

## EDUCATORS' GUIDE & ACTIVITIES

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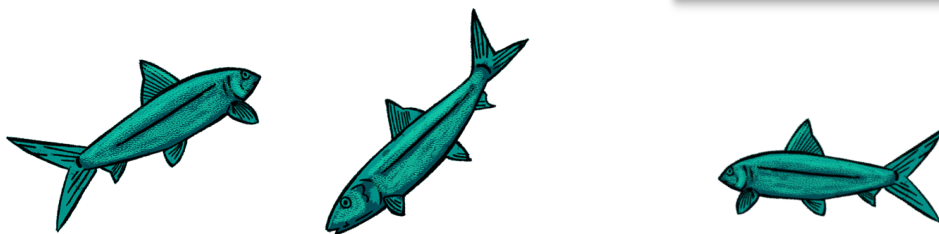


## About the Book

Wrecker needs to deal with smugglers, grave robbers, and pooping iguanas—just as soon as he finishes Zoom school. Welcome to another wild adventure in Carl Hiaasen's Florida!

Valdez Jones VIII calls himself Wrecker because his great-great-great-great-great-grandfather salvaged shipwrecks for a living. So, is it destiny, irony, or just bad luck when Wrecker comes across a speedboat that has run hard aground on a sand flat? The men in the boat don't want Wrecker to call for help—in fact, they'll pay him to forget he ever saw them.

Wrecker would be happy to forget, but he keeps seeing these men all over Key West—at the marina, even in the cemetery. And now they want more than his silence—they want a lookout. He'll have to dive deep into their shady dealings to figure out a way to escape *this* tangled net. . . .



Grades 5 & Up • Themes: Adventure, Humor, Making Choices, Mystery & Suspense, Family & Relationships

## About the Author



Photo credit: Elena Seibert

**Carl Hiaasen** was born and raised in Florida, where he still lives. He is the author of many bestselling novels, including *Squeeze Me* and *Razor Girl*. His books for younger readers

include the Newbery Honor winner *Hoot*, as well as *Flush*, *Scat*, *Chomp*, *Skink—No Surrender*, and *Squirm*. You can read more about Hiaasen's work at [carlhiaasen.com](http://carlhiaasen.com), and follow him on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter at @Carl\_Hiaasen.

## Praise for Carl Hiaasen

**"Pitch perfect."**

—*The New York Times*

★ **"Humorous adventure tales just don't get any more wacked . . . or fun to read."**

—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

**"Only in Florida—and in the fiction of its native son Carl Hiaasen—does a dead iguana fall from a palm tree and nearly kill somebody."**

—*New York Post*





# Pre-Reading Activities

## About Wrecking

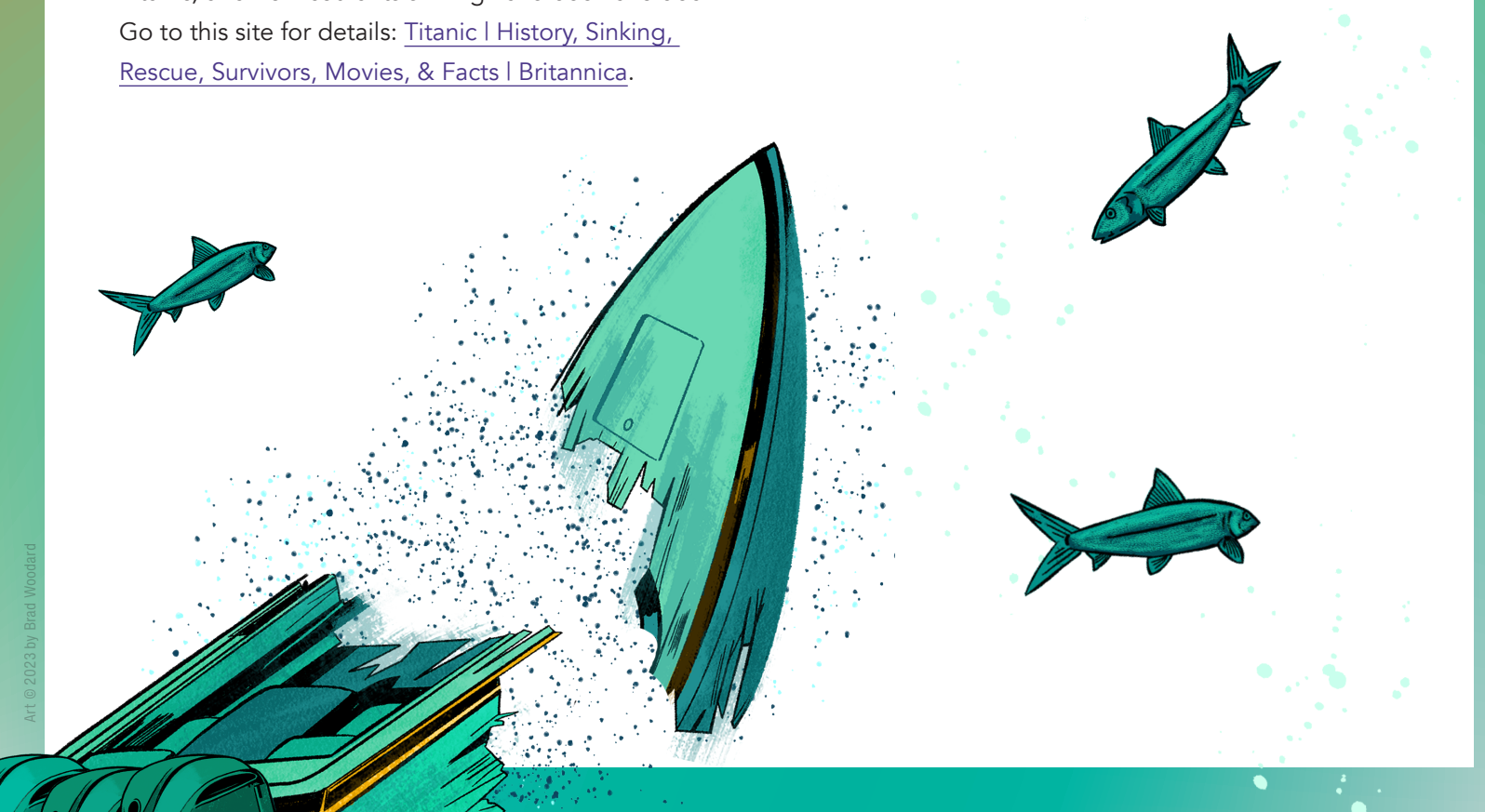
**Explore a Dive Site** To explore a dive site on your own, go to [Wreck Diving: The 10 Best Dive Sites in the World \(padi.com\)](https://www.padi.com/wreck-diving/the-10-best-dive-sites-in-the-world). Choose a shipwreck, and answer these questions for yourself: What was the name of the ship? When and where was it sunk? How did it sink? Is it still possible to dive to this site, and if so, what level of certification is required? Also, you could watch one of the dive videos on the site and explain what you see.

