

The Rag and Bone Shop Study Guide

The Rag and Bone Shop by Robert Cormier

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Plot Summary

The Rag and Bone Shop was released in 2001. The author, Robert Corimer, is an award-winning author who received the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. His books have been translated into several different languages. The Rag and Bone Shop was Corimer's final novel before his death.

In this novel, Trent is a famous police interrogation officer working in Vermont. He is known for his 100 percent confession rate on all of the cases he works as a police interrogation officer. While he is employed by a police station in Vermont, police stations from around the country call him in for help on important cases. When a seven-year-old girl, Alicia Bartlett is murdered in Monument, the lead detective on the case, Braxton, calls Trent in to help obtain the confession of the last boy, Jason Dorrant, to see Alicia alive. Even though the police do not have any physical evidence that connects Jason to the murder, he is their only suspect and they direct their efforts into getting a confession from him.

At first, Trent is worshipped as the best interrogator in the country. Even the senator in Monument, whose grandson is a classmate of Alicia Bartlett, takes an interest in getting Trent to obtain the confession from Jason Dorrant. The senator offers Trent an opportunity to "write his own ticket" in his career if he obtains the confession. While Trent has good intentions when he first enters the interrogation room with Jason Dorrant, when Trent realizes the boy is innocent, Trent uses leading questions, techniques and tactics to obtain a false confession from Jason. By the end, Trent only cares about maintaining his 100 percent confession rate and furthering his career.

Trent's plan backfires on him when Sarah Downes tells Trent that it is impossible that Jason Dorrant confessed to the crime when they have a confession from Alicia's brother, Brad Bartlett. After Brad's alibis fell apart, Brad confessed to murdering his sister and leaving her body in the woods. Trent obtaining a false confession from Jason Dorrant has the opposite effect on his career, most likely obtaining a demotion, and wrecking his 100 percent confession rate, rather than furthering his career.

Part I

Part I Summary

In Part 1, the novel opens with Carl Seaton confessing to murdering three people, a family, in a home that Carl broke into. Carl is making the confession to Trent, who appears to be an attorney because he is recording the confession and mentions that the police are on their way. Carl is a 17-year-old boy that broke into the home of Aaron and Muriel Stone to steal guns from them while they were supposed to be way on vacation. When Carl goes upstairs, after finding three loaded guns, he finds the family is home and shoots all three of them while they are sleeping.

Part I Analysis

Carl sees himself as a metaphor for God as he stands in the doorway of the sleeping family bedrooms. He realizes he has the power to decide what happens to them, and he decides to shoot them to see what it feels like. When he finds their son asleep in another room, Carl kills him so the boy won't have to go through life without his parents, so he feels it was an act of compassion. Trent suggests that his wife, Lottie is dead because he mentions going home to the ghosts of an empty home without anyone to tell about getting Carl to confess to the crime.



Part II—Pages 11-16

Part II—Pages 11-16 Summary

In Part II, pages 11-16, Jason Dorrant wakes up to his first day of summer vacation between his seventh and eighth grade year. He introduces his family to the reader. He has an eight year old sister, Emma, who is very intelligent. His mother does a lot of volunteer work and his father is a big New England Patriots fan. Right now, his father is on a business trip in London. He plans on spending the morning at the Y swimming while his mom does her exercises and then the afternoon alone at home, while his sister is at her friend's house and his mom is doing her volunteer work.

Part II—Pages 11-16 Analysis

The way Jason describes himself infers that he is slow or has a learning disability. He also mentions that the kids at school seem to ignore him and that he gets along better with younger kids. He foreshadows a summer at camp but is looking forward to spending some days off at home before going to camp. Jason's interest in younger children might foreshadow him molesting or harm them in some way. It might also be that Jason relates better to younger children because he is emotionally younger than his age.



