READING IS AN ADVENTURE.

Carl Hiaasen
Billy Dickens, a loner and snake enthusiast, lives with his free-spirited mother in Florida. He writes a column for the Miami Herald and is the author of many bestselling novels, including Razor Girl and Bad Monkey. His books for younger readers include the Newbery Honor winner Hoost, as well as Slash, Chomp, and Slink — No Surrender. You can read more about Hoost's work at carlhiaasen.com, and follow him on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter at @Carl_Hiaasen.

Billy Dickens was born and raised in Florida. He writes a column for the Miami Herald and is the author of many bestselling novels, including Razor Girl and Bad Monkey. His books for younger readers include the Newbery Honor winner Hoost, as well as Slash, Chomp, and Slink — No Surrender.

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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Lead a class discussion about the difference between “endangered,” “threatened,” and “vulnerable” species.

- What and who determines if a species is placed on this list? (animals.mom, difference-between-endangered-threatened-vulnerable-species-11408.html)

Tell students that Squirm is set in both Montana and Florida. Have them investigate which species are on the lists in these states.

- Connects with Common Core State Standards in Reading: RF.3.1, L.3.4, W.3.2, 3.2, Language: SL.3.1, 3.3; Knowledge of Language: L.3.5.

VOCABULARY

Students may encounter some unfamiliar words while reading the novel. Ask them to try to define these words, taking clues from context. Such words may include: cloacophagous (p. 3), primal (p. 4), and fixated (p. 15).


SPECIAL SPECIES

There are 350 different kinds of birds and 27 varieties of snakes that live in the Everglades. Ask students to identify at least 20 birds and five snakes common to the area. Have them do a colored sketch and write a brief description for a wildlife brochure on Everglades National Park.

EXPLORING THE EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

In Hoot, Roy gains a greater appreciation of wildlife when the Bearbats take a Sunday afternoon boat trip through the Everglades. Ask the class to study the Everglades' ecosystems. Divide students into groups. Ask each group to select one of the endangered species in Everglades National Park and to plan a campaign for saving the species. This may include posters, pamphlets, letters, etc.

READ AND EXPLORE WILDLIFE

All of Carl Hiaasen’s books take place partly in Florida and emphasize the importance of wildlife preservation. As you read, explore Florida’s ecosystems and the implications of using its resources through the below projects.

EXTRA, EXTRA! RESEARCH THE EVERGLADES!

Ask students to find websites or newspaper and magazine articles to help them understand oil drilling and oil use in present-day America. Then engage them in a discussion about whether land like the Everglades should be kept pristine from oil drilling and mining or if these activities should be allowed. Be sure that students address the impact on animals (especially endangered species) and their habitats.

GET TO KNOW THE FLORIDA KEYS

The Florida Keys are a national marine sanctuary. Visit www.sanctuaries.nos.noaa.gov and ask them to describe the purpose of the national marine sanctuary. How are sanctuaries selected? What federal government agency manages the sanctuaries? Have students write a brief description about the Key West Sanctuary for a travel magazine. Include information about special programs to protect it.
ABOUT THE BOOK

Billy Dickens, a loner and snake enthusiast, lives with his free-spirited mother in Florida where she moves the family from town to town in search of bald eagle nests. He hasn’t seen his father since his parents divorced when he was four years old. Now an eighth grader, Billy conducts some clever detective work and finds that Dennis Dickens, his father, lives in Montana, where he is involved in some type of secret work. Billy travels across the country in search of his elusive father, and finds himself on a journey in which he floats down a river with his father’s new wife and stepdaughter, hikes deep into a mountain, and comes dangerously close to a giant bear and her cubs. His only communication with his father is through a note that drops from a drone. Later, his father returns to Florida to apologize for his years of absence and takes Billy on a mission to the Everglades to save an endangered Florida panther from a wealthy poacher.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CARL HIAASEN was born and raised in Florida. He writes a column for the Miami Herald and is the author of many bestselling novels, including Razor Girl and Bad Monkey. His books for younger readers include the Newbery Honor winner Hoot, as well as Scat, Chomp, and Skink—No Suitcase. You can read more about Hiaasen’s work at carlhiaasen.com, and follow him on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter at @Carl_Hiaasen.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Lead a class discussion about the difference between “endangered,” “threatened,” and “vulnerable” species. What and who determines if a species is placed on these lists? (animals.mom/…difference-between-endangered-threatened-vulnerable-species-11480.html)

Tell students that Squirm is set in both Montana and Florida. Ask them to find out which species are on the lists in these states.