**Is “Wrecking” Real? You Bet It Is!** Visit this website to learn more about it: [wreck diving](https://www.wreckdiving.com/). Answer these questions to further your knowledge of wrecking. What are the reasons people engage in wrecking? Explain the three types of wreck diving. What kind of special equipment do you need to be a wrecker?

**The Facts Behind the Most Famous Shipwreck of All** The *Titanic* set sail from England bound for New York City in 1912 with over 2,000 passengers aboard. It was thought to be the unsinkable ship by many, but they were wrong. What actually happened with the *Titanic*, and how could its sinking have been avoided? Go to this site for details: [Titanic | History, Sinking, Rescue, Survivors, Movies, & Facts | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/topic/titanic-history-sinking-rescue-survivors-movies-facts).

**Images from the *Titanic*** In 1997, director James Cameron made his movie *Titanic*, which shared the tale of Jack and Rose and their ill-fated trip aboard the ship. Although the *Titanic* is buried in the Atlantic Ocean 12,500 feet down and about 400 miles from Newfoundland, Canada, underwater researchers have made many trips to the ship and shot fascinating HD footage of the wreck. Watch this video to explore the majesty of this once-great ship: [Titanic footage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzUuK1t18bQ). What three objects were the most interesting to you and why?

**Is “Wrecking” for You?** There are certified scuba diving schools that can teach you how to be a wreck diver. Go to this website to learn more about one of them: [Wreck Diving Specialty Certification—Get certified with SSI \(divessi.com\)](https://www.divessi.com/wreck-diving-specialty-certification-get-certified-with-ssi). What are some of the activities you’ll need to know how to do to be a wrecker? How old do you have to be to become certified? How long does it take to become certified? Does this sound like something you might be interested in? What is exciting or frightening about being a wrecker?



## About American History

**The KKK** The Ku Klux Klan is a hate organization founded shortly after the United States Civil War ended. It has used intimidation, violence, and murder to uphold white supremacy. This site [Ku Klux Klan](#) has more information about the KKK. Answer these questions to find out more: Where and when was the KKK founded? How did their members dress and for what purpose? After Congress acted to try to stop the Klan, how and why did it come back stronger? To strive to maintain white supremacy, what groups does the KKK target today and how?

### The Florida Keys: A National Marine Sanctuary

In the book you see Wrecker's sister Suzanne and many others doing their best to protect their precious coral reefs and marine life from oversize cruise ships that stir up muck and silt that can be damaging. Learn more about the protections in place in the Florida Keys by visiting [Welcome to the NOAA Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary](#). Learn more about one or more of the following areas:

- corals
- plant life
- the ocean
- the seafloor
- shipwrecks
- animal life
- artificial reefs

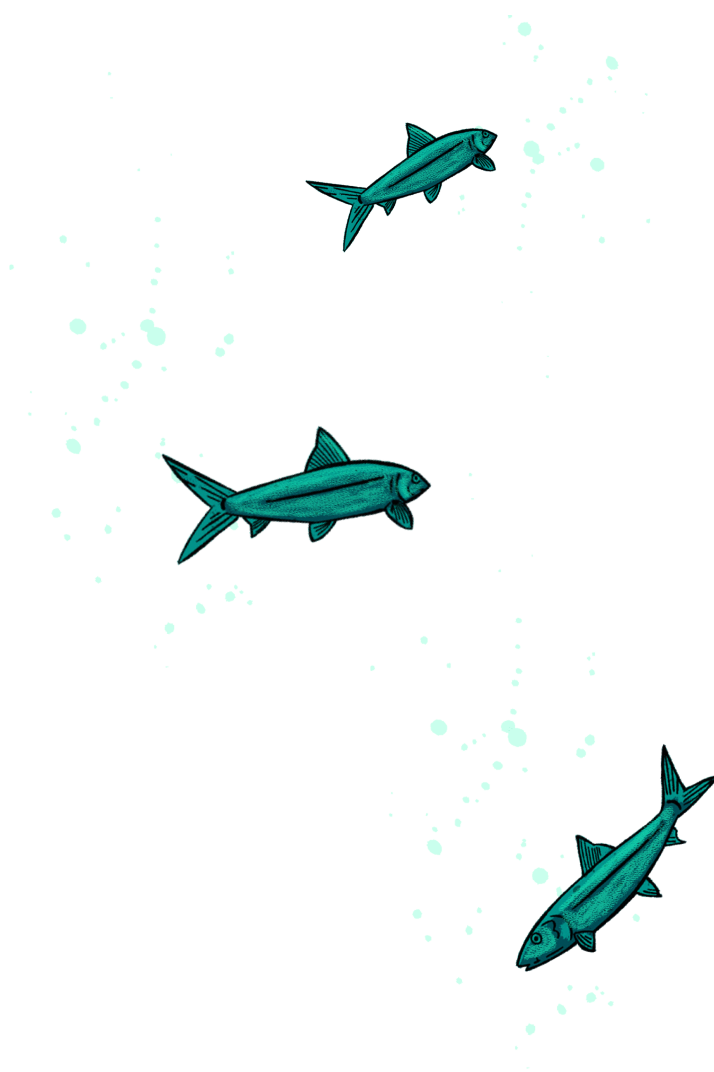
## About Nature

**Those Green Guys May Be Cute, But . . .** Wrecker's job at the cemetery is to clean iguana waste from the tombstones. These green iguanas can cause damage to plant and animal life and are not native to Florida. Learn more about these somewhat cute but ultimately damaging reptiles here: [South Florida Is Overrun with Green Iguanas](#).

