

OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 8 ENGLISH/HANDOUT 20

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

“Leaving”

Tally “sneaks out” one last time; this time, it is because she is working as a spy. She has a fancy new hoverboard that can go fast. She needs to get to the Smoke fast or they may realize that she left after her birthday.

To get to the Smoke, Tally has to interpret Shay’s enigmatic note. The first part says, “Take the coaster straight past the gap,” which must be a reference to the roller coaster. The second part says, “Until you find one that’s long and flat,” which Tally figures out is a reference to a long, straight roller coaster-like track—a railroad track. The third part of the note tells Tally to stay close to the sea.

Excerpt

She scanned the horizon, looking for clues. There was nothing long and flat that she could see. Peering down at the ground passing below, Tally could hardly make out anything in the weed-choked darkness. She might zoom right past whatever the clue referred to and not even know it, and have to retrace her path in daylight. But how would she know when she’d gone too far? “Thanks, Shay,” she repeated.

Then she spotted something on the ground, and stopped.

Through the shroud of weeds and rubble, geometrical shapes had appeared—a series of rectangles in a line. She lowered the board and saw that below her was a track with metal rails and wooden crossbars—like the roller coaster, but much bigger. And it went in a straight line, as far as she could see.

“Take the coaster straight past the gap, until you find one that’s long and flat.”

This thing was a roller coaster, but long and flat.

“But what’s it *for*?” she wondered aloud. What fun was a roller coaster without any turns or climbs?

She shrugged. However the Rusties got their kicks, this was perfect for a hoverboard. The track stretched off in two directions, but it was easy enough to tell which one to take. One led back the way she’d come, toward the center of the ruins. The other headed outward, northward and angling toward the sea.

“Cold is the sea,” she quoted from the next line of Shay’s note, and wondered how far north she was going.

Tally brought the hoverboard up to speed, pleased that she’d found the answer. If all of Shay’s little riddles were this easy to solve, this whole trip was going to be a breeze.

What is the “roller coaster” that Tally is supposed to follow? Why does she not recognize it?

“Spagbol”

On her trip, Tally learns that the railroads are used by Rusties for transportation.

The next part of Shay's note says "Cold is the sea and watch for breaks," which Tally ignores. This causes her to almost fall down into the sea when she crosses a crumbling bridge.

Later, Tally opens up some of her dehydrated food marked "SpagBol." It turns out to be spaghetti bolognese.

The fourth part of Shay's note says "At the second make the worst mistake." At the next crumbling bridge, Tally goes to sleep and lets the solar-powered hoverboard charge up. Before that, however, she looks through her bag and discovers that all Dr. Cable gave her was SpagBol.

“The Worst Mistake”

Waking up before night, Tally folds up her hoverboard and prepares to make the worst mistake with a broken bridge. This involves...

Excerpt

Tally pulled out a packet of SpagBol, then realized that her purifier was empty. The only ready source of water was at the bottom of the cliff, and there was no way down. She wrung out her wet jacket, which produced a few good *squooshes*, then scraped off handfuls of the water oozing from the board until the purifier was half-full. The result was a dense, overspiced SpagBol that required lots of chewing.

By the time she was done with the unhappy meal, the board's light had turned green.

“Okay, ready to go,” Tally said to herself. But where? She stood still, pondering, one foot on the board and one on the ground.

Shay's note read, “At the second make the worst mistake.”

Making a mistake shouldn't be that hard. But what was the *worst* mistake? She'd almost killed herself once today already.

Tally remembered her dream. Falling into the gorge would count as a pretty bad mistake. She stepped onto the board and edged it to the crumbling end of the bridge, looking down to where the river met the sea far below.

If she climbed down, her only possible path would be to follow the river upstream. Maybe that's what the clue meant. But the steep cliff showed no obvious path, not even a handhold.

Of course, a vein of iron in the cliff might carry her down safely. Her eyes scanned the walls of the gorge, searching for the reddish color of iron. A few spots looked promising, but in the growing darkness, she couldn't be certain.

“Great.” Tally realized that she'd slept too long. Waiting for dawn would be twelve hours lost, and she didn't have any more water.

The only other option was to hike upriver atop the cliff. But it might be days before she reached a place to climb down. And how would she see it at night?

She had to make up time, not blunder around in the dark.

Tally swallowed, coming to a decision. There had to be a way down on her board. Maybe she was making a mistake, but that's what the clue called for. She edged the board off the bridge until it began to lose purchase. It slipped down the cliffside, descending

faster as it left the metal of the track behind.

Tally's eye searched desperately for any sign of iron in the cliff. She eased the board forward, bringing it closer to the wall of stone, but saw nothing. A few of the board's metal-detector lights flickered out. Any lower, and she was going to fall.

This wasn't going to work. Tally snapped her fingers. The board slowed for a second, trying to climb, but then shivered and continued to descend.

