

Reflections:

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *Deathwatch*

*by Robb White*

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## **Chapter 1**

1. Early in this chapter, Ben tells Madec to wait until he has seen horns before he fires his gun. Madec is so anxious to kill a bighorn that he does not want to listen to this advice. While Ben seems like a character with great patience, Madec seems to have very little. In a few paragraphs, write about an instance in your life when it was difficult to have patience, though you knew it was probably the right thing to do. Be sure to include the reason for your impatience and the way it affected your performance.
2. Early in their time together, Madec tells Ben that he is “not the type of man who can understand big-game hunting.” Madec makes a hasty, maybe even false, assumption about Ben before getting to know him. There are misjudgments every day—in the news, at school, or even at home. Pick one and imagine you are a reporter for a local paper. Write a brief article that tells what happens when people make misjudgments and how they affect others.
3. Madec explains to Ben that he hunts because he enjoys the satisfaction of outwitting the animals he stalks and kills. The sport of hunting often creates controversy; many people support the right to hunt, but others feel it is inhumane and unnecessary. What are your views about hunting? Write a brief letter to the editor of a hunting magazine discussing your feelings about the right to hunt.
4. Madec only needs Ben to help find the bighorn; once bighorn is found, Madec makes it clear that Ben will no longer be needed. It is clear that Madec does not enjoy Ben’s company and is frustrated about having to rely on someone he does not like. Describe a situation similar to Madec’s, in which you had to rely on someone you did not like or trust. Be specific about your feelings, which may include resentment or uncertainty. If you have never experienced this type of situation, but you know of someone who has, you may write about that experience instead. Try to imagine how you would feel.
5. At the end of the chapter, it is clear Madec is not an honest man. It seems his intentions are to ignore his fatal mistake, and if Ben does not insist on verifying Madec’s story, he may get away with being dishonest. Do you think lying is ever justified? Write a letter to a friend, presenting your opinion and the reasoning behind it.

## **Chapter 2**

6. Ben discovers that the man Madec has shot was a local prospector; later, Ben describes other prospectors he has known. Do a little research into the history of prospecting in the United States. When and where was prospecting the most common? How successful has prospecting been in our country? How much prospecting still goes on today? When you are finished your research, make a list of ten interesting facts you discover about prospecting in the United States.
  
7. The dead prospector has left behind very little to identify himself. What gives us an identity? Take inventory of the things that make you who you are. This list might include your name or social security number, but it can also include a birthmark, a habit, or a distinctive talent. What traits or abilities make you different from everyone else?
  
8. Madec tells Ben that his shooting the prospector was a “pure accident.” Compose an argument to agree or disagree with this statement. Include in your written argument evidence from *Deathwatch*, in addition to your own observations and conclusions.
  
9. Madec attempts to persuade Ben not to tell the authorities that he shot the prospector. In one attempt, he offers Ben money, and when this does not work, he threatens to implicate Ben in the shooting. What are other ways that people can be persuaded to do something they don't want to do? Briefly describe one or two other means of persuasion. Include examples from your own experiences, or even from something you have heard on the news or seen on a television show or a movie.

## **Chapter 3**

10. At the beginning of this chapter, the narrator says that Madec's voice had a "chiding, teacherlike quality." Tone of voice can produce many different reactions and responses. What different tones of voice do you use? Does your tone change, depending on who you are talking to or your mood? In a note to a friend, describe the different tones of voice you use each day with the people around you.
11. Madec says that he believes people in a small town think and behave differently from people in a big city. What are some common perceptions of people who are from each area? Make a comparison chart in your journal. In one column, list the traits you think are common to people from small towns, and in the other column list traits you feel are common to people from the city. Your chart should use headings like the following:

**PEOPLE FROM A SMALL TOWN    PEOPLE FROM A BIG CITY**

12. While discussing his potential fate if Ben were to turn him in, Madec insinuates that the justice system is easily manipulated and fooled into punishing the wrong person. Do you believe that our justice system works fairly? Imagine you are writing a letter to a judge; give an example of fair or unfair treatment. Briefly explain why you think so.
13. When Ben first realizes that Madec intends to frame him for the murder of the prospector, he does not exactly feel fear or even apprehension. Instead, he experiences an almost physical sensation, like "a chill gripping his shoulder blades." Write a poem that describes Ben's slow realization that Madec intends to frame him and perhaps cause his death. In your poem, use descriptive adjectives that convey Ben's "chill" to the reader.
14. After calling Ben a loser and a nobody, Madec states that, "The world is already too full of men like you." Do you believe the world can have too many of a certain kind of person? Write a short essay answer to that question, giving precise reasons for your belief.

## **Chapter 4**

15. Ben is left in the middle of the desert with nothing to help him survive. If you were going to be stranded in the desert, what 12 items would you like to have that might help you survive. Make a list of them, keeping in mind that each item should be portable—nothing too large or heavy.
16. Ben's hopes rise when he remembers the old prospector's clothing, boots, rope and groundsheet, and he hurries back to get them. When he arrives, he finds Madec has outwitted him; Madec has removed every article of clothing and taken the rope and groundsheet away. Ben's hopes are temporarily dashed. Do you remember a time in your life when, after becoming very excited about a possibility, you were extremely disappointed? Briefly describe the circumstances and how you dealt with them.
17. As Ben stares up at the stars, he observes that they appear both comforting and threatening. It is, at first, surprising that these stars can have such contradictory qualities. Write an essay about something else in nature, or in your life, that you have found to be positive and negative at the same time.
18. Ben happens upon a small metal box in the prospector's camp. When he finally manages to get it open he finds in it a few personal possessions: a slingshot, a radio, batteries, a tobacco pouch, some buckshot, and a billfold containing money and a snapshot. Imagine Ben also found a letter this prospector had written to one of the people in the snapshot. Write this brief letter; in it explain what you have been doing for the past few years that you have spent alone in the desert. Perhaps you might also explain why you came to the desert in the first place.
19. The items Ben finds in the prospector's box are obviously things the old man treasured, because he took care to keep them safely locked away. What things do you value? Make a short list of what you value most. Your list can include the non-physical, like the love of your family or your friendships with certain people, as well as the physical items.

## **Chapter 5**

20. As Ben searches for water, he finds himself having to choose between two relatively difficult routes. He can either drop down a twelve-foot-high cliff, or walk along it until it merges again with the mountain, and thus gain an easier slope to descend. Sometimes, in order to gain a reward, we have to choose between two tough tasks. Write a brief diary entry in which you describe a time when you had to make a choice between two unpleasant or difficult tasks. What were the circumstances surrounding your choice? Why did you make that choice? What was the result?
21. As Ben works his way down the twelve-foot cliff, Madec begins shooting at him with the Hornet rifle. His shooting is quite precise; he intends to keep Ben away from the basin of water, but does not intend to shoot him. In the sport of hunting, it is obvious that precision is important. Can you think of other hobbies, sports, and professions that require great precision? Make a list of ten. Under each example, use a few sentences to explain why precision is important to your choice.
22. Ben considers hiking north, across the desert, but realizes this would be an impossible journey for an injured man without food, water, or protection from the elements. Do a little research on the Internet to find out how long someone can survive without food and water. Write a paragraph about each, explaining your findings and discussing the effects that going without food and water can have on the body.
23. At a moment when Ben feels defeated, he remembers the story of a family who found themselves stranded in the desert. The family did “everything wrong,” according to Ben. He recalls the mistakes they made and then reflects on his own position. He always thought he could survive in the desert if he became stranded; but without the ability to move, and without resources, he begins to doubt himself. Write a letter to Ben, encouraging him to not give up. In your letter, recount an instance when you felt you wanted to give up, but with persistence, succeeded in accomplishing something.