## About Life

**Following a Dream** Being able to follow one's dreams is important because it allows us to see a brighter future ahead. Sometimes, though, following one's dream has a cost. Wrecker's father tells Wrecker that he left his mother because he "had a dream, one your mother didn't share." Wrecker calls him "gutless" and "pathetic" for the way he left them. Is it right to follow your dream even though you might hurt those you love? Write down your answer and reasoning.

**Technology vs. Human Observation** There is a picture of the sixty-five-foot tower that Wrecker watches sea conditions from in the novel. What advantages or disadvantages could Wrecker have by using this tower rather than a weather app on his phone? [Going Solo: Key West Shipwreck Museum – Orlando Sentinel](#)





# Discussion Questions & Activities

**Can Anyone Be a Hero?** Wrecker takes a lot of chances in this book. Some of these seem like foolish or poor decisions (the eel bite) and others are perceptive and insightful (hiding behind the boat to evade capture). Make a T-chart with a list of reasons why you think Wrecker COULD and COULD NOT be considered a hero. Share these with someone else or have a debate in which you choose one side and someone else chooses the other.

## Let's Chat

*Below are some discussion questions to get you thinking and talking as you read. Use textual evidence to back up your ideas.*

### Chapter 1:

What are some of the dangers involved in Wrecker's nighttime grave cleaning?

### Chapter 2:

What might have happened if Wrecker went through with his plan to return the money to Silver Mustache?

### Chapter 3:

Why was what happened to El Isleno (Manuel Cabeza) possible if there were police in Key West at the time?

### Chapter 4:

Why is Mr. Chillingwood so upset about his sister's death?

### Chapter 5:

What might Wrecker have done rather than accepting the money when Silver Mustache palmed him \$50?

### Chapter 6:

What do you think Wrecker thinks of his mom and dad?

### Chapter 7:

Is it simply a mistake that the Bendito Vachs tombstone says that he died a day after Willi and Wrecker see the tombstone?

### Chapter 8:

If you were Wrecker, would you have been as reluctant to talk to your father as he was, or would you embrace the idea?

### Chapter 9:

We learn that the governor of Florida is allowing oversized cruise ships to dock at Key West despite the town voting to disallow them. Should the governor have this right if they think it's in the best interest of the state?

### Chapter 10:

How is what Wrecker is doing with the packages he wrecks from the ship similar to or different from what his ancestors did?

### Chapter 11:

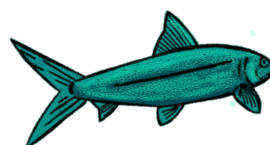
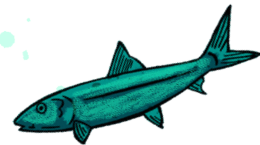
Why do you think Wrecker makes Willi wait to find out the contents of the packages they wrecked from the sunken ship?

### Chapter 12:

Why would Wrecker tell Silver Mustache the lie that a busboy supposedly told him about someone discovering packages?

### Chapter 13:

After law enforcement finds a body near the sunken boat with a vaccination card as his only identification, why doesn't Wrecker go to the police and explain what happened?



### Chapter 14:

What does it say about Wrecker that he continues to clean Sarah Chillingwood's grave even after Riley Chillingwood is gone?

### Chapter 15:

Why does Wrecker feel betrayed when Willi moves the boxes?

### Chapter 16:

In a horrific incident in this chapter, a police officer tackles Wrecker as he leaves Willi's house. Explain the actions that might lead you to think this is racially motivated.

### Chapter 17:

Wrecker's dad WANTS to be sued about his new song "Here Comes the Moon." What does this tell you about him?

### Chapter 18:

How is Wrecker feeling based on his dream in this chapter?

### Chapter 19:

Wrecker and Willi damage Vachs's grave in this chapter. Do you think this and the false rumors of what happened to the pizza boxes are helping or hurting Wrecker trying to get away from Silver Mustache?

### Chapter 20:

Why is Willi so concerned about the golf balls being hit off the boat if they're biodegradable?

### Chapter 21:

*Irony* is getting the opposite of what you'd expect, like "I saw a fish drowning." What is ironic about Silver Mustache demanding that all his employees must get vaccinated against COVID-19?

### Chapter 22:

Give your opinion on whether Suzanne planned a successful protest against the oversize cruise ship. Could she have done anything differently?

### Chapter 23:

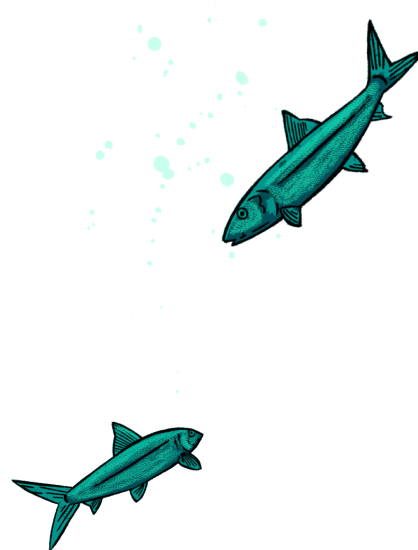
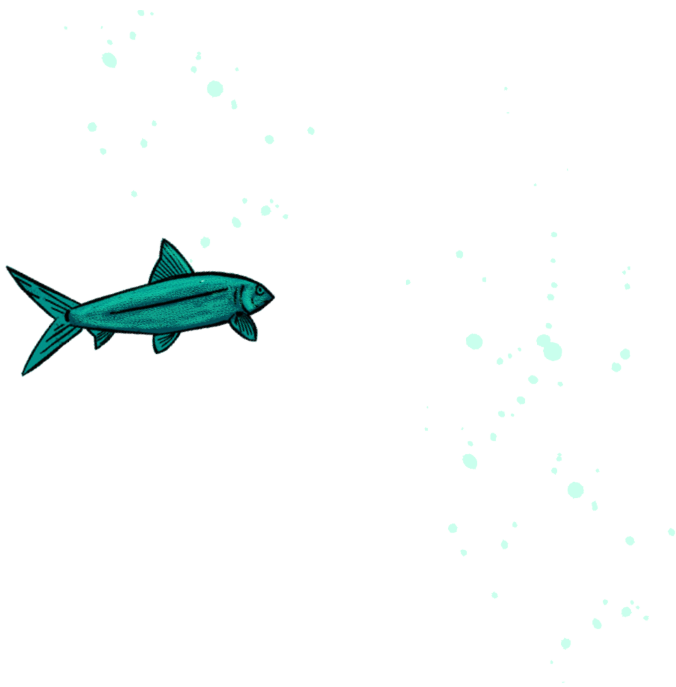
How does the author build suspense in this chapter BEFORE Wrecker and Silver Mustache meet with Rodrigo?