Too late.

Tally spread her jacket, but the air in the gorge was still. She spotted a rusty-looking streak in the wall of stone and coaxed the board closer, but it turned out to be just a slimy smear of lichen. The board slipped downward faster and faster, the metal-detector lights flickering out one by one.

Finally, the board went dead.

Tally realized that this mistake might be her last.

She fell like a rock, down toward the crashing waves. Just like in the dream, her voice felt choked by a freezing hand, as if her lungs were already filled with water. The board tumbled below her, spinning like a falling leaf.

Tally closed her eyes, waiting for the shattering impact of cold water.

Suddenly, something grabbed her by the wrists and yanked her up cruelly, spinning her in the air. Her shoulders screamed with pain, and she spun once all the way around like a gymnast on the rings.

Tally opened her eyes and blinked. She was being lowered onto the hoverboard, which waited rock-steady just above the water.

"What the . . . ?" she wondered aloud. Then, as her feet came to rest, Tally realized what had happened.

The river had caught her. It had been dumping metal deposits there for centuries, or however long rivers lasted, and the board's magnets had found purchase just in time.

"Saved, more or less," Tally muttered. She rubbed her shoulders, which ached from being caught by the crash bracelets, and wondered how far you had to fall before the bracelets would rip your arms out of their sockets.

But she'd made it down. The river stretched out in front of her, winding its way into the snowcapped mountains. Tally shivered in the ocean breeze and pulled her soggy jacket tighter around her.

"Four days later take the side you despise," she quoted Shay's note. "Four days. Might as well get started."

What did Shay intend for Tally to do by writing in the note, "At the second make the worst mistake"?

“The Side You Despise”

A giant “flying machine” from the Rusty Era causes a big windstorm. It hovers around and then leaves without finding Tally in the river. Unfortunately, it does accidentally rip up Tally's sleeping bag.

Tally rides one more night until she reaches a branch in the river. The line, “take the side you despise,” in Shay's notes reminds Tally about their talk about face options. Since Tally despises the right side of her face, she takes the right branch of the river.

By the end of that night, Tally finds herself in a landscape full of white flowers.

The next part of Shay's clue is: “And look in the flowers for fire-bug eyes.” Tally does not know what that means, and so she decides to take a rest.

When she wakes up, there's fire all around.

Excerpt

Thunder came from the sky, like a giant drum beating fiercely and fast, forcing its way into her head and chest. It seemed to rattle the whole horizon, making the surface of the river shimmer with every thud.

Tally crouched low in the water, sinking to her neck just before the machine appeared.

It came from the direction of the mountains, flying low and kicking up dust in a dozen separate windstorms in its wake. It was much bigger than a hovercar, and a hundred times louder. Apparently without magnets, it beat the air into submission with a half-invisible disk shimmering in the sun.

When the machine reached the river, it banked into a turn. Its passage churned the water, sending out circular waves as if some huge stone were skimming across the surface. Tally saw people inside, looking down at her camp. The unfolded hoverboard pitched in the windstorm, its magnets fighting to keep it on the ground. Her knapsack disappeared in the dust, and she saw clothing, the sleeping bag, and packets of SpagBol scattering in the machine's wake.

Tally sank lower into the frantic water, struck by the thought that she would be left here, naked and alone, with nothing. She was already half frozen.

But the machine dipped forward, just like a hoverboard, and moved on. It headed toward the sea, vanishing as quickly as it had appeared, leaving her ears pounding and the river's surface boiling.

Tally crept out shivering. Her body felt ice cold, her fingers barely able to clench into a fist. She made her way back to her camp, grasping clothes to her body, putting them on before the setting sun could dry her. She sat and wrapped her arms around herself until the shaking stopped, glancing fearfully at the red horizon every few seconds.

What is this flying machine? How do you know?

“Firestorm”

The white flowers are burning all around Tally, who tries to get to the river and her hoverboard.

Just when she's flying over the river in her hoverboard, she sees one of those Rusty flying machines, which is spreading fire all over.

The flying machine also knocks Tally off her board into the river. Some masked people pick her up. Their masks give them "bug eyes."

Excerpt

It was cool and quiet under the waves.

For a few endless moments, Tally felt only relief to have escaped the searing wind, the thundering machine, the blistering heat of the firestorm. But the weight of the crash bracelets and knapsack pulled her down fast, and panic welled up in her pounding chest.

She thrashed in the water, climbing up toward the flickering lights of the surface. Her wet clothes and gear dragged at her, but just as her lungs were about to burst, she broke the surface into the maelstrom. Tally gulped a few breaths of smoky air, then was slapped in the face by a wave. She coughed and sputtered, struggling to stay afloat.

A shadow passed over her, blacking out the sky. Then her hand struck something—a familiar grippy surface. . . .

