Crenshaw by Katherine Applegate

1. When are the times in Jackson’s life that Crenshaw appears? Which events occur that create a need for Jackson to have Crenshaw in his life?
2. Compare Crenshaw and Aretha in the way they behave. Can Aretha see Crenshaw the way Jackson can? Does she sense whenever he is around, or does Jackson imagine that she does?
3. What is the difference between Jackson’s reaction to Crenshaw when he appeared the first time and when he appears now? Why does Jackson keep telling him to leave? What is he afraid of when Crenshaw is there?
4. When did Crenshaw go away in Jackson’s life earlier? Why has he never told Marisol about Crenshaw and about his family’s problems? Why does he tell her now?
5. How did Jackson and Marisol become friends? What are the experiences and beliefs that they have in common? What are their differences? How does their friendship help each of them?
6. Why does Jackson steal the dog cookie? How does he feel about the few times that he has stolen from a store? Why does he feel worse about lying than stealing? What makes him ask Crenshaw: “Are you my conscience?”
7. Jackson sometimes feels as if he is the most grown-up member of his family. Identify times in the story when he does appear to act more grown-up than his parents. Identify places in the story when his parents are in charge of the situation.
8. Discuss Jackson’s statement: “Stories are lies, when you get right down to it. And I don’t like being lied to.” (p. 9) Why doesn’t Jackson like made-up stories? Why is it so important for him to have a logical explanation for everything that happens? Does he feel the same way about magic? Discuss Marisol’s comment: “Just enjoy the magic while you can, okay?” (p. 160)

Alternate Project Ideas

1. Jackson and Robin’s parents are both musicians, and music is very important to them; in fact, they named their children after the companies that made their guitars. They especially like the music of guitarist B. B. King and singer Aretha Franklin. Listen to recordings of both of these performers and discuss how the music makes you feel, and why you think these performers were so important to the parents.
2. Jackson and Robin have to choose special possessions to put in their “keepsake bags” before the family has a yard sale. Make a list of things that were most important to the children in the story and state why they believe each object was special. Then make a list of the things you would put in a keepsake bag at home or at school and explain why these things are special.
3. Crenshaw is a name that Jackson makes up. Everyone in his family is named for someone, or something, else. Discuss the importance of a name. Why is it important for Jackson to give Crenshaw a completely made-up name that isn’t related to anything else in his life? Write a paragraph on the origin of your own name or on a name they would make up for a pet or an imaginary friend.

Discussion Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant and Editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th Books of Junior Book of Authors and Illustrators (H. W. Wilson/Salem Press).

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