Preparation

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EXPLORING THE EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

In Hoot, Roy gains a greater appreciation of wildlife when the Barnharts take a Sunday-afternoon boat trip through the Everglades. Ask the class to study the Everglades’ ecosystems. Divide students into groups. Ask each group to select one of the endangered species in Everglades National Park and to plan a campaign for saving the species. This may include posters, commercials, letters, etc.

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EXTRA, EXTRA! RESEARCH THE EVERGLADES!

Ask students to find websites or newspaper and magazine articles to help them understand oil drilling and oil spills in present-day America. Then engage them in a discussion about whether land like the Everglades should be kept pristine from oil drilling and mining or if these activities should be allowed so that people can address the impact on animals (especially endangered species) and their habitats.

GET TO KNOW THE FLORIDA KEYS

The Florida Keys are a national marine sanctuary. Refer students to www.sanctuaries.nao.noaa.gov and ask them to describe the purpose of the national marine sanctuary. How are sanctuaries selected? What is the government role in protecting the sanctuaries? Have students write a brief description about the Key West Sanctuary for a travel magazine. Include information about special programs to protect it.
ABOUT THE BOOK
Billy Dickens, a loner and snake enthusiast, lives with his free-spirited mother in Florida where she moves the family from town to town in search of bald eagle nests. He hasn’t seen his father since his parents divorced when he was four years old. Now an eighth-grader, Billy conducts some shady detective work and finds that Dennis Dickens, his father, lives in Montana, where he is involved in some type of secret work. Billy travels across the country in search of his elusive father and finds himself on a journey in which he floats down a river with his father’s new wife and stepdaughter, hikes deep into a mountain, and comes dangerously close to a grizzly bear and her cubs. His only communication with his father is through a note that drops from a drone. Later, his father returns to Florida to apologize for his years of absence and takes Billy on a mission to the Everglades to save an endangered Florida panther from a wealthy poacher.

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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES
Lead a class discussion about the difference between “endangered,” “threatened,” and “vulnerable” species. What and who determines if a species is placed on these lists? (animals.mom.com/wildlifehabitats/managed/bald-eagle-florida) Tell students that Squirm is set in both Montana and Florida. Ask students to find out which species are on the lists in these states.

READING ACTIVITIES
Billy Dickens, a loner and snake enthusiast, lives with his free-spirited mother in Florida where she moves the family from town to town in search of bald eagle nests. He hasn’t seen his father since his parents divorced when he was four years old. Now an eighth-grader, Billy conducts some shady detective work. Billy travels across the country in search of his elusive father and finds himself on a journey in which he floats down a river with his father’s new wife and stepdaughter, hikes deep into a mountain, and comes dangerously close to a grizzly bear and her cubs. His only communication with his father is through a note that drops from a drone. Later, his father returns to Florida to apologize for his years of absence and takes Billy on a mission to the Everglades to save an endangered Florida panther from a wealthy poacher.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION
• There are several incidents of bullying in the novel. How does Billy stand up to the bullies in his school? What does he do to defend Chin? Discuss the significance of the gift that Chin gives him. Billy’s mother reminds him that the school has rules about bullying in the Code of Conduct (p. 8). How are these rules universal? Debate whether such rules are always effective.
• Describe Billy’s mother. The family moves often in search of bald eagle nests. Discuss how the frequent moves affect Billy and his sister, Belinda.
• Billy is curious about his dad. Why does his mother fear losing the address labels on the envelopes containing his child support payments? Billy manages to piece together the address. How does he convince his mother to let him go to Montana? Explain why Billy’s mother sends someone disguised as Billy’s uncle to meet him at the airport. What does Billy discover when he gets to his father’s house?
• Describe Dennis Dickens. Billy’s father Why is he so secretive about his job? How does Aunt Sophie’s money allow him to follow his passion? At what point does he decide to tell Billy the truth about his work? How does he know he can trust Billy with the truth?
• Billy’s mom says that there is nothing “usual” about Dennis Dickens. Cite evidence that she is correct. Why does she call Dennis Dickens a “serial quilter”? (p. 41) How might the same thing be said about Billy’s mother? Discuss whether they were too much alike to live together?
• Squirm is defined as a sharp and often sardonic or ironic utterance designed to cut or give pain. Billy is a master of squirm. Identify some of his many sarcastic remarks. How does squirm make Billy appear brave and in control?
• Billy lies to his mother on several occasions. He says, “When you’re not used to lying, it’s hard to get tripped up.” (p. 31) What lies does he tell, and when does he come close to getting tripped up?