Her hoverboard had come back to her! Just the way it always did when she spilled. The crash bracelets lifted her up until she could grab on to it, her fingers clinging to its knobbly surface as she gasped for air.

A high-pitched whine came from the nearby shore. Tally blinked away water from her eyes and saw that the Rusty machine had landed. Figures were jumping from the machine, spraying white foam at the ground as they crashed through the burning flowers and into the river. They were headed for her.

She struggled to climb onto the board.

“Wait!” the nearest figured called.

Tally rose shakily to her feet, trying to keep steady on the wet surface of the board. Her hard-baked shoes were slippery, and her sodden knapsack seemed to weigh a ton. As she leaned forward, a gloved hand reached up to grab the front of the board. A face came up from the water, wearing some sort of mask. Huge eyes stared up at her.

She stomped at the hand, crunching the fingers. They slipped off, but her weight was thrown too far forward, and the board tipped its nose into the water.

Tally tumbled into the river again.

Hands grabbed at her, pulling her away from the hoverboard. She was hoisted out of the water and onto a broad shoulder. She caught glimpses of masked faces: huge, inhuman eyes staring at her unblinkingly.

Bug eyes.

Who are these figures with bug eyes?

"Bug Eyes"

Tally gets pulled into the flying machine (with her hoverboard) and the masked people turn out to be pretties, just like Peris, and the others back home.

These pretties are rangers. They set fires to the white flowers because they belong to an invasive species that kills off all the other plants.

These rangers are sometimes friendly with the Smoke runaways. They agree to drop Tally off among the orchids and leave.

Tally follows the last of Shay's instructions, "Then wait on the bald head until it's light."

Excerpt

LIES

A couple of hours after dawn, they came and got her.

Tally saw them hiking through the orchids, four figures carrying hoverboards and dressed all in white. Broad white hats in a dappled pattern hid their heads, and she realized that if they ducked down into the flowers, they would practically disappear.

These people went to a lot of trouble to stay hidden.

As the party drew close, she recognized Shay's pigtails bobbing under one of the hats and waved frantically. Tally had planned to take the note literally and wait on the hilltop, but at the sight of her friend, she grabbed her board and dashed down to meet them.

Infiltrator or not, Tally couldn't wait to see Shay.

The tall, lanky form broke from the others and ran toward her, and the two embraced, laughing.

"It *is* you! I knew it was!"

"Of course it is, Shay. I couldn't stand missing you." Which was pretty much true.

Shay couldn't stop smiling. "When we spotted the helicopter last night, most people said it had to be another group. They said you'd taken too long, and that I should give up."

Tally tried to smile back, wondering if she hadn't made up enough time. She could hardly admit starting four days *after* her sixteenth birthday.

"I kind of got turned around. Could your note have been any more obscure?"

"Oh." Shay's face fell. "I thought you'd understand it."

Unable to bear Shay blaming herself, Tally shook her head. "Actually, the note was okay. I'm just a moron. And the biggest problem was when I got to the flowers. The rangers didn't see me at first, and I almost got roasted."

Shay's eyes widened as she took in Tally's scratched and sunburned face, the blisters on her hands, and her patchy, scorched hair. "Oh, Tally! You look like you went through a war zone."

"Just about."

The other three uglies walked up. They stood back a bit, one boy holding a device in the air. "She's carrying a bug," he said.

Tally's heart froze. "A what?"

Shay gently took Tally's board from her and handed it to the boy. He swept his device across it, nodded, and pulled one of the stabilizer fins off. "Here it is."

"They sometimes put trackers on the long-range boards," Shay said. "Trying to find the Smoke."

"Oh, I'm really . . . I didn't know. I swear!"

"Relax, Tally," the boy said. "It's not your fault. Shay's board had one too. That's why we meet you newbies down here." He held up the bug. "We'll take it away in some random direction and stick it on a migrating bird. See how the Specials like South America." The Smokies all laughed.

He stepped closer and swept the device up and down her body. Tally flinched when it passed close to the pendant. But he smiled. "It's okay. You're clean."

Tally sighed with relief. Of course, she hadn't activated the pendant yet, so his device couldn't detect it. The other bug was just Dr. Cable's way of misleading the Smokies, getting them to drop their guard. Tally herself was the real danger.

Shay stepped up next to the boy, taking his hand in hers. "Tally, this is David."

The boy smiled again. He was an ugly, but he had a nice smile. And his face held a kind of confidence that Tally had never seen in an ugly before. Maybe he was a few years older than she was. Tally had never watched anyone mature naturally past age sixteen. She wondered how much of being ugly was just an awkward age.

Of course, David was hardly a pretty. His smile was crooked, and his forehead too high. But, uglies or not, it was good to see Shay, David—all of them. Except for a couple of stunned hours with the rangers, she hadn't seen human faces in what seemed like years.

. . .

"So, what've you got?"