### Chapter 24:

Earlier in the book, Wrecker mentions the boat *Last Laugh* to Silver Mustache. Explain how Wrecker uses the name *Last Laugh* in this chapter.

### Chapter 25:

Contrast the song Wrecker's dad is now writing with the two previous songs in the book.



# Extension Questions & Activities

## Family

**Wrecker and His Dad** Wrecker reconnects with his dad after a long period when he show up in Key West as a traveling singer with a hit on the Billboard Top 100. Although his dad seems earnest in his attempts to speak with his son, Wrecker shies away because he's been without him for so long and doesn't think he needs him. Write about a time when you felt unsupported by family or friends, including what the problem was, how you overcame it, and what the result of the situation was.

**All in the Family** When Wrecker is with Willi, he gets a chance to wreck a ship. He sees the racing boat submerged in almost twenty feet of water, and he pulls five packages from the wreck. He takes pride in what his father's family had done but never thought he'd get the chance to do it himself. Think about a time when you did something for the first time (whether it is related to your family or not). Explain what this achievement was and how you felt when you accomplished it.

**Wrecker's Ancestral Pride** When Wrecker meets Riley Chillingwood, the brother of Sarah Chillingwood (whose grave he has been cleaning), Riley says that wrecking is "hard, dangerous work. I understand why you're so proud." This surprises Wrecker, who wasn't conscious of showing it. What does Mr. Chillingwood see or hear that reveals the pride Wrecker has in his ancestor's wrecking past?

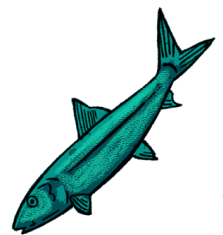
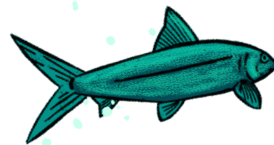
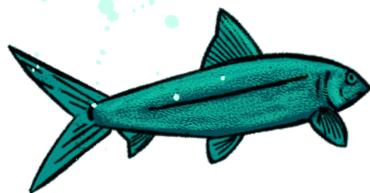
**Who Has Come Before Us?** Wrecker's friend Willi feels guilty for the violent, racist actions of her ancestor Swanson Paul, the carpenter who was involved in the murder of El Isleno. Wrecker feels proud of his great-great-grandfathers who took great risks to dive into the shipwrecks off Key West for treasure and adventure. Is it right to feel pride for what heroic actions your ancestors have accomplished, even if these actions were hundreds of years before you were born? Why or why not? Also, is it right to feel guilty for your ancestors past crimes, even if these crimes were hundreds of years before you were born? Why or why not?

## Friendship

**About "Ghosting"** Willi and Wrecker "ghost" each other at different times in the book. They both recover from this and remain friends, but ghosting can have serious effects. What is *ghosting*? Read this article to better understand the effects of ghosting and better ways of dealing with interpersonal problems.

[All About ghosting: And Why It's NOT Okay.](#)

Write to explain more healthy ways of dealing with relationship problems.





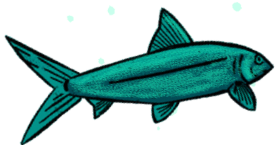
## History & Racism

**The Fight for Interracial Marriage** In the book, Wrecker tells us about El Isleno, beaten and murdered because he was Black and married a white woman in 1921. This right to marry someone of another race wasn't guaranteed for all Americans until nearly fifty years later. Mildred and Richard Loving were arrested because they broke interracial marriage laws in Virginia, which led to a Supreme Court decision in 1967 that made interracial marriage legal. Research the facts in the case *Loving vs. Virginia*.

**"Passing"** After finding out about El Isleno's murder, Wrecker feels guilty because his skin is lighter than his ancestors and "No one has called me the N-word to my face." Later, after the police officer Nedrick Nugent has body slammed him to the ground and is questioning him in the police station, Nugent says to Wrecker, "I get it. You're trying to pass for white." This idea of light-skinned people in America passing for white has been around for centuries. Read or listen to this article and explain details about how and why this was done. Recount one person's story of why they did it and the result of that action: [A Chosen Exile: Black People Passing in White America](#).

## Public Health

**COVID-19 Is No Joke** Wrecker's stepfather Roger gets COVID-19 in the book, it turns into what is referred to as "long COVID," which is far more serious. Read this article to understand the differences and much greater danger of long COVID. Explain in a short paragraph the differences between "regular" COVID and "long COVID." [Long COVID: Long-Term Effects of COVID-19](#).



## Creative Thinking

**Should He Stay or Should He Go?** At the end of the novel, Wrecker is faced again with the idea of moving with his mom, Carole, and stepfather, Roger, to their new home in Pebble Beach, California, or staying and continuing to live with his stepsister Suzanne. He quickly makes the decision to stay with Suzanne. As Wrecker, write a letter to your mother explaining why you think staying with Suzanne is the best option OR write a letter to Suzanne explaining why you are going to live with Carole and Roger.

**Creative Naming** Silver Mustache names the grave that his men and Wrecker watch for him "Bendito Vachs." *Bendito* means "blessed" in Spanish and *Vachs* is pronounced "vax," which comments on what a blessing (fiscally) the vaccination cards are. Wrecker tells the Coast Guard that Silver Mustache's boat is the *Last Laugh*, something he's referred to before. Now it's your turn. What are some other places or things in the book that could be creatively named to have a meaning beyond the surface that relates to events in the story? The iguana tree? The graveyard? The harbor?

