

**OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 8 ENGLISH/HANDOUT 18**

Read the chapter summaries (adapted from shmoop.com) and respond to the discussion questions that follow.

Summary of and excerpt from "Rapids"

*Tally escapes from her dorm and rides with Shay outside of the city.*

They hit the rapids ten minutes later.

Tally had lived her whole life within sight of the river. Slow-moving and dignified, it defined the city, marking the boundary between worlds. But she'd never realized that a few kilometers upstream from the dam, the stately band of silver became a snarling monster.

The churning water really was white. It crashed over rocks and through narrow channels, catapulted up into moonlit sprays, split apart, rejoined, and dropped down into boiling cauldrons at the bottom of steep falls.

Shay was skimming just above the torrent, so low that she lifted a wake every time she banked. Tally followed at what she guessed was a safe distance, hoping her tricked-up board was still reluctant to crash into the darkness-cloaked rocks and tree branches. The forest to either side was a black void full of wild and ancient trees, nothing like the generic carbon-dioxide suckers that decorated the city. The moonlit clouds above glowed through their branches like a ceiling of pearl.

Every time Shay screamed, Tally knew she was about to follow her friend through a wall of spray leaping up from the maelstrom. Some shone like white lace curtains in the moonlight, but others struck unexpectedly from the darkness. Tally also found herself crashing through the arcs of cold water rising from Shay's board when it dipped or banked, but at least she knew when a turn was coming.

The first few minutes were sheer terror, her teeth clenched so hard that her jaw ached, her toes curled up inside her special new grippy shoes, her arms and even fingers spread wide for balance. But gradually Tally grew accustomed to the darkness, the roar of water below, the unexpected slap of cold spray against her face. It was wilder, and faster, and farther than she'd ever flown before. The river wound into the dark forest, cutting its serpentine route into the unknown.

Finally, Shay waved her hands and pulled up, the back of her board dipping low into the water. Tally climbed to avoid the wake, spinning her board in a tight circle to bring it to a smooth halt.

"Are we there?"

"Not quite. But look." Shay pointed back the way they'd come.

Tally gasped as she took in the view. The distant city was a bright coin nestled in darkness, the fireworks of New Pretty Town the barest cold-blue shimmer. They must have climbed a long way up; Tally could see patches of moonlight rolling slowly across the low hills around the city, pushed along by the light wind that barely tugged at the clouds.

She'd never been beyond the city limits at night, had never seen it lit up like this from afar.

Tally pulled off her spattered goggles and took a deep breath. The air was full of sharp smells, evergreen sap and wildflowers, the electric smell of churning water.

"Nice, huh?"

"Yeah," Tally panted. "Much better than sneaking around New Pretty Town."

Shay grinned happily. "I'm really glad you think so. I've been wanting to come out here so bad, but not alone. You know?"

Tally looked at the surrounding forest, trying to peer into the black spaces between the trees. This was really the wild, where anything could be hidden, not a place for human beings. She shivered at the thought of being there alone.

"Where to now?"

"Now we walk."

*"Walk?"*

Shay eased her board to the shore and stepped off. "Yeah, there's a vein of iron about half a kilometer that way. But nothing between here and there."

"What are you talking about?"

"Tally, hoverboards work on magnetic levitation, right? So there's got to be some kind of metal around or they don't hover."

"I guess so. But in town—"

"In town, there's a steel grid built into the ground, no matter where you go. Out here, you have to be careful."

"What happens if your board can't hover anymore?"

"It falls down. And your crash bracelets don't work either."

1. How does Westerfield's writing contrast nature and the city? What literary devices are used?

---

2. How do the hoverboards work, and why do Shay and Tally have to walk?

---

---

---

### Summary of and excerpt from "Rusty Ruins"

*The Rusty Ruins are the ruins of a city built by a previous civilization, called the Rusties. They live a very different lifestyle.*

*Every Ugly goes to the Rusty Ruins on a school trip, but Shay and Tally explore much more of the city. They even ride their hoverboards on a roller coaster, even though the roller coaster isn't totally intact.*

*Tally gets angry at Shay for not telling her about the gap she needed to jump, but gets over it quickly.*

*Shay tells Tally that she has special knowledge about the Rusties because she has a friend who told her. According to Shay, this mysterious friend lives out here in the wilderness, and they are going to meet him.*

A few blank windows stared down on them in silence from the husks of the giant buildings. Any glass had long since shattered, any wood had rotted, and nothing remained but metal frames, mortar, and stone crumbling in the grip of invading vegetation. Looking down at the black, empty doorways, Tally's skin crawled with the thought of descending to peer into one.

The two friends slid between the ruined buildings, riding high and silent as if not to disturb the ghosts of the dead city. Below them the streets were full of burned-out cars squeezed together between the looming walls. Whatever had destroyed this city, the people had tried to escape it. Tally remembered from her last school trip to the ruins that their cars couldn't hover. They just rolled along on rubber wheels. The Rusties had been stuck down in these streets like a horde of rats trapped in a burning maze.

"Uh, Shay, you're pretty sure our boards aren't suddenly going to conk out, right?" she called softly.

