

A Reading Group Guide to

Panic

By Sharon M. Draper

Discussion Questions

1. *Panic* begins with a confrontation between Justin, a dancer, and some local bullies. How does this help capture the reader's attention? Discuss the impact of bullies in schools. What is your opinion of how Justin handles the bullies?
2. What predictions can the reader make about Justin and his role as a dancer and a teenager? Compare those predictions to what really happens at the end of the novel.
3. Describe the dance academy and the role it seems to play in the lives of the students who take lessons there. How is the relationship between a dance teacher and her students different from an academic classroom teacher and his or her students?
4. Describe Diamond's home life. As you first meet Diamond, how is she like many young people today? How is she different? What seem to be her biggest insecurities? Her greatest strengths? What character traits does she have that will help her through the difficulties to come?
5. Describe the initial meeting between Diamond and Thane. How believable is it that he is able to convince her to leave with him? Do you think he planned that confrontation? What would you have done in the same situation?
6. Discuss the reactions of the students to Diamond's disappearance. Which characters stand out and why?
7. How does Diamond gradually discover the enormity and evil of her situation? What is both ironic and horrible about Thane's explanation of what is to happen?
8. Describe Donovan physically, emotionally, and socially. Why do you think a girl like Layla lets him mistreat her? What factors in her life might play a part? How is Donny's behavior another form of bullying?
9. If available, listen to the music Justin dances to in chapter 11. Visualize his performance as you listen. How do the words match both the movement and the music?
10. Compare and contrast the April 14 Sunday morning of Mercedes and of Diamond.

11. How do extraordinary events affect the lives of ordinary people? Describe how Diamond's disappearance affected her parents, her sister, and her friends.
12. Compare and contrast the relationship of Mercedes and Steve, and the relationship of Layla and Donovan. Give specific examples of noticeable differences.
13. The source of pleasure for most of the characters in the book is dance. Describe how music and dance in the novel help to aid various characters throughout. Why are music and performance easy ways to explain complicated feelings? How can self-expression be used as a tool for helping or healing?
14. Layla thinks she is in control of the situation when she lets Donny take the pictures. Describe how innocent lapses in judgment led to her problems the next day.
15. Discuss the power of social media, the Internet, and instant sharing of information. How can that be both positive and negative?
16. Compare and contrast the reaction of students at school to Layla's pictures and Justin's reaction to the pictures and to Layla.
17. How does Diamond find the strength to survive her ordeal? What does she do to cling to hope? How successful do you think her reintegration into both school and dance classes will be?
18. Compare and contrast Diamond's abuse and Layla's abuse. How are their situations similar? How are they different?
19. Explain the title of the novel. Why does the title have more than one possible interpretation? Use specific examples to support your answer.
20. Partner abuse in high school, bullying, and the criminality of Internet sexual abuse are topics that need to be discussed. Discuss how the lives of Diamond and the others are portrayed and how the characters can become voices for young readers.

Activities and Research

1. You are a reporter at one of the following scenes:

- the dance recital
- the video made by Diamond's parents, pleading for her release
- the scene where rescue crews arrive for Diamond
- classes and activities at the dance academy

Write the story for your newspaper.

2. Investigate child abductions. Find out statistics as well as solutions.
3. Investigate bullying in schools. Find out statistics as well as solutions.
4. Explain how the quotes from *Peter Pan* fit into the flow of each chapter. **OR** Read the original *Peter Pan* and analyze it as a children's story.
5. Write a letter to one of the characters in the book explaining your feelings about the events in the story. What advice would you give Diamond, Layla, Justin, or Mercedes?
6. Imagine it is three months after the end of the novel. Write a letter or create a conversation between the following characters:
 - Layla to Justin
 - Diamond to Shasta
 - Mercedes to Miss Ginger
 - Zizi to Jillian
 - Thane to his lawyer
7. In diary form, write the life of Diamond (after the abduction) for several months. Include details about how she copes with her bad memories, her lost dreams, and her hope for the future.
8. Trace the story of one of the following characters. Imagine you are a reporter doing a story on one of their lives. Write everything you know, as well as whatever you can infer about the character in order to write your magazine article.
 - Thane
 - Donovan
 - Miss Ginger
 - Zizi
9. Listen to the songs used in the novel and tell how each one fit into the themes of the story and the lives of the characters.
10. Describe the relationship between the friends in the book. Is friendship enough when situations become monumental and overwhelming to young people? Explain.

Writing Activities

1. COMPARISON PAPER

- A. "I thought you loved me." He increased the pressure.
Layla's mind reeled—he was going to kill her if he didn't stop. She could barely speak. "Please. You. Are. Hurting. Me. Stop! Stop!"

He squeezed even harder. "Then you got some decisions to make."

She felt dizzy. Her words gurgled. "You. Know. I. Love. You. Please. Let. Go." She could tell she was about to black out.

He released his hand. Layla slumped in relief against the door, inhaling and exhaling sharply. She rolled down the window, gulping the damp air.

B. "Please, please untie me!" Her head pounded, and her brain felt so fuzzy. She couldn't think. Why was the room spinning?

Thane laughed again. "You still don't get it, do you? You wanted to be in a movie, and you're just in time for your audition."

Diamond tried to think straight. Nothing made sense. She felt drugged. "Wha? What? I—I don't understand."

"No!" she screamed. "Let me go! Please, please, let me go!"

