

Reading Guide

Unhooking the Moon by Gregory Hughes



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The author:

Gregory Hughes was born and lives in Liverpool. After being expelled from Jesuit school, he went to a home for wayward boys, where he spent some very happy times. After some madcap years in his youth, he went to university to study computers. He has worked as everything from a dishwasher to a deep sea diver, and has worked in many countries including Norway, Canada and America. *Unhooking the Moon* is his first novel.

The book:

Meet the Rat: A dancing, football-playing gangster-baiting ten-year-old. When she foresaw her father's death, she picked up her football and decided to head for New York. Meet her older brother Bob: Protector of the Rat, but more often her follower, he is determined to find their uncle in America and discover a new life for them both. On their adventures across the flatlands of Winnipeg and through the exciting streets of New York, Bob and the Rat make friends with a hilarious con man and a famous rap star, and escape numerous dangers. But is their Uncle a rich business man, or is the word on the street, that he something more sinister, true? And will they ever find him?

Talking points:

- Beep this, beep that. The Rat is not your conventional heroine; she is foul-mouthed and precocious, but also vulnerable and full of life. Do you think the portrayal of her character is realistic, and do you like her?
- 'I didn't really believe what she [the Rat] said. But, like a child being told a fairytale, I felt better for hearing it.' Bob is sometimes the Rat's Protector, but more often her follower. Discuss the bond between the siblings and the nuances of their relationship.
- Winnipeg is home for Bob and Rat, but most of the action in the book happens in dark and dangerous New York. Discuss how the sense of place along the pair's adventurous journey enforces the plot.
- Native myth, spirituality and religion are interweaved through the story. What do you think Gregory Hughes is trying to say through the Rat's premonitions and the Chief's traditions?
- Bob is on a metaphorical journey as well as a literal one in *Unhooking the Moon*. Can you relate your own growth as a teenager to Bob's coming of age?

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Breakfast at Tiffany's by Truman Capote
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time by Mark Haddon
Solace of the Road by Siobhan Dowd
The Bride's Farewell by Meg Rosoff

More about Gregory Hughes:

Gregory Hughes at Quercus: www.quercusbooks.co.uk

The Booktrust Teenage Prize celebrates the best contemporary writing for young people

This guide provides information about some exciting online resources as well as ideas to trigger in-depth discussion during class or with a reading group. There are six guides, one for each of the 2010 shortlisted titles.