"Don't worry. Whoever built this city loved to waste metal. They aren't called the Rusty Ruins because some guy called Rusty discovered them."

Tally had to agree. Every building sported jagged spurs of metal sticking from its broken walls, like bones jutting from a long-dead animal. She remembered that the Rusties didn't use hoverstruts; every building was squat,

crude, and massive, and needed a steel skeleton to keep it from falling down.

And some of them were so *huge*. The Rusties didn't put their factories underground, and they all worked together like bees in a hive instead of at home. The smallest ruin here was bigger than the biggest dorm in Uglyville, bigger even than Garbo Mansion.

Seeing them now, at night, the ruins felt much more real to Tally. On school trips, the teachers always made the Rusties out to be so stupid. You almost couldn't believe people lived like this, burning trees to clear land, burning oil for heat and power, setting the atmosphere on fire with their weapons. But in the moonlight she could imagine people scrambling over flaming cars to escape the crumbling city, panicking in their flight from this untenable pile of metal and stone.

Shay's voice pulled Tally from her reverie. "Come on, I want to show you something."

Shay cruised to the edge of the buildings, then out over the trees.

"Are you sure we can—"

"Look down."

Below, Tally saw metal glinting through the trees.

"The ruins are much bigger than they let on," Shay said. "They just keep that part of the city standing for school trips and museum stuff. But it goes on forever."

"With lots of metal?"

"Yeah. Tons. Don't worry, I've flown all over the place."

Tally swallowed, keeping an eye out for signs of ruin below, glad that Shay was moving at a nice, slow speed.

1. How does Westerfield's writing arouse the reader's curiosity about the Rusty Ruins? Why?

### Summary of and excerpt from "Waiting for David"

*In one of the tallest ruins, Shay lights a firework to signal to her mysterious friend, David. However, he does not show up, which leads Tally to wonder if he is real.*

*Tally is still glad that they went out that night since, to her, the Rusty Ruins show how a civilization can collapse if people are not careful.*

*When they get back to the river, Tally sees something that might be a spark of light back in the ruins. But maybe not.*



"This is a joke, right?"

Shay didn't answer. They were back in the heart of the ruins, in the shadow of the tallest building around. She was staring up at it with a puzzled expression on her face. "I think I remember how to do this," she said.

"Do what?"

"Get up there. Yeah, here it is."

Shay eased her board forward, ducking to pass through a gap in the crumbling wall.

"Shay?"

"Don't worry. I've done this before."

"I think I already had my initiation for tonight, Shay." Tally wasn't in the mood for another one of Shay's jokes. She was tired, and it was a long way back to town. And she had cleanup duty tomorrow at her dorm. Just because it was summer didn't mean she could sleep all day.

But Tally followed Shay through the gap. Arguing would probably take longer.

They rose straight into the air, the boards using the metal skeleton of the building to climb. It was creepy being inside, looking out of the empty windows at the ragged shapes of other buildings. Like being a Rusty ghost watching as its city crumbled over the centuries.

The roof was missing, and they emerged to a spectacular view. The clouds had all disappeared, and moonlight brought the ruins into sharp relief, the buildings like rows of broken teeth. Tally saw that it really had been the ocean she'd glimpsed from the roller coaster. From up here, the water shone like a pale band of silver in the moonlight.

Shay pulled something from her shoulder pack and tore it in half.

The world burst into flame.

"Ow! Blind me, why don't you!" Tally cried, covering her eyes.

"Oh, yeah. Sorry." Shay held the safety sparkler at arm's length. It crackled to full strength in the silence of the ruins, casting flickering shadows through the interior of the ruin. Shay's face looked monstrous in the glare, and sparks floated downward to be lost in the depths of the wrecked building.

Finally, the sparkler ran out. Tally blinked, trying to clear the spots from before her eyes. Her night vision ruined, she could hardly see anything except the moon in the sky.

She swallowed, realizing that the sparkler would have been seen from anywhere in the valley. Maybe even out to sea. "Shay, was that a signal?"

"Yeah, it was."

Tally looked down. The dark buildings below were filled with phantom flickers of light, echoes of the sparkler burned into her eyes. Suddenly very aware of how blind she was, Tally felt a drop of cold sweat creep down her spine. "Who are we meeting, anyway?"

"His name's David."

1. What momentarily blinds Tally?

---

2. What are your thoughts about this David figure?

---

### Summary of and excerpt from "Fight"

*At the end of summer, Shay and Tally decide to do one more prank to Shay.*

*The breakdown in ages becomes clearer. Up to twelve years old, you're a little and live with your parents in the suburbs; from twelve to sixteen, you're ugly and live in the dorms; at sixteen, you turn pretty and move to New Pretty Town.*

"Oh, that was perfect!"

"Did you see their faces?"

"Not actually," Shay said. "I was kind of busy watching the floor coming at me."

"Yeah, I remember that from jumping off the roof. It does catch your attention."

"Speaking of faces, love the nose."

Tally giggled, pulling it off. "Yeah, no point in being uglier than usual."

Shay's face clouded. She wiped off an eyebrow, then looked up sharply.