**You Are Wrecker: What Will You Do Now?** Wrecker becomes entangled in the criminal world of Marco David Quantraine (aka Silver Mustache). Think about what he maybe COULD have done differently in their relationship to avoid getting to the point where he risked life. Choose one incident and describe how you would have handled it.

**A Saying That Lasts Forever** In the book we get a few interesting epitaphs, such as "Everyone's Favorite" on Vachs's stone and "The rumor was true" on Sarah Chillingwood's. Imagine that you have been asked to write epitaphs for your five favorite celebrities (singers, movie or TV stars, YouTube personalities, etc.), but you can only write *six words* maximum for each. Which five people would you choose, what would your epitaphs say? Explain the reason you chose each epitaph.

**Is Wrecker a Safe Boater?** Wrecker usually seems highly concerned with safety on the water, but there are a number of times when he appears unconcerned or makes risky decisions. Write about one of the times when he did something that seemed foolish or reckless on a boat and what COULD have happened because of this unnecessary chance he'd taken.

## Local Activities

**What's Fun in Your Area?** Although Carl Hiaasen's books are full of the dangers humans pose to our environment, they're also full of the natural beauty of the state of Florida. In *Wrecker*, we see through Wrecker's eyes the peace and beauty of being out on the ocean. What are some highlights of the environment around you? Create a short travel brochure for someone coming to your state, city, or area, including ways they could experience the beauty of our natural world. List at least three places.

## Activism and Freedom

### So, You Really Want to Change the World?

Wrecker's sister Suzanne and friends founded the organization "Friends of the Blue Waters" that tried to limit the size of cruise ships that came into Key West. Through their organization, they raised awareness of the dangers these ships pose to the Key West ecosystem. If you have an issue that you'd like to raise awareness of, check out this website which gives you a step-by-step guide on how to get your message to the masses. Write down what you'd like to change and a few ways you'd start to do it. [How to Start an Awareness Campaign](#)

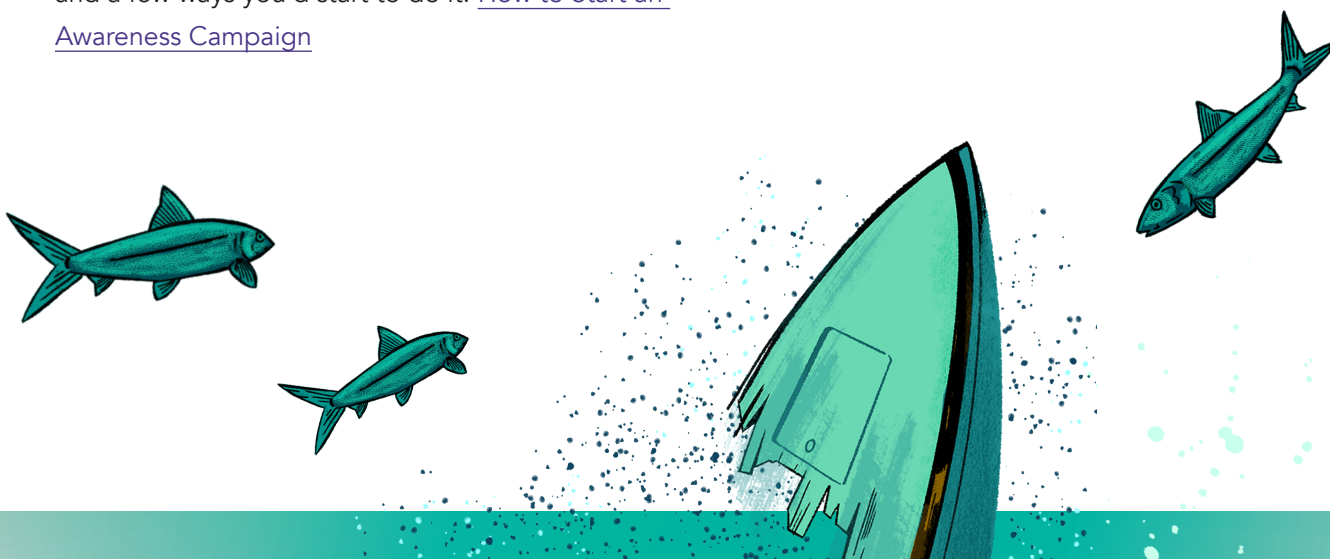
**Boating Freedom?** At one point in the book, Wrecker tells us that he thinks it's ridiculous that a fourteen-year-old in Florida can drive a boat (Florida requires finishing an approved boating safety course as well). Although we all like to have the freedom to do what we want, restrictions or regulations are important for the safety of all, and younger boat drivers could endanger others. Discuss whether you think fourteen-year-olds should be able to operate any size boat OR come up with your own age-restricted topic to argue for or against.

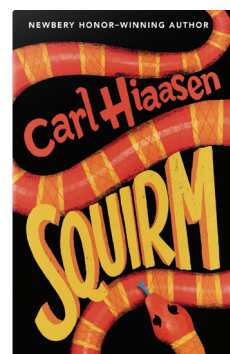
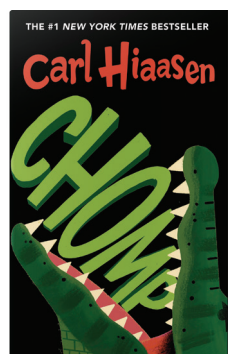
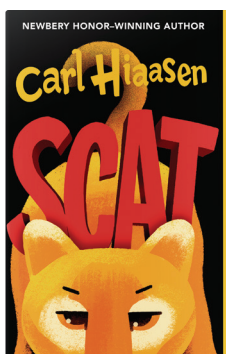
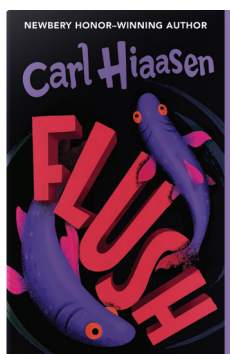
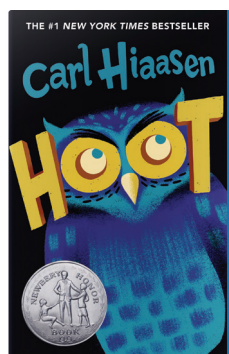
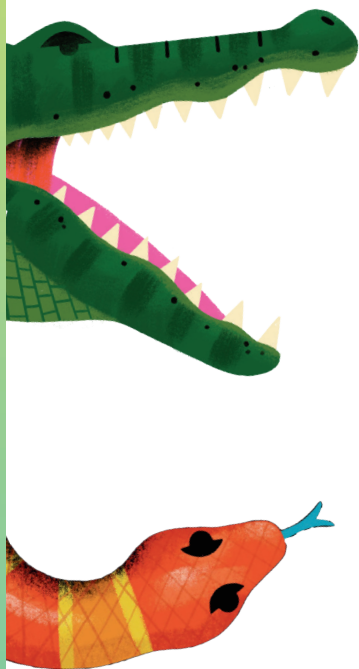
## Virtual or In-Person?