"Huh?"

Croy was one of the other uglies who'd come to meet her. He also looked older than sixteen, but it didn't suit him like it did David. Some people needed the operation more than others. He reached out a hand for her knapsack.

"Oh, thanks." Her shoulders were sore from being strapped to the thing for the last week.

He pulled it open as they hiked, looking inside. "Purifier. Position-finder." Croy pulled out the waterproof bag and opened it. "SpagBol! Yum!"

Tally groaned. "You can have it."

His eyes widened. "I can?"

Shay pulled the knapsack away from him. "No, you can't."

"Listen, I've eaten that stuff three times a day for the past . . . what seems like forever," Tally said.

"Yeah, but dehydrated food's hard to get in the Smoke," Shay explained. "You should save it to trade."

"Trade?" Tally frowned. "What do you mean?" In the city, uglies might trade chores or stuff they'd stolen, but trade *food*?

Shay laughed. "You'll get used to the idea. In the Smoke, things don't just come out of the wall. You've got to hang on to the stuff you brought with you. Don't go giving it away to anyone who asks." Shay glared at Croy, who looked down sheepishly.

"I was going to give her something for it," he insisted.

"Sure you were," David said.

Tally noticed his hand on Shay's shoulder, touching her softly as they hiked. She remembered the way Shay had always talked about David, kind of dreamily. Maybe it wasn't just the promise of freedom that had brought her friend here.

They reached the edge of the flowers, a dense growth of trees and brush that started at the foot of a towering mountain.

"How do you keep the orchids from spreading?" Tally asked.

David's eyes lit up, as if this was his favorite subject. "This old-growth forest stops them. It's been around for centuries, probably even before the Rusties."

"It's got lots and lots of species," Shay said. "So it's strong enough to keep out the weed." She looked at David for approval.

"The rest of this land used to be farms or grazing pasture," he continued, gesturing back at the expanse of white behind them. "The Rusties had already broken its back before the weed arrived."

A few minutes into the forest, Tally realized why the orchids were no match for it. The tangled brush and thick trees were knotted together into an impassable wall on either side. Even on the narrow path, she was constantly shoving past branches and twigs, tripping over roots and rocks. She'd never seen any woodlands this raw and inhospitable. Vines dotted with cruel thorns ran through the semidarkness like barbed wire. "You guys *live* in here?"

Shay laughed. "Don't worry. We've got a ways to go. We're just making sure you weren't followed. The Smoke's much higher, where the trees aren't so intense. But the creek's coming up. We'll be on board soon."

"Good," Tally said. Her feet were already chafing in the new shoes. But they were warmer than her destroyed grippies, she realized, and were better for hiking. She wondered what would have happened if the rangers hadn't given them to her. How did you get new shoes in the Smoke? Trade someone all your food? Make them yourself? She looked down at the feet ahead of her, David's, and saw that his shoes did look handmade, like a couple of pieces of leather crudely sewn together. Strangely, though, he moved gracefully through the undergrowth, silent and sure while the rest of them crashed along like elephants.

The very idea of making a pair of shoes by hand boggled her mind.

It didn't matter, Tally reminded herself, taking a deep breath. Once in the Smoke, she could activate the pendant and be home within a day, maybe within hours. All the food and clothes she would ever need, hers for the asking. Her face pretty at long last, and Peris and all their old friends around her.

Finally, this nightmare would be over.

. . .

Soon, the sound of running water filled the forest, and they reached a small clearing.

David pulled his device out again, pointing it back toward the path. “Still nothing.” He grinned at Tally. “Congratulations, you’re one of us now.”

Shay giggled and hugged Tally again as the others readied their boards. “I still can’t believe you came. I thought I’d messed everything up, waiting so long to tell you about running away. And I was so stupid, getting into a fight instead of just telling you what I was going to do.”

Tally shook her head. “You’d said everything already, I just wasn’t listening. Once I realized you were serious, I needed a chance to think about it. It just took me a while . . . every minute, until the last night before my birthday.” She took a deep breath, wondering why she was saying all this, lying to Shay when she didn’t really have to. She should just shut up, get to the Smoke, and get it over with. But Tally found herself continuing. “Then I realized I’d never see you again if I didn’t come. And I’d always wonder.”

That last part was true, at least.

As they boarded higher up into the mountain the creek widened, cutting an archway of trees into the dense forest. The gnarled, smaller trees became taller pines, the undergrowth thinning, the brook breaking into occasional rapids. Shay cried out as she rode through the spray of churning white water.

“I’ve been dying to show you this! And the *really* good rapids are on the other side.”

Eventually, they left the creek, following a vein of iron over a ridge. From the top, they looked down into a small valley that was mostly clear of forest.

Shay held Tally’s hand. “There it is. Home.”

The Smoke lay below them.

Explain the significance of the chapter’s title.