"You're not ugly."

"Oh, come on, Shay."

"No, I mean it." She reached out and touched Tally's real nose. "Your profile is great."

"Don't be weird, Shay. I'm an ugly, you're an ugly. We will be for two more weeks. It's no big deal or anything." She laughed. "You, for example, have one giant eyebrow and one tiny one."

Shay looked away, stripping off the rest of her disguise in silence.

They were hidden in the changing rooms beside the sandy beach, where they'd left their interface rings and a spare set of clothes. If anyone asked, they'd say they were swimming the whole time. Swimming was a great trick. It hid your body-heat signature, involved changing clothes, and was a perfect excuse for not wearing your interface ring. The river washed away all crimes.

A minute later they splashed out into the water, sinking the disguises. The bungee jacket would go back to the art school basement that night.

"I'm serious, Tally," Shay said once they were out in the water. "Your nose isn't ugly. I like your eyes, too."

"My eyes? Now you're totally crazy. They're way too close together."

"Who says?"

"Biology says."

Shay splashed a handful of water at her. "You don't believe all that crap, do you—that there's only one way to look, and everyone's programmed to agree on it?"

"It's not about believing, Shay. You just *know* it. You've seen pretties. They look . . . wonderful."

"They all look the same."

"I used to think that too. But when Peris and I would go into town, we'd see a lot of them, and we realized that pretties do look different. They look like themselves. It's just a lot more subtle, because they're not all freaks."

"We're not freaks, Tally. *We're* normal. We may not be gorgeous, but at least we're not hyped-up Barbie dolls."

"What kind of dolls?"

She looked away. "It's something David told me about."

"Oh, great. David again." Tally pushed away and floated on her back, looking up at the sky and wishing this conversation would end. They'd been out to the ruins a few more times, and Shay always insisted on setting off a sparkler, but David had never showed. The whole thing gave Tally the creeps, waiting around in the dead city for some guy who didn't seem to exist. It was great exploring out there, but Shay's obsession with David had started to sour it for Tally.

"He's real. I've met him more than once."

"Okay, Shay, David's real. But so is being ugly. You can't change it just by wishing, or by telling yourself that you're pretty. That's why they invented the operation."

"But it's a trick, Tally. You've only seen pretty faces your whole life. Your parents, your teachers, everyone over sixteen. But you weren't *born* expecting that kind of beauty in everyone, all the time. You just got programmed into thinking anything else is ugly."

"It's not programming, it's just a natural reaction. And more important than that, it's fair. In the old days it was all random—some people *kind* of pretty, most people ugly all their lives. Now everyone's ugly . . . until they're pretty. No losers."

1. Explain how "the river washed away all crimes."

---

---

---

2. Describe the disagreement between Tally and Shay. Where, and why, do they disagree?

---

---

---



## MORE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Shay differentiates between new pretty fun and real fun. Explain her distinction. Do you agree? Read an excerpt from “Rapids.”

They met at the dam, where the river split in two to encircle New Pretty Town. Tonight, there weren't any river skimmers out to disturb the darkness, and Shay was practicing moves on her board when Tally walked up.

“Should you be doing that here in town?” Tally called over the roar of water rushing through the dam's gates.

Shay danced, shifting her weight back and forth on the floating board, dodging imaginary obstacles. “I was just making sure it worked. In case you were worried.”

Tally looked at her own board. Shay had tricked the safety governor so it wouldn't tattle when they flew at night, or crossed the boundary out of town. Tally wasn't so much worried about it squealing on them as whether it would fly at all. Or let her fly into a tree. But Shay's board seemed to be hovering just fine.

“I boarded all the way here, and nobody's come to get me,” Shay said.

Tally dropped her board to the ground. “Thanks for making sure. I didn't mean to be so wimpy about this.”

“You weren't.”

“Yeah, I was. I should tell you something. That night, when you met me, I kind of promised my friend Peris I wouldn't take any big risks. You know, in case I really got in trouble, and they got really mad.”

“Who cares if they get mad? You're almost sixteen.”

“But what if they get mad enough that they won't make me pretty?”

Shay stopped bouncing. “I've never heard of that happening.”

“I guess I haven't either. But maybe they wouldn't tell us if it had. Anyway, Peris made me promise to take it easy.”

“Tally, do you think maybe he just said that so you wouldn't come around again?”

“Huh?”

“Maybe he made you promise to take it easy so you wouldn't bother him anymore. To make you afraid to go to New Pretty Town again.”

Tally tried to answer, but her throat was dry.

“Listen, if you don't want to come, that's fine,” Shay said. “I mean it, Squint. But we're not going to get caught. And if we do, I'll take the blame.” She laughed. “I'll tell them I kidnapped you.”

Tally stepped onto her board and snapped her fingers. When she reached Shay's eye level she said, “I'm coming. I said I would.”

Shay smiled and took Tally's hand for a second, squeezing. “Great. It's going to be fun. Not new pretty fun—the real kind. Put these on.”

“What are they? Night vision?”

“Nope. Goggles. You're going to love the white water.”

---



---



---