**How Do You Prefer to Learn?** At the beginning of the story, Wrecker is attending school online, but at some point, he starts in person again. During the pandemic beginning in 2020, many students were forced to have school online, at least for some period. Studies have shown that this led to problems. What's your opinion about online schooling? Write to persuade either that online schooling is the best way to learn, that in-person schooling is best, or a combination of the two might be best.

## Make a Pros and Cons List

**The Positives and Negatives of Wrecker** Although Wrecker makes a lot of decisions with positive consequences, he also makes some choices which have negative outcomes. List three positive and three negative decisions he made in the novel and what their consequences were.





Greg Shafer has 27 years of experience teaching in Florida middle schools, and holds three degrees from the University of Florida: a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Bachelor of Science in Journalism, and a Master's Degree in English Education. As a National Board Certified Teacher, Mr. Shafer has taught middle school drama, language arts, and served as a peer evaluator as part of a \$100 Million Grant from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to Hillsborough County Public Schools. In addition, Mr. Shafer has served as team leader for seventh and eighth grades for the majority of his teaching career, and holds his professional certification to teach middle grades, gifted, English 6–12, and ESOL.



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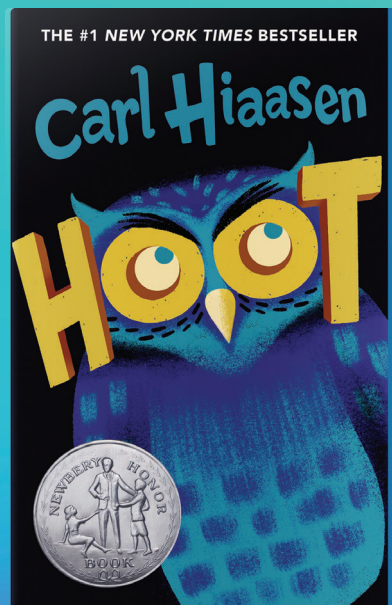
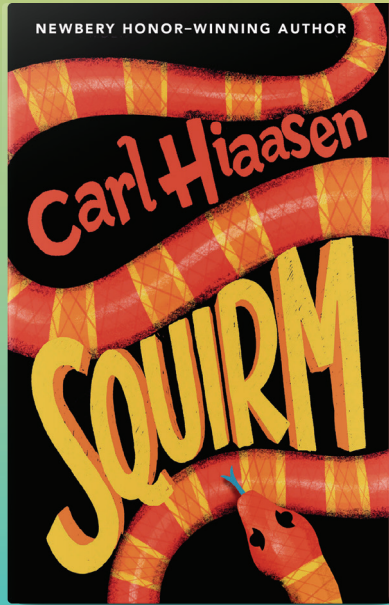
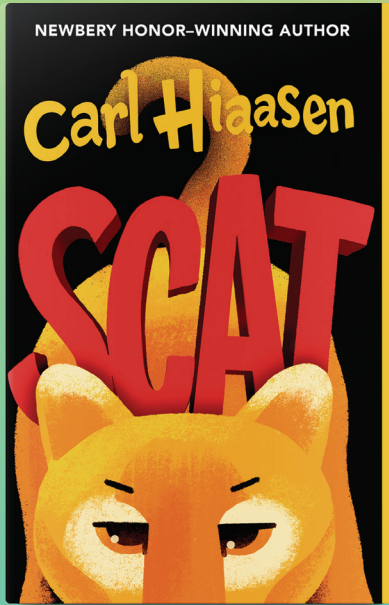
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# Carl Hiaasen's

## Books for Grades 5 & Up



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EDUCATORS' GUIDE

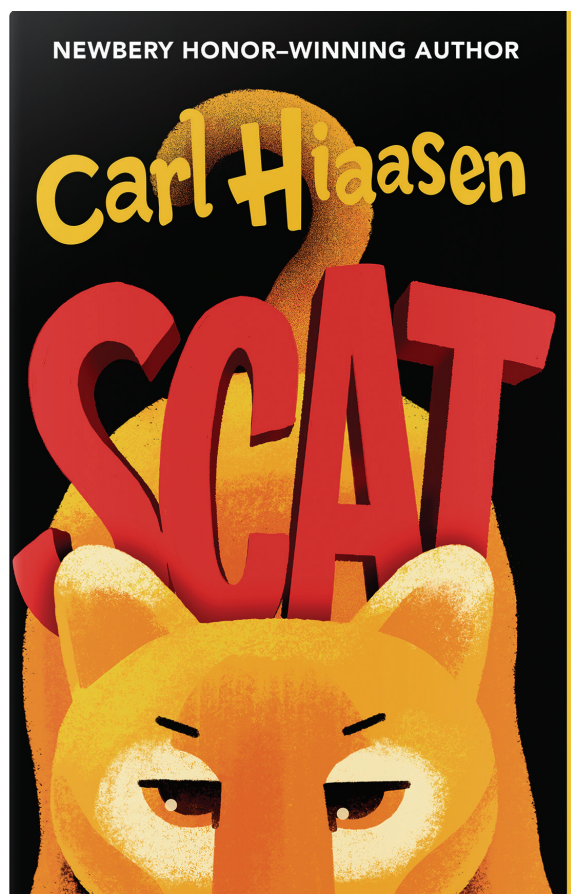


## About the Book

Bunny Starch, the most feared biology teacher ever, is missing. She disappeared after a school field trip to Black Vine Swamp. And, to be honest, the kids in her class are relieved.

