Day's Work*
 Citra, Becky. *Dog Days*
 Daher, Anita. *Flight from Big Tangle, Flight from Bear Canyon*
 Fox, Paula. *The Stone-Faced Boy*
 Gill, Shelley. *Kiana's Iditarod*
 Lemieux, Jean. *Toby Laughs Last*
 Little, Jean. *Birdie for Now, Rescue Pup, Rescue Dog*
 Wishinsky, Frieda. *Each One Special, A Bee in Your Ear*

Non-Fiction

(Dewey Decimal Classification numbers appear in parentheses where applicable)

- Edwards, Ron. *Diamonds and Gemstones* (553.8)
 Gear, Adrienne. *Reading Power* (372)
 Hancock, Lyn. *Northwest Territories* (971.9)
 Harvey, Stephanie and Goudvis, Anne. *Strategies that Work* (372.47)
 Holbrook, Sara. *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam* (811.54)
 Janeczko, Paul. *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms* (811.008)
 Llewellyn, Claire. *Kids Survival Handbook* (796.4)
 Love, Ann and Drake, Jane. *The Kids Book of the Far North* (971)
 Lynch, Wayne. *Arctic Alphabet: Exploring the North from A to Z* (577.09)
 Marshall, Diana. *Northwest Territories* (917.1)
 Morris, Neil. *Diamonds and Other Gems* (553.82)
 Riddles, Libby. *Storm Run* (798.8)
 Stead, Tony. *Is That a Fact?* (372.62)
 Sherwonit, Bill. *Iditarod: The Great Race to Nome* (798.8)



Online

Conflict Diamonds

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/diamonds/index.do>

Diamond History

<http://www.diamondwholesalecorporation.com/DiamondHistory.html>

Job Description for Gem and Diamond Workers

<http://www.careerplanner.com/Job-Descriptions/Gem-and-Diamond-Workers.cfm>

The Mohs Scale of Relative Mineral Hardness

<http://www.geology.about.com/library/bl/blmohsscale.htm>

Canol Trail General Information

<http://www.canoltrail.tripod.com/canolgi.htm>

Sled Dog

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sled_dog

Iditarod

<http://www.iditarod.com/>

Mushing Terms

<http://www.athropolis.com/arctic-facts/fact-dogs-command.htm>

Dogsled

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_sled

American Heritage Canol Trail

http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/it/2002/3/2002_3_24.shtml

The Junior Canadian Ranger Programme

http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=739

Canadian Rangers

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Rangers

Junior Canadian Rangers Training: Sharing Circles

http://www.rangers.forces.gc.ca/pubs/jcr/training/jcr-train_e.asp

Junior Canadian Ranger Programme

http://www.rangers.forces.gc.ca/pubs/jcr/intro_e.asp



A Few Words from the Author

Dear Readers,

My daughter used to drive me crazy with how many questions she asked! Crazy, but I loved her to bits for it. You see, as a child I often missed out on things that looked like a lot of fun because I was too shy to say I would like to participate. I would also go for very long periods of time not understanding something because I was too shy to ask questions. In *Racing for Diamonds* Jaz does not have this problem—no way! She is not shy, and—like my daughter—she asks so many questions that she sometimes drives people crazy. She doesn't mind, though. Nope! Jaz is comfortable with who she is. She asks questions and jumps into life with eyes wide open and both shoes on—sometimes even snowshoes.

I first learned of the Canol Trail from my friend Donna Huffam. I met Donna shortly after I moved to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in 1999. She had just moved from Norman Wells, Northwest Territories, which is the community at the very start of the trail. She was fascinated by the trail's history, and even took time to fly in by helicopter to have a good look around. Her enthusiasm inspired me to learn more, and I'm so glad I did. I was as much amazed by the fact that workers were able to complete the road in such a short period of time—in harsh terrain and sometimes horrendous conditions—as I was by the area's beauty.

I hope you have as much fun reading this adventure as I did writing it. If you have any questions about Jaz, or anything else in the story, please feel free to email me through my web site at www.anitadaher.com.

Happy Reading,

Anita