Part II—Pages 17-21

Part II—Pages 17-21 Summary

In Part II, pages 17-21, the body of Alicia Bartlett, a seven-year-old girl is found in the woods. The medical examiner says she most likely dies from blunt force trauma to the head. Her body doesn't show any defensive wounds, rape or molestation. Alicia died approximately one-hour after she went missing. Alicia's body is posed and covered. Jason Darrant is the last witness to see Alicia alive. Detective Braxton is in charge of the investigation and has a suspect that he is interviewing later in the afternoon.

Part II—Pages 17-21 Analysis

The lack of defensive wounds suggests that Alicia knows her attacker. The posing and covering of Alicia's body also suggests that it is someone who knows and cares about Alicia. It infers that Jason Darrant might have something to do with the murder because of his affection for younger children. The inference of Jason being the murderer returns again because the victim's brother is a classmate of Jason Darrant.



Part II—Pages 22-29

Part II—Pages 22-29 Summary

In Part II, pages 22-29, Jason Dorrant starts to cry when he hears of Alicia's murder. It is the first time Jason has cried since he got in a fight defending himself against Bobo Kelton pushing Jason in the school cafeteria, and Jason getting in trouble for it. Emma comes into Jason's room to see if Jason is OK since she knows he liked watching Alicia put her puzzles together. The doorbell rings and the detective is there to question Jason.

Part II—Pages 22-29 Analysis

When Jason says he is sorry for Alicia's death to Emma, it is as if he is seeking forgiveness for what he has done. The detective showing up at Jason's house to question him infers Jason is the prime suspect in the murder.



PART II—Pages 30-39

PART II—Pages 30-39 Summary

In PART II, pages 30-39, when the detective tells Jason he is the last one to see Alicia alive it takes Jason's breath away. The detective questions Jason about what happened at Alicia's house while Jason was there. The detective also asks what time Jason left and arrived home, as well as when Jason's mother and sister arrived home. Jason answers the detective's questions, but when Jason returns to his room, he thinks about all of the details he did not provide to the detective.

PART II—Pages 30-39 Analysis

In the details that Jason does not share with the detective, the conversation between Alicia and her brother, Brad, seems as if something happened between them earlier in the day. Whatever happened made Alicia madder and moodier than she normally is toward her older brother. Jason wonders if Brad has something to do with Alicia's murder.



Part II—Pages 40-43

Part II—Pages 40-43 Summary

In Part II, pages 40-43, the district attorney, Alvin Dark, asks Detective Braxton what he has on the Alicia Bartlett murder. The detective admits he has a suspect and a gut feeling. The detective also talks the district attorney into calling Trent, who is a famous interrogation officer, in on the case.

Part II—Pages 40-43 Analysis

The detective infers that Jason Dorrant is his primary suspect in the murder of Alicia Bartlett. The district attorney eludes to the fact that the detective has used his gut feeling over evidence in past cases, which may have caused them to lose the case.

Part II—Pages 44-51

Part II—Pages 44-51 Summary

In Part II, pages 44-51, Trent just finishes obtaining a confession when he receives a call from Detective Braxton. Braxton is waiting for a high-profile case to transition from a police officer to a professional who gives seminars and workshops on interrogating suspects. Trent tells Braxton to fax him the details of the case and to have the Senator's driver pick him at 6 a.m. the next morning.

Part II—Pages 44-51 Analysis

When Detective Braxton calls Trent, Braxton mentions that the senator is interested in solving the murder of Alicia Bartlett, which indicates to Trent that this may be his chance to make his transition.



PART II—Pages 52-61

PART II—Pages 52-61 Summary

In PART II, pages 52-61, officer Kendall leads Jason into the police headquarters building. Jason remembers how the officer arrived at his home that morning. The officer tells Jason's mom that they've brought in special interrogators to jog the memories of those walking the streets on Monday. This is why they want to question Jason again at headquarters. Jason's mother lets him go alone because she has to take his sister to the doctor.

PART II—Pages 52-61 Analysis

While Jason is waiting for questioning in the police station, he sees some of his classmates come in for questioning too. Even though Jason is the prime suspect, the police are establishing a scenario where it doesn't look that way so they can try to get a confession out of Jason or at least evidence that proves Jason is involved in Alicia's murder. Braxton makes it seem as if they are splitting the boys up for separate interrogations, but it is really just Jason being interrogated by Trent.



