NICKEL BAY NICK

Study Guide

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1. Look at the Table of Contents. Every chapter title in NICKEL BAY NICK is a little riddle, because each one refers to something or someone within that chapter… but not in so many words. Pick out a few - like “The High Cost of Falling” (Ch. 5) or “The Wishes in a Jar” (Ch. 10) – and explain how those titles relate to the events or characters in those chapters. (In other words, what *is*  ‘the high cost of falling?’ What *does*  ‘the wishes in a jar’ refer to?)

2. At the beginning of the book, Sam Brattle is very angry with his father (pp. 2-4); can you remember some of the things that got him so upset? How do you think would you react if one of your parents did the same sorts of things to you?

3. When Sam discovers his mother’s new wedding photo (p. 10), he’s so shocked that he nearly passes out. Can you imagine and make a list of some of the many emotions that he’s suddenly feeling? What could you think of to tell Sam to get him to calm down?

4. When Sam does all that damage to Mr. Wells’s house and yard (Ch. 3), he never even apologizes. If you were responsible for destroying a neighbor’s property, what kinds of things would you say or do to make up for it?

5. Sam is afraid that Hoku is always about to pounce and eat him (p. 19). Have you ever had an experience with an animal that made you feel the same way? Do you have a pet yourself? Does your pet scare people or make them feel welcome?

6. Mr. Wells has a lot of evidence of the many illegal acts that Sam has committed (p. 52). So why doesn’t he turn him in to the police?

7. If they didn’t hang out together, do you think Sam – on his own -- would think of as many ways of making trouble as Jaxon comes up with?

8. If Sam was your friend and you saw someone treating him the way Jaxon does, would you say something to Sam? If so, what?

9. Can you understand and explain why Sam has such a hard time speaking to Ivy?

10. Mr. Wells, we find out, has taken on and shed many identities during his career (p. 219); we never even learn his real name. Why do you think he wouldn’t want people to know his actual identity? Do you ever think

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about changing your name? To what?

11. Sam has many fantasies about what kind of powers his transplanted heart comes with. For instance, he imagines having the strength of a lion or being able to swim like a dolphin. (p. 82) If you could inherit the ability any one animal, what would it be?

12. When Sam sees the FOR RENT sign in his father’s shop, he does something that he later regrets (p. 191). Can you understand and explain Sam’s reason for doing what he does? And then does Mr. Wells have reason to be angry with Sam?

13. Sam has many happy memories of the times he’s spent with his mom. How many of Sam’s memories can you think of? Do you have one favorite memory of a special time you’ve shared with your mom or dad?

14. Many of the characters in “Nickel Bay Nick” are not who they seem to be. They change their clothes. Or their name. Or their language. Can you make a list of the characters in the book who adopt different identities or appearances? Then discuss their reasons for transforming themselves.

15. For many of the characters and place names (i.e., streets, stores, public squares) in “Nickel Bay Nick”, I pulled references from famous works of literature and mythology. I think of each of these citations as a little breadcrumb I’ve dropped, creating a trail that might (I hope) lead the reader to think of how the stories and legends from which they come apply to Sam and his journey. For instance:

A. From the legend of Robin Hood:

Sherwood (as in *Forest)* - p. 15

Little John – p. 49

Tuck – (as in *Friar) –* p. 95

Robin Hood’s creed is that he ‘robs from the rich to give to the poor.’ How is that similar to/different from what Nickel Bay Nick does?

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B. From Charles Dickens’s “Oliver Twist” –

Sikes (as in *Bill) -*  p. 88

Brownlow (as in *Mr.*) – p. 162

Nancy – p. 244

Oliver Twist has to learn to be a pickpocket in order to join Fagin’s gang. What is different about Sam’s training?

C. From mythology –

Pegasus – p. 15

Griffin – p. 97

Angel – p. 110

Hanuman – p. 82

Mermaid – p. 201

From the beginning of time, people have been fascinated by mythic creatures that combine human attributes with animal abilities. Identify the half-human/half-animal combinations that each of the above embodies. How does Sam react to the idea of a hybrid creature (p. 82)?

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Then discuss the ways in which all these names enrich and illuminate the story of “Nickel Bay Nick.”