But when the principal tries to tell the students that Mrs. Starch has been called away on a “family emergency,” Nick and Marta just don’t buy it. No, they figure the class delinquent, Smoke, has something to do with her disappearance.

And he does! But not in the way they think. There’s a lot more going on in Black Vine Swamp than any one player in this twisted tale can see. It’s all about to hit the fan, and when it does, the bad guys better scat.



Grades 5 & Up • Themes: Nature, Environment, Humor, Mystery & Suspense

## About the Author

Photo credit: Elena Seibert



**Carl Hiaasen** was born and raised in Florida, where he still lives. He is the author of many bestselling novels, including *Squeeze Me* and *Razor Girl*.

His books for younger readers

include the Newbery Honor winner *Hoot*, as well as *Flush*, *Scat*, *Chomp*, *Skink—No Surrender*, and *Squirm*. You can read more about Hiaasen’s work at [carlhiaasen.com](http://carlhiaasen.com), and follow him on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter at @Carl\_Hiaasen.

## Praise for the Book

**“A hybrid madcap swamp adventure and environmental whodunit.** Hiaasen’s gumbo tastes a lot like his previous efforts, but there’s a reason why a recipe tastes so good time and again.” —*Booklist*

- A New York Times Bestseller
- An Indie Bestseller
- An Indie Next Pick
- A Skipping Stones Honor Award Winner
- A School Library Journal Best Book of the Year
- An Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Platinum Award Winner
- A Chicago Public Library Best Book of the Year
- A Green Earth Award Honor Book
- A Bank Street College of Education Best Children’s Book of the Year
- An ILA/CBC Children’s Choice Book



## Discussion Questions

- 1 If you were stuck in the trunk when Twilly comes into Mrs. Starch's house like Marta or Nick, what would you do from the moment you heard Twilly walk in the door? What do you think would happen?
- 2 Do you think it was right for Twilly to strap the Red Diamond Energy Corporation worker to the tree after he found him illegally working in Section 22? Why or why not?
- 3 If you were Nick, what would you have done when the abusive substitute teacher Wendell Waxmo forced you to sing in class?
- 4 Nick is playing catch with his dad when he thinks, "This wasn't about baseball. This was about hope." Explain what he means by this.
- 5 Explain why the board of trustees of the Truman School (which Smoke, Nick, and Marta attend) first voted to expel Smoke from school but quickly changed it to a temporary suspension.
- 6 Smoke committed arson twice in the book due. He then gets falsely accused of setting the fire in the swamp. Do you believe him when he says that his days of setting fire to things are over? Why or why not?
- 7 In the novel, Smoke is a legendary tracker who can trace a person or animal across vast distances and through all kinds of conditions. According to Twilly, he's better than some Native American Seminoles who wonder how he can do this. Discuss how this would be useful for someone who lived in the wild most of his life.
- 8 Explain what Twilly means when he says that he has a "gutful of anger."
- 9 Discuss the errors that Red Diamond Energy Corporation owner Drake McBride and his assistant Jimmy Lee Bayliss make in their scheme to make money illegally.
- 10 What message do you think author Carl Hiaasen is trying to send to the reader by having the baby Florida panther (named "Squirt" by Mrs. Starch and Twilly) scratch Mrs. Starch, even when she's just trying to nurse him with the zoo's baby milk formula?





# Activities

**Endangered Species** In *Scat*, we are told that there may be 100 or less Florida panthers left, and that they are very hard to track because they move at night. Watch [this video](#) to find out more and answer the following questions. What is the biggest obstacle facing the Florida panther today? What did the Nature Conservancy do in 2012 to protect panthers? Did it work? (You may need to do more research.)

**Saving Our Home** Organizations such as Greenpeace, Rainforest Action Network, and the World Wildlife Fund have been working for years to protect our natural environment and the many animals it contains. Watch this video about the [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#) and answer these questions: How have our perceptions of our planet changed in the 60 years since the WWF started? What specifically has the WWF done to protect our planet? Give examples of specific species or areas that the WWF has helped to preserve.

**The Pimple Essay** Smoke felt embarrassed and hurt when Mrs. Starch, in front of the class, called him out for picking his acne and assigned him to write 500+ word essay on pimples. Write about a time when you felt called out in front of your peers or embarrassed. How did you deal with this embarrassment? What were some other ways you could have dealt with it, and what could have been the possible outcomes?

**Don't Judge a . . .** One of the most famous metaphors in the English language is "Don't judge a book by its cover," which means to not evaluate something or someone based on physical appearances or what is most easily noticeable. There are at least four characters in the book that defy at least some expectations of how they should act based on appearances or what you'd notice about them at first: Mrs. Starch; Duane Scrod Sr.; Duane Scrod Jr. (Smoke); and Twilly Spree. Explain what you would say about each of these characters based on first meeting them or outward appearances, and then explain how they are very different once you get to know them and their attitudes and goals.

**Bravery** Nick Waters's dad, Greg, was a former baseball player who lost his right arm in the Iraq war. Less than two weeks after this incident, he was back home and playing catch with his son. This early intense activity may have actually hurt his recovery as he had to return to the hospital because of an infection. Nick learns what it means to be brave from his father's attitude toward the loss of his arm. Discuss two or more times when Nick showed bravery and what the results of his actions were.

**Nick Waters** After Nick's dad lost his right arm, Nick decides to bind his right arm behind him. Nick and his father are both right-handed. Explain why you believe Nick does this and what this says about him as a person.

**Money, Money, Money** The villains of *Scat* are Drake McBride and his assistant Jimmy Lee Bayliss of the Red Diamond Energy Corporation, who are only interested in making money, regardless of who or what stands in their way. Explain the scheme that these two try to enact in the Everglades that is eventually thwarted by Mrs. Starch, Twilly, Nick, and Marta.