PART II—Pages 62-72

PART II—Pages 62-72 Summary

In Part II, pages 62-72, the senator's limousine picks up Trent to take him to interrogate Jason Darrant. Trent finds Sarah Downes with the district attorney's office in the limo. She is there to brief Trent on the case during their drive.

PART II—Pages 62-72 Analysis

Trent sense some doubt in Sarah's tone as she talks about Jason Darrant being the perpetrator. Trent's ability to pick up on this tone is what makes him so successful during interrogations. When Trent questions her on this, she admits that she is not convinced because there is no physical evidence that points to Jason. Trent realizes that Sarah reminds him of his wife, Lottie, which foreshadows a relationship forming between the two as the work on the Bartlett case together.



Part II—Pages 73-77

Part II—Pages 73-77 Summary

In Part II, pages 73-77, when Trent arrives at the police station, he is greeted by the senator. The senator tells him that the case is very important to the town and that if Trent solves it that the senator will help Trent in whatever career path that he wishes to take. Trent walks into the interrogation room, which is set up just as Trent advised Braxton to do.

Part II—Pages 73-77 Analysis

The interrogation room is small and cramped. This is so the suspect, Jason Darrant, does not feel comfortable. The chair Trent will sit in is slightly higher than the one Jason will sit in to make Trent appear bigger and more in control of the situation than Jason. All of these are tactics to get the confession out of Jason.



Part II—Pages 78-94

Part II—Pages 78-94 Summary

In Part II, pages 78-94, Trent leads Jason into the interrogation room. Every word Trent speaks and every movement Trent makes is calculated and part of the interrogation tactics and techniques that work to get the confession out of the perpetrator. Trent starts out questioning Jason about his life and then they move into specific questions about Monday, the day Alicia was murdered. While Trent reads Jason as being innocent, Trent also establishes that Jason like horror, science fiction and adventure books and movie, trying to show Jason's fondness for violence. Trent takes a break, leaving Jason in the room alone.

Part II—Pages 78-94 Analysis

Jason considers lying to Trent. He considers making up seeing a stranger in town that he saw the day of Alicia's murder. This could be Jason's need to please Trent or as a way to deflect the suspicion away from what he did to Alicia. At the break in the interrogation, Jason compares the interrogation with taking a quiz in school—he is not sure if he is passing or failing.



Part II—Pages 95-100

Part II—Pages 95-100 Summary

In Part II, pages 95-100, when Trent steps into the hall, he finds Sarah Downes pacing in front of the door to the interrogation room. She asks how it's going. Trent says they are just in the preliminary stages. Trent asks if they have any new leads and Sarah says she doesn't think Braxton is looking for anything new.

Jason decides he is thirsty after Trent suggests he might be thirsty before leaving the room. Jason decides he doesn't want to answer any more questions. He remembers they said his being there is voluntary, so Jason gets up out of his chair to leave.

Part II—Pages 95-100 Analysis

It seems as if the police have set their sights on Jason Dorrant as Alicia's murderer. Rather than prove this with evidence, the police seem to be working backwards, so they are trying to make the evidence fit Jason Dorrant. It is inferred that both Braxton and Trent are guilty of doing this in their past cases and it seems as if Jason may be another one of their victims.

It seems as if Trent is placing thoughts in Jason's head, such as when he suggests Jason might be thirsty. Jason also has sense of pleasing Trent by answering his questions correctly, rather than truthfully, which might lead to a false confession on Jason's part.



Part II—Pages 101-103

Part II—Pages 101-103 Summary

In Part II, pages 101-103, when Trent steps back into the interrogation room, it's empty and Jason is gone. Trent correlates Jason's escape with his guilt. Trent steps outside of the police station, spots Jason and calls his name. Trent convinces Jason to return to questioning because he tells Jason that leaving makes him look suspicious. Jason agrees to continue with the questioning and they go back inside together.