Write a paper comparing the situations of Layla and Diamond; or write about two people you know who faced horrible situations and compare how they dealt with it. Make sure you use specific details to make your paper effective.

2. DESCRIPTIVE PAPER

"But as the flickering lights sputtered out in tiny puffs of smoke, Justin felt a cold chill. It was too much like a hundred small deaths happening all at once."

Write a descriptive paper that uses sensory imagery. Use vivid verbs and powerful adjectives and adverbs as you write. Use as many of the senses as you can (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste).

3. NARRATIVE PAPER

As they headed for the stairs, Mercedes counted three policemen in the living room and two more in the den. Phones rang. Strange wires had been stretched across the floor. A bulky piece of electronic equipment sat on the dining room table next to a set of telephones.

"That stuff is for in case the kidnappers call for ransom—so they can trace the call," Shasta whispered.

"How do you know all this?"

"I listen at the top of the stairs."

Write a narrative paper from the point of view of someone who listened at the top of the stairs, or someone who overheard a conversation. Tell what the person might have learned, the reactions to the information, and the results of that knowledge. Make sure you use specific details to make your paper effective.

4. EXPOSITORY PAPER

Exhausted, she sat down and paid close attention to where she was. The room was small, the walls steeply slanted. It made her feel a little dizzy to look at them. A converted attic, she figured. The only window, a small octagon, was tucked at least twenty feet above her head, in the triangle where the two walls met. A chance to escape? Probably not. How would she ever get up there? Thin light, made gray by the rainy weather, filtered through it.

She paced the room, checking for anything she could use to help her. She tried to remove a picture from the wall, but found it was nailed there. There were no lamps. No decorations. No television. There was nothing she could use as a weapon. Not one thing. She put her ear to the door, but all she could hear was thick silence. It was as if she were in a tomb.

Write an expository (explanatory) paper that describes a room in your house or in your school, or an area in your neighborhood. Use as many specifics as possible.

5. PERSUASIVE PAPER

"Six years now. He got sent away when I was ten. I should be used to him being gone, but it still sucks."

"Does dancing help?" Mercedes asked.

"It totally saved me. It was my dad who found Miss Ginger's when I was in first grade; he's the one who convinced my mom to let me try out the classes. It's like somehow he knew that dancing made me feel real."

"Deep."

"He used to wait in the parking lot every night until I finished class."

"I remember! Sometimes you guys would give me a ride home. Didn't he always have a strawberry smoothie waiting in the cup holder for you?"

"Yep." Layla tried to smile, remembering. "He never missed a pickup. He never missed a show. And then he was gone."

Write a persuasive paper that argues the point: "Children who have parents who are incarcerated are negatively influenced because of it." OR "Children who have parents who are incarcerated are positively influenced because of it." OR "Children who have parents who are incarcerated are both positively and negatively influenced because of it." Give specific examples to support your opinions.

6. POINT OF VIEW PAPER

Another song began. "Just the Way You Are" by Boyce Avenue. It was slower, more sensuous. Breathing hard, Justin extended his hand to Layla. She smiled and reached out her hand to him. They moved together, almost as if they were one person. They twisted and stepped together. He twirled her around, then gently lifted her while the music surged around them. The words to the song were so perfect for Layla—for the

two of them, Mercedes thought. *"It's so sad to think she don't see what I see/When I see your face, there's not a thing that I would change/'Cause you're amazing, just the way you are . . ."*

Layla landed delicately and spun within the circle of Justin's arms. For a moment, there was only Justin, Layla, and the music that swirled around them."

Read the passage above and explain how the point of view of the character who makes the observation influences the description. How would Donovan have written this passage?

7. CHARACTER SKETCH PAPER

[H]er pointe shoes barely making a sound as she spun effortlessly with the music.

The final strains of the music, as bold and strong as Jillian's leaps, echoed in the background. The cheers and applause from the audience resounded. Jillian took her bows gracefully, then trotted off the stage in that awkward walk of girls who would prefer to be on pointe, in the air, above the rest of the world, rather than walking flat-footed on solid ground in heavy-toed pointe shoes.

Her makeup smeared with sweat, Jillian pushed Zizi and Layla out of her way, headed to the nearest garbage can, and threw up. Jillian always vomited after her performances. As Zizi said, she danced like the devil, then she puked.

Write a character sketch of a strong powerful person--a friend, relative, or family member. Use strong verbs and adjectives, as well as sensory imagery.

8. PERSONAL ESSAY

She found energy in thinking about the studio, which always felt comfortable, like a favorite sweatshirt. The smell of popcorn from the microwave in the café, the swirling strains of thousands of songs, the glaring reality of the mirrors that covered each wall. Miss Ginger's voice, demanding and gentle at the same time. The sound of fifteen pairs of tap shoes on the wooden floor. Sweat—honest, exhilarating sweat after a great class.

Diamond opened the door to the Crystal Pointe Dance Academy, walked into the main dance room, and inhaled deeply. It smelled of cocoa and costumes, of perspiration and popcorn, of happiness and hope. Happy smells a lot like leftover sweat, she thought with a smile.

Write a personal essay that describes a special memory, object, or place in your life. Explain why it is meaningful to you. Be sure to include sensory imagery (sight, smell, touch, taste, sound).

9. POETRY

Write a poem about one of the following topics, or another topic of your choice:

Stupid decisions
Lost and alone
Forever friends
The joy of dance
Escape
Thunderstorms
Controlled by love

Guide written by the author.

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