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EXPLORING THE EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM
In Hoot, Roy gains a greater appreciation of wildlife when the Barths take a Sunday afternoon boat trip through the Everglades. Ask the class to study the Everglades’ ecosystems. Divide students into groups. Ask each group to select one of the endangered species in Everglades National Park and to plan a campaign for saving the species. This may include posters, pamphlets, letters, etc.

EXTRA, EXTRA! RESEARCH THE EVERGLADES!
Ask students to find websites or newspaper and magazine articles to help them understand oil drilling and oil-in-use during the present day. Then, engage them in a discussion about whether land like the Everglades should be kept pristine from oil drilling and mining or if these activities should be allowed so that students understand the impact on animals (especially endangered species) and their habitats.

GET TO KNOW THE FLORIDA KEYS
The Florida Keys are a national marine sanctuary. Rather than visit www.squirm.com and ask them to describe the purpose of the national marine sanctuary. How are sanctuaries selected? What type of government agency regulates them? The sanctuary? Have students write a brief description about the Key West Sanctuary for a travel magazine. Include information about special programs to protect it.

Eagle in Montana (Bald Eagle Outreach). Ask students to research the similarities and differences between these two types of eagles. Then have them create an informative PowerPoint presentation that Billy’s mother might show to local bird-watchers.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE
Students may encounter some unfamiliar words while reading the novel. Ask them to try to define these words, taking clues from context. Such words might include: cloacophobiac (p. 3), primal (p. 4), nonverbal (p. 4), dandelion (p. 15). Billy’s mother’s move family throughout Florida in search of bald eagles. (myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/managed/bald-eagle/) is the story of a golden eagle in Montana (Bald Eagle Outreach). Ask students to research the similarities and differences between these two types of eagles. Then have them create an informative PowerPoint presentation that Billy’s mother might show to local bird-watchers.

VOCABULARY/Acquisition & Use
Carl Hiaasen is noted for writing ecological mysteries. The main focus of a mystery is a crime that needs solving. Ask students to write a paper that discusses why Squirm is an ecological mystery. What’s the crime? How is there more than one mystery to be solved? What is Billy’s role in solving both mysteries? Cite specific scenes and use direct quotes from the novel to support your arguments.

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SQUIRM EDUCATORS’ GUIDE

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- There are several incidents of bullying in the novel. How does Billy stand up to the bullies in his school? What does he do to defend Chin? Discuss the significance of the gift that Chin gives him. Billy’s mother reminds him that the school has rules about bullying in the Code of Conduct (p. 8). How are these rules universal? Debate whether such rules are always effective?
- Describe Billy’s mother: the family moves often in search of bald eagle nests. Discuss how the frequent moves affect Billy and his sister, Belinda.
- Billy is curious about his dad. Why does his mother fear that the address labels on the envelopes containing his child support payments? Billy manages to piece together the address. How does he convince his mother to let him go to Montana? Explain why Billy’s mother sends someone disguised as Billy’s uncle to meet him at the airport. What does Billy discover when he gets to his father’s house?
- Describe Dennis Dickens, Billy’s father. Why is he so secretive about his job? How does Aunt Sophie’s money allow him to follow his passion? At what point does he decide to tell Billy the truth about his work? How does he know he can trust Billy with the truth?
- Billy’s mom says that there is nothing “usual” about Dennis Dickens. Cite evidence that she is correct. Why does she call Dennis Dickens a “serial quitter”? (p. 4) How might the same thing be said about Billy’s mother? Discuss whether they were too alike to live together.
- Squarcia is defined as a sharp or sardonic or ironic utterance designed to cut or give pain. Billy is a master of sarcasm. Identify some of his many sarcastic remarks. How does sarcasm make Billy appear brave and in control?