Part II—Pages 101-103 Analysis

When Trent tells Jason he is making himself look like a suspect by leaving, Jason shows concern for the first time. It seems as if he senses that there is more to Trent's agenda than simply finding the murderer. It is not clear yet as to whether or not Jason realizes that he is the suspect of Alicia's murder as far as the police are concerned.

Part II—Pages 104-111

Part II—Pages 104-111 Summary

In Part II, pages 104-111, when Trent and Jason return to the interrogation room, Trent tells Jason to forget that he tried to escape to get the word on the tape of the interrogation. Trent's new line of questioning convinces Jason that it is odd that he had a friendship with Alicia and even though Jason thought of Alicia as a friend, that she made fun of him just like the people that are not his friends. Jason asks for a drink and Trent breaks his own protocol to get Jason a drink. Trent's focus is on ending the interrogation with Jason's confession, collecting his fee, and getting his favor from the senator and what Trent believes is the truth.

Part II—Pages 104-111 Analysis

Trent suggests it is odd that Jason and Alicia were friends, considering the difference in their ages. Trent also convinces that it is good for Jason to talk about what happened to Alicia to express his feelings and regret. Trent is suggesting that Jason has remorse about killing Alicia, but Jason thinks his only regret is that he is sorry that someone did something to Alicia.



Part II—Pages 112-142

Part II—Pages 112-142 Summary

In Part II, pages 112-142, Trent continues the interrogation with Jason. He wraps up the questioning about whom Jason saw on his walk to Alicia's house and starts to ask questions about the time Jason spent at Alicia's house. Jason mentions that Alicia and Brad seemed to be mad at other, more than normal, about something that Brad might have done to Alicia earlier in the day. Trent asks Jason about his feelings for Alicia. In the middle of the questioning, Trent realizes that Jason is innocent, but ignores the nagging voice inside of him to stop the interrogation because he wants to take the senator up on his offer to "write his own ticket." Trent tells Jason that Jason is the prime suspect in the murder and offers to keep him safe by helping Jason to devise a strategy. Trent tells Jason that if Jason confesses to murdering Alicia that Trent can help him get the charges reduced, but if not then Jason might go to trial as an adult and spend his life in prison. Even though Jason continues to deny killing Alicia, Trent continues to paint a picture that leaves Jason no choice but to confess. Jason utters the words that Trent needs to hear.

Part II—Pages 112-142 Analysis

Trent believes that Jason is cunningly trying to paint Brad as a suspect in the murder. Trent decides that Jason is his target and therefore turns up the heat on the questioning in order to get Jason to confess. Trent tries to make Jason feel like a freak or point out how ridiculous it is that a seven-year-old girls and 12-year old boy could be friends, which is to make Jason believe that Alicia was making fun of Jason and not really his friend. Trent twisting Jason's words and pushing Jason foreshadows a false confession. It's ironic that Trent turns the questioning to Jason's feelings and how attractive Alicia is because there is no evidence of a sexual assault or molestation on Alicia's body. Trent plays on Jason's need to make Trent happy to continue the questioning when Jason wants to leave again. Trent is using leading questions to make it seem as if Jason knows the answers because he involved with the murder, such as asking Jason what he thinks the murder weapon was, after talking with Jason about how the area where the body was found is rocky.



Part III—Pages 145-149

Part III—Pages 145-149 Summary

In Part II, pages 145-154, Trent is back in his office in Vermont looking at the transcript of the interrogation with Jason Darrant. Trent remembers walking out of the interrogation room after obtaining Jason's confession and smirking at Sarah Downes to let her know that he obtained the confession. Sarah confronts Trent, saying that Trent made the boy confess because it isn't possible that Jason is the murderer. Sarah tells Trent that it was Brad that murdered Alicia and that they have him in custody. Trent's dispatcher interrupts his thoughts to let him know that Sarah is not answering her phone and Trent knows that Sarah will never return his messages. Trent also knows the senator won't be calling him either. the dispatcher reminds Trent of his meeting with the chief, which they both know means a demotion for him for obtaining a false confession.

