



RACING CALIFORNIA

Janet Nichols Lynch

YA
FICTION

About the Book

A gifted athlete surprises everyone, especially himself, in his first pro race, when, as the youngest rider at age eighteen, he becomes a sensation with his astounding climbing skills and all-around stunning performance.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND MORE!

Questions for Discussion

- The author provides early suspense on page 9, where Evan is summoned to Mike's hotel room. Were there other places in the story where you felt suspense? Where? Explain how things occurred in the same manner or differently from what you expected.
- The romance between Evan and Glory plays a big part in the story. Do you think the story would have been as good without the romance angle, i.e., just focusing on the bike race? Why or why not?
- Evan says on page 59 that he has "to be a pro cyclist on the inside and a high school kid on the outside." Have you ever had similar feelings about having to perform dual roles? How did you handle it? Do you think Evan handled it well? Why or why not?
- Do you think it was necessary for the author to include particular words—usually in dialogue—that some readers might find offensive? Did these so-called profanities add a sense of reality to the story, or were they unnecessary? What are your reasons for your opinion?
- Evan has to make some difficult choices in this story: whether to participate in the TOC or march in his high school graduation; whether to please his parents or himself; whether to go to college or to join the tour; and whether to please Glory or himself, among others. What difficult choices have you had to make in your own life? What steps did you go through to reach a decision? Were you ultimately satisfied with the choice you made? Why or why not?
- Evan worships his cycling hero, Dash Shipley, who is later found to have cheated, doping in order to win his race. What *is* a hero, in your opinion? What is the difference between a hero and a champion? Who are some of your heroes? Why? How do you feel when a hero cheats or makes another type of mistake? Do you agree that the public loves to see a hero brought down? Why or why not?
- The issue of the use of performance-enhancing drugs, or doping, plays a part in the story. Some professional cyclists believe that doping should be made legal, and that if it were, cycling would be safer. What are your thoughts about this? On what do you base your opinion?

AND MORE!

Geography

Use atlases, Google Maps, globes, or other resources to locate the following places, which are mentioned in the story: Aspen, CO; the Canadian Rockies; the Grand Tetons; Phoenix, AZ; Scottsdale, AZ; the Sierra Nevada; Tempe, AZ; Tucson, AZ; Canyonlands National Park, UT. You can also find the locations of well-known international cycling tournaments. (See the list in “Electronic Resources” below, under “Cycling races/competitions.”)

After visiting the TOC website, plot the course of the current year’s race on a California map and describe the terrain of each of the eight stages of the race. Taking into consideration the dates of the race (it usually begins in mid-May and lasts six days), also visit www.farmersalmanac.com/long-range-weather-forecast/southwest-us/ to find weather predictions.

Math

The grade or slope of a hill is very important to cyclists. To see an explanation of this and to learn how grade is calculated, go to www.1728.org/gradient.htm.

Physiology

Many terms related to sports and sports medicine are mentioned in the text. Use encyclopedias, science or medical dictionaries, or online resources to search for their definitions. Some possible searches are *gastroenteritis*, *glutes*, *lactic acid in muscles*, and *quads*.

Electronic Resources

Vocabulary—Many cycling-specific terms are mentioned in the book, including *critteriums*, *domestique*, *King of the Mountain*, *paceline*, *peloton*, *sprint*, *road rash*, *squares*, *stacking it*, and *wheelsucker*. A full glossary of bike racing terminology is at the Tour of California website: www.amgentourofcalifornia.com/Peloton/glossary.html.

Research—The book provides a variety of opportunities for research. Start with Google and Google Images, which will lead you to a multitude of sources. In each case, enter *cycling* or *cyclist* along with the main search term. Some possible topics are below.

- **Biographies**—Dash Shipley in the book is a fictional character, but you be interested in learning about the real cyclists who are also mentioned, including Lance Armstrong, Fausto Coppi, George Hincapie, Chris Horner, Greg LeMond, Levi Leipheimer, Eddie Merckx, Tommy Simpson, and Dave Zabriskie. Many of these cycling aces have their own websites.
- **Cycling races/competitions**—You may be interested in learning more about the major cycling events mentioned in the book, including the Tour de France, the Union Cycliste Internationale, the Giro d’Italia, and the Vuelta a España. Find out where cycling events are held in your own state at www.usacycling.org/events/.
- **Tour of California (TOC)**—This is the race in which Evan participates. A wealth of information pertaining to this race is at www.amgentourofcalifornia.com/. The site includes news of recent races, health tips for cyclists, a map of the current year’s route, and even Tweets from participants, including some famous racers mentioned above.
- **Doping in professional cycling**—An extensive discussion of this issue can be found at <http://bicycling.about.com/od/professionalcycling/a/cheating.htm>, along with links to a number of additional articles and opinions. (Note: this site contains several advertisements.)
- **Author**—Information about Janet Nichols Lynch, including photos and the titles of her other books, can be found at www.janetnicholslynch.com.

About the Author

Janet Nichols Lynch is the author of *Addicted to Her* and *Messed Up*, an ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers and a VOYA Top of the Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers title. She began her writing career as a cycling journalist and has raced bikes and cycle-toured the United States and Europe. Janet is also a high school teacher and teaches English part-time at the College of the Sequoias in Visalia, California, where she lives. Her short stories have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Seventeen*, and other publications. She has written novels and nonfiction for children and adults. Visit the author’s official website at www.janetnicholslynch.com.

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