- Billy lies to his mother on several occasions. He says, “When you’re not used to lying, it’s hard to get tripped up.” (p. 31) What lies does he tell, and when does he come close to getting tripped up?

Why does Billy feel he must lie? Debate whether he is protecting his mother or himself.

- Billy becomes separated from Summer Chasing-Hawks and Little Thunder-Lynx in the high-fiber country of the Rockies. He operates a remote-controlled drone hovering over him. Discuss the note that Dennis drops from the drone (p. 53). What is the irony in his writing “Loved Dad”? Discuss why Dennis Dickens uses the note, and that moment, to apologize for all the last years with his children.
- Explain why Billy feels angry and sadness when his parents divorce. Discuss what kind of person does Billy get to be? How did they become so secretive about his job? How has Billy grown in his confidence and ability to resist?” (p. 248), and “Don’t let them tell you you’re turned to shame.” (p. 114) Dennis Dickens doesn’t fear the poachers. Why does he fear his family? At what point does he confront his fear and shame?
- Describe the relationship that Billy forms with Summer Chasing-Hawks and Little Thunder-Lynx. How do they feel about Dennis Dickens?
- Billy embarks on a journey with his father in Florida to find the poacher Lincoln Chumley. Discuss Billy and Chin’s relationship. Billy says, “You can’t just forget.” Billy’s mother reminds him that the school has rules about bullying in the Code of Conduct. How does the school handle bullying?

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Lead a class discussion about the difference between “endangered,” “threatened,” and “vulnerable” species. What and who determines if a species is placed on these lists? (animals.mom.com/definition/endangered-threatened-vulnerable-species-11408.htm) Tell students that Squarcia is set in both Montana and Florida. Have them find out which species are on the lists in these states.

- Locate and read the following definitions:
  - Endangered: A species is endangered when there are fewer than 100 mature individuals of the species remaining in the wild.
  - Threatened: A species is threatened when it is likely to become endangered in the near future.
  - Vulnerable: A species is vulnerable when its population size is already small and it is at risk of becoming endangered soon.

- Have students research the similarities and differences between these two types of eagles. Then have them create an informative PowerPoint presentation that Billy’s mother might show to local bird-watchers.

- Have students research the ESA (fws.gov/endangered) and the local newspaper that Billy Dickens might write in. Discuss how the agency regulates it? How is it regulated? Have students research other types of animal species on these lists. (animals.mom.com/definition/endangered-threatened-vulnerable-species-11408.htm)

- Divide students into groups. Ask each group to select one of the endangered species in Everglades National Park to research. Each group should include posters, pamphlets, letters, etc. to create an informative PowerPoint presentation that Billy’s mother might show to local bird-watchers.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Identify the figurative language in the following passage: “Billy’s like looking for a microscopic needle in a supersized haystack. A needle that doesn’t want to be found!” (p. 73) What is the haystack? Who is the needle? Ask students to write a simile or metaphor that describes the scene when Billy finds his father tied up and left to be eaten by the grizzly bears.
- Have students research the similarities and differences between these two types of eagles. Then have them create an informative PowerPoint presentation that Billy’s mother might show to local bird-watchers.

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EXPLORING THE EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM

In Hoot, Roy gains a greater appreciation of wildlife when the Baraths take his Sunday-afternoon boat trip through the Everglades. Ask the class to study the Everglades’ ecosystem. Divide students into groups. Ask each group to select one of the endangered species in Everglades National Park and to plan a campaign for saving the species. This may include posters, pamphlets, letters, etc.

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Ask students to find websites or newspaper and magazine articles to help them understand oil drilling and oil in present-day America. Then engage them in a discussion about whether land like the Everglades should be kept pristine from oil drilling and mining or if these activities should be allowed to ensure that states address the impact on animals (especially endangered species) and their habitats.

GET TO KNOW THE FLORIDA KEYS

The Florida Keys are a national marine sanctuary. Visit their website (sanfs.noaa.gov) and ask them to describe the purpose of the national marine sanctuary. Have students select different species of concern and write letters to the sanctuary? Have students write a brief description about the Key West Sanctuary for a travel magazine. Include information about special programs to protect it.