Part III—Pages 145-149 Analysis

Trent knows what he did was wrong by eliciting a false confession from Jason Darrant. Trent did it to further his own career without much thought to the affect it would have on Jason Darrant. Before his wife died, she told Trent that he is what he does. In the end, Trent ends up being a deceptive liar that forces people to make false confessions. In the numerous cases he has been involved with, there is no telling how many times the confessions were real and how many were false. This might cause the legal system to reevaluate all of the cases Trent was involved in and could leave the cases open for appeal, which may free innocent prisoners, but might even free guilty ones.



Part III—Pages 150-154

Part III—Pages 150-154 Summary

In Part III, pages 150-154, Jason Dorrant has nightmares for the week following his interrogation and false confession. Jason feels like he doesn't belong anywhere in the world, including with his family. He is on medication and now he doesn't like to be alone. Jason is struggling with why he confessed to the murder when he didn't do it. He also wonders if he could confess to it if it is something he is capable of doing. Jason realizes that he could not murder someone like Alicia, but he could murder someone like Bobo Kelton. He goes into the kitchen and gets a butcher knife out of the drawer after thinking he can wait for Bobo outside of the recreation center where Bobo hangs out.

Part III—Pages 150-154 Analysis

It infers that Jason is seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist to deal with the aftermath of his experience with Trent. After his experience with Trent, Jason is questioning all of his thoughts and actions. Jason comes to the conclusion that he could murder someone like Bobo Kelton. It infers that the medication Jason is on makes him feel like he is in a dream world, which may be contributing to his thoughts that he can commit murder. Jason planning Bobo's murder foreshadows Jason going to the recreation center and killing Bobo Kelton when he comes out.



Characters

Carl Seaton

Carl Seaton is a 17-year-old boy. When the novel opens, Carl is confessing that he broke into the home of Aaron and Muriel Stone to steal their handguns. When he finds the family of three is home sleeping, Carl shoots them in their beds. Carl confesses his crime to an attorney by the name of Trent.

In the same week that Trent gets Carl Seaton to confess to his crimes, Trent is called in to help with the Alicia Barret case. When Trent meets Jason Dorrant, the suspect in the case, he sees a similarity between Carl and Jason in the innocence in both of the boys' eyes.

Trent

Trent is a police officer. He works out of the Vermont office in Highgate, Vermont. Trent is a famous interrogation officer. He is famous for always getting the criminals he interrogates to confess to their crimes. So far, he has a one hundred percent success rate. The other cops in the department dislike him, which Trent thinks is jealousy because he is such a great interrogation officer.

His wife, Lottie, is dead, so Trent now lives in their old home alone. It seems that he doesn't have much of a personal life. Instead, Trent focuses his efforts on his professional life. As the novel unfolds, he reveals that his wife died from complications of a car accident. The night before she died, they had a fight so their last words to each other were in anger.

Trent wants to break free from the police department and work for himself. He hopes to give seminars and workshops around the country training police officers on interrogation tactics and techniques. Trent has been biding his time waiting for a high-profile case to go out on his own. The Alicia Bartlett case seems to be exactly what he is waiting for, so when Braxton calls Trent to ask for his help in the case, Trent accepts the offer.

Jason Dorrant

Jason Dorrant is a boy between his seventh and eighth grade year at school. He has a younger sister, Emma, who is very intelligent. Jason's father is on a business trip in London and is a huge New England Patriots' fan. His mom does a lot of volunteer work. Jason is a middle-of-the-road student and doesn't really get along with kids his own age. Jason relates better to kids that are younger than him.



Jason is shy. He is somewhat of an introvert with children his own age. He does not like to draw attention to himself, which prohibits him from even raising his hand in class to answer the teacher's question.

Jason becomes the prime suspect in the murder of Alicia Bartlett. One of the reasons he is the prime suspect is he is the last person to see the girl alive.

Alicia Bartlett

Alicia Bartlett is a seven-year-old murder victim. Her body is found in a posed position in the woods near her home, covered with debris and leaves. Alicia's time of death is approximately one-hour after Jason Dorrant last saw Alicia on the front porch of her home. Alicia lives with her parents and older brother, who is a classmate of Jason Dorrant.

Detective Lieutenant George Braxton

Detective Lieutenant George Braxton is in charge of investigating Alicia Bartlett's murder. He is 47 years old and an insomniac. It is Detective Braxton's idea to bring Trent in on the interrogation of Jason Dorrant.

Bobo Kelton

Bobo Kelton is a bully at Jason's school. One day, in the cafeteria, Bobo pushes Jason. Jason turns around and hits Bobo with his fists. The day before, Jason witnesses Bobo pushing one of their girl classmates up against her locker, whispering something in her ear and twisting one of her breasts, while the girl shakes her head no.

Mr. Hobart

Mr. Hobart is the principal of Monument Middle School. This is the school Jason Dorrant and Alicia's brother attends. When Jason defends himself against Bobo, Mr. Hobart punishes Jason instead of Bobo.

Sarah Downes

Sarah Downes is the assistant district attorney in Monument. She rides in the senator's limousine to pick Trent up for the Jason Dorrant interview. Sarah briefs Trent on the case during their ride from Vermont back to Monument. It's also Sarah that informs Trent that Alicia's brother, Brad, confessed to the crime after Trent obtains the forced confession from Jason Dorrant.



Brad Bartlett

Brad Bartlett is the 12-year-old brother of Alicia Bartlett. He is an athlete at Monument Middle School and a classmate of Jason's. Brad is swimming in the Bartlett pool with his friends the day of Alicia's murder. Brad uses his friends as his alibi for the time of Alicia's murder, but when the alibis fall apart, Brad confesses to killing his sister.

Senator Gibbons

Senator Gibbons lives and works in Monument. He has taken an interest in the Alicia Bartlett case because his grandson is one of Alicia's classmates. The senator promises Trent whatever he wants for his career, if Trent obtains a confession from Jason Dorrant.



Objects/Places

Highgate, Vermont

Highgate is a small town in northern Vermont. It is near the Canadian border. It is also the police department that Trent works for as an interrogation officer.

Monument, Massachusetts

Monument, Massachusetts is in central Massachusetts. It is the town where Alicia Bartlett's murder takes place. Alicia's family and Jason's family live in Monument. Jason and Alicia's brother, Brad, attend Monument Middle School. Monument is also the town where Braxton works as a detective.

Alicia Bartlett's Porch

The porch on Alicia Bartlett's house is the last place that Jason Dorrant saw Alicia before her murder. Jason saw Alicia on the front porch of her home at 4 p.m. as he leaves the Dorrant home and goes to his own home.

The Woods

The woods near Alicia's and Jason's homes is the dump site for Alicia's body. The murderer places the body in the woods and covers it with leaves and debris.

Rock

A rock in the woods is thought to be Alicia's murder weapon. Since Alicia dies from blunt force trauma to the head, the police believe that a nearby rock in the woods is the murder weapon.

Monument Middle School

Monument Middle School is the school where Brad, Brad's friends and Jason attend. It is also the location where Jason defends himself against the school bully, Bobo Kelton, in the school cafeteria.



Playground

During recess, Jason sometimes goes over to the playground for the elementary school. He pushes the younger children, such as Alicia Bartlett on the swings. These actions are also used against Jason during the interrogation with Trent.

Interrogation Room

The interrogation room at the Monument police station is purposely set up to make Jason Dorrant feel uncomfortable and pressure him into confessing. Trent arranges for the room he uses to be as small as possible, so that Trent and Jason's knees almost touch. Trent also arranges for the interrogation room to be crammed with furniture to make it look smaller than it is. Finally, Trent arranges for the temperature in the room to be hot. This is the same room where Trent questions Jason and ultimately obtains a false confession from Jason.

Bartlett Pool

The Bartlett pool is where Jason and Alicia, as well as Brad and his friends were hanging out on the day of Alicia's murder. Alicia and Jason were putting together a puzzle. Brad and his friends were swimming and roughhousing in the pool.

Dorrant House

The police come to the Dorrant home to question Jason on what he saw and knows about the last day of Alicia's life. When the police department calls in Trent to interrogate Jason, another police officer picks Jason up from the Dorrant house to take him to the station for questioning.

Themes

Greed

One of the primary themes in the novel is greed. Greed represents itself in a couple of different ways throughout the novel. First, greed shows in the bullying that Bobo Kelton does to his classmates. Bobo's greed is his need to show that he is superior and stronger than his fellow classmates, including the girl he gropes in the hall and Jason Dorrant, who Bobo attacks in the school cafeteria.

The biggest show of greed comes from Trent, the interrogation officer. Trent has a need, urge and desire to maintain his 100 percent confession rate, no matter what the cost is to the confessors. All Trent seems to care about is getting away from the police station where he is currently employed and furthering his own career. While it is not clear that Trent has acted greedily in his previous cases, it is evident that he does so with Jason Dorrant in the Alicia Bartlett murder case.

In the end, Trent's actions even convince an innocent boy, Jason Dorrant, that he is capable of murder, even if Jason did not murder Alicia Bartlett. Trent's greed eventually pushes Jason to a self-fulfilling prophecy of being a murderer as Jason heads out at the end of the novel to murder Bobo Kelton.

Doing the Right Thing

Doing what is right is another primary theme in the novel. In fact, in doing the right thing, Jason Dorrant possesses an urge to help the police in their investigation of Alicia Bartlett's murder. Jason's naïve and innocent nature makes him believe that by answering the police's questions and the questions Trent has that Jason will play an integral part in solving the murder.

Trent even convinces Jason that in order for Jason to do the right thing that Jason has to confess to the murder. Even though Jason knows he did not murder Alicia, he allows his desire to do what is right to falsely confess to the murder. Jason is seeking approval from Trent, who he sees as an authority figure, and someone who can lead him to do what is right.

Loss of Innocence

The loss of innocence is another theme in the novel. Alicia and Jason's sister, Emma are innocent because they are only seven-years-old. Since the characters live in what seems as if it is a small town, murder and other crimes seem foreign to them. In addition, Jason seems emotionally younger than his 12 years.



Jason's loss of innocence begins when Trent starts accusing Jason of accidentally killing Alicia in the woods. While it takes a little while, Jason eventually realizes that the police think he is Alicia's murderer, even though Jason knows he is not. After Trent forces Jason into the false confession, Jason is the one that suffers the consequences.

Jason, in his own mind, realizes that if he could confess to something he knows he didn't do, then it must mean he is capable of murdering someone. This leads Jason to think about whom he might be able to murder. Jason comes to the conclusion he could murder Bobo Kelton. Jason's loss of innocence climaxes when he plans Bobo's murder and walks into the kitchen to obtain the murder weapon - a butcher knife - implying Jason is going to go kill Bobo.

Style

Point of View

The novel is in the first-person point of view, from the perspective of the character that the section focuses. The novel changes narrators, depending on the section. Sometimes the narrator is Trent and at other times the narrator is Jason Dorrant. The novel swings back and forth between the two characters as narrators.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each of the two main characters, Trent and Jason Dorrant. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Trent's head and Jason's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrators, even though they struggle between good and evil. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in Monument, Massachusetts. Other settings include Highgate, Vermont, which is where Trent lives and works as a police interrogation officer. The novel seems to cover a modern time, possibly in the early to late '90s. The main characters of the novel are involved in the murder investigation of Alicia Bartlett.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the character that seems one of the most innocent characters, Trent, is possibly one of the most dangerous even in the murder investigation. However, as events unfold, the investigation is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The author, however, interjects many high-level vocabulary words to fit into the setting of the novel. The language is modern and descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations. The language also possesses enough detail for the reader to truly understand what is taking place as the novel unfolds.

Structure

The novel contains three parts with subdivisions, but does not have chapters. Each section has a different number of subsections, ranging from two to 13 subsections. The length of each subsection is roughly three to 30 pages long. The novel tells the story in

both exposition and dialogue. The narrator injects his own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing his opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the murderer investigation in the novel, and the greed of the police and Trent to pin the murder on Jason Darrant. One subplot is the need for Jason to do the right thing in helping Trent and the police solve the murder, which ends up leading to Jason's false confession. Another subplot is the loss of innocence Jason and even some of the other characters experience because of Alicia's murder and the aftermath of falsely confessing to a murder Jason did not commit.



Quotes

"I know. They're dead. Gone. Can't bring them back. But—can the sin be erased" (Part I, p. 3).

"I didn't really help her. She was real good with the puzzles. But I got a kick out of her" (Part II, p. 28).

"Everything's important, Mrs. Dorrant. And especially Jason's information. We haven't found anyone else who saw her after Jason left her house. By tracking Jason's movements and making some kind of timetable, we can trace Alicia's movements. For instance, we know that Alicia was alone in her house at about four o'clock, when Jason left" (Part II, p. 35).

"This man's uncanny. Part of a new breed of interrogators, trained to extract confessions. He never fails" (Part II, p. 42).

"That's the hitch. No physical evidence. No witnesses. No weapon. No fingerprints. That's why we're calling you. We have a suspect who fits the profile. But we need a confession. Otherwise, he walks" (Part II, p. 49).

"But this is a new approach we're trying. We have some special interrogators down at headquarters who will be asking people who were out on the street on Monday what they might have seen" (Part II, p. 55).

"Down where all the ladders start, in the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" (Part II, p. 71).

"You can write your own ticket. I keep my promises" (Part II, p. 75).

"They're kind of violent too, aren't they" (Part II, p. 84).

"The line of questioning so far has thrown him off balance a bit. I think the stage is set for the next level" (Part II, p. 97).

"But you can't leave like this. It makes you look suspicious" (Part II, p. 103).

"There are such things as trauma, Jason. Shock. When something like this happens, the death of a friend, it can affect you emotionally, deeper than you think. And it's



sometimes good to express your sadness and your anger and your regret" (Part II, p. 108).

"Opportunity and motive are the most important aspects of a case, Jason. And you had both" (Part II, p. 129).

"Don't forget your appointment with the chief" (Part II, p. 149).



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Trent? Why has he chosen to come to Monument, Massachusetts to aid in the interrogation of Jason Dorrant? Why does he like Sarah Downes as soon as he meets her? Why does he obtain a confession from Jason even after he realizes that Jason is innocent? What are the repercussions from Trent's actions?

Discuss the relationship between Jason and Alicia. Are they friends, foes, or somewhere in between? Is there competition in their relationship? How does Jason feel about Alicia? How does Alicia feel about Jason? Why does Jason think Alicia might have been mocking him rather than being his friend? What does he do about it? What happens to Jason?

Who is Jason Dorrant? Is he an innocent boy that is emotionally immature or something else? Why do you think Jason gets along with girls that are so much younger than him, such as his sister and Alicia Bartlett? Why do you think Jason confesses to Alicia's murder? What role do you think Trent plays in the actions and decisions that Jason makes?

Why does Mrs. Dorrant allow her son to undergo questioning at the police station without an adult present? What does this say about her character? What, if anything, do you think Mrs. Dorrant knew about Jason's involvement in Alicia's murder? Why do you think Mrs. Dorrant doesn't come down to the station at some point during Jason's interrogation?

Discuss Trent's interrogation scenario. What impact do his tactics and techniques have on the suspects he interrogates? How does it motivate them to confess and how does it derail their lives? Do these techniques have anything to do with Jason's confession? How does each character learn to deal with the murder?

What do you think causes Jason to decide to murder Bobo Kelton? Do you think it has anything to do with Trent? Is it the medication Jason is on that makes his mind fuzzy and real life to see like a dream? Is it something else? Do you think Jason carries out his plot to murder Bobo Kelton? Why or why not?

What do you think happens to Trent? Do you think he is demoted? Do you think he gets fired? Do you think that it brings his other confessions into question?