**The Monkey Wrench Gang** Twilly gives Nick the book *The Monkey Wrench Gang* by Edward Abbey to read so Nick can try to understand what he and Mrs. Starch are trying to do in their quest. Based on the following synopsis of the book, explain how Mrs. Starch and Twilly (with help from Smoke, Nick, and Marta) are acting like the characters in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

*The Monkey Wrench Gang concerns the use of sabotage to protest [ecologically](#) damaging activities in the [American Southwest](#), and was so influential that the term "[monkey wrench](#)" has come to mean any violence, sabotage, activism, law-making, or law-breaking to preserve wilderness, wild spaces and ecosystems.*



## About the Book

Some facts about Billy Dickens:

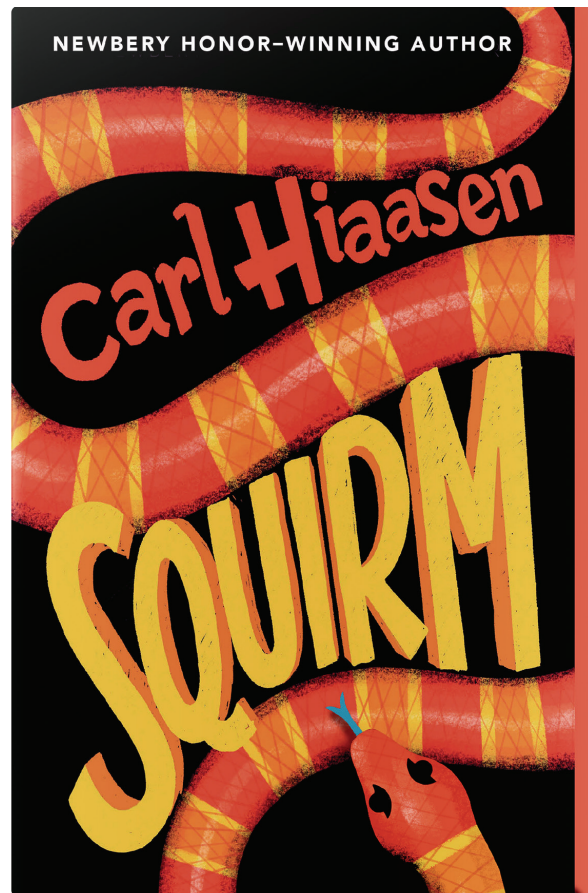
- He once saw a biker swerve across the road in order to run over a snake.
- Later, that motorcycle somehow ended up at the bottom of a canal.
- Billy isn't the type to let things go.

Some facts about Billy's family:

- They've lived in six different Florida towns because Billy's mom insists on getting a house near a bald eagle nest.
- Billy's dad left when he was four and is a total mystery.
- Billy has just found his dad's address—in Montana.

This summer, Billy will fly across the country, hike a mountain, float a river, dodge a grizzly bear, shoot down a spy drone, save a neighbor's cat, save an endangered panther, and then try to save his own father.

Carl Hiaasen tells a wickedly funny, slightly twisted tale about families, figuring out what's really important, and knowing when (and when not) to let things go.



Grades 5 & Up • Themes: Nature, Endangered Species, Mystery & Suspense, Family & Relationships

## About the Author

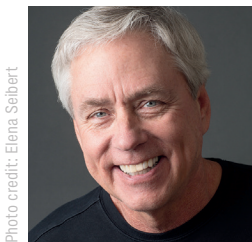


Photo credit: Elena Seibert

**Carl Hiaasen** was born and raised in Florida, where he still lives. He is the author of many bestselling novels, including *Squeeze Me* and *Razor Girl*. His books for younger readers

include the Newbery Honor winner *Hoot*, as well as *Flush*, *Scat*, *Chomp*, *Skink—No Surrender*, and *Squirm*. You can read more about Hiaasen's work at [carlhiaasen.com](http://carlhiaasen.com), and follow him on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter at @Carl\_Hiaasen.

## Praise for the Book

**"An entertaining, pulse-pounding story."**

— *The Horn Book Magazine*

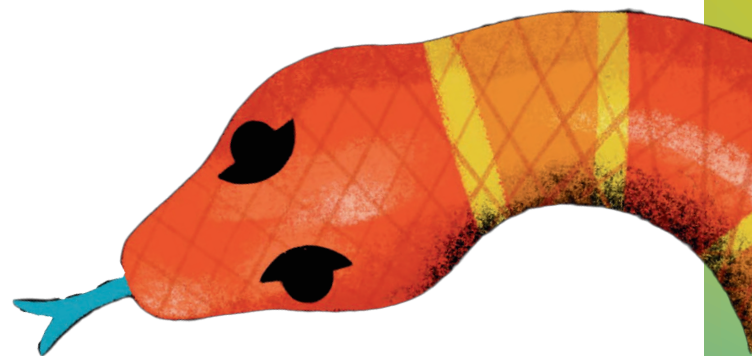
"Humorous, self-deprecating narration and convoluted exploits will keep pages turning till the satisfying close." —*Kirkus Reviews*

**"Hiaasen's ecological passion shows no sign of abatement, and neither does his faith in kid resourcefulness and family resilience."** —*The Bulletin*

- A *New York Times* Bestseller
- A Kids' Indie Next List Selection
- An Indie Bestseller

## Discussion Questions

- 1 If you were Billy, what would you want to say to your dad? (Remember that Billy doesn't know his father at all.)
- 2 After first meeting him, Billy thinks that his father is a coward for avoiding contact with him and his sister Belinda all these years. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
- 3 How does the author build suspense around Billy meeting his father?
- 4 Although Billy and his father appear to be very different, each values his native surroundings. Explain what they do in the book to show this.
- 5 Carl Hiaasen's characters are brave and stand up to injustice and bullies, and they often use their brains to outwit others. Find three examples of Billy's cleverness overcoming the unjust actions of others.
- 6 Although drones are used in the book in mostly positive ways, the presence of drones can also be very disruptive and invasive. What are some real-life ways drones can be used for positive purposes? How can they be used for negative purposes?
- 7 Billy's father Dennis either lies to his family or muddies the truth in his quest to keep poachers from illegally killing animals. Do you think it's right for him to not be honest with his family about what he's doing, even though he's working to protect endangered species?
- 8 Why does author Carl Hiaasen make us wait so long to meet the villain of the story, Lincoln Chumley Baxter IV? How would the story have been different if we had met him earlier?
- 9 If you had to write a novel about the environment where you live, what would you focus your novel on and why?





# Activities

## Pre-Reading

**About Those Snakes** Billy comes across and uses quite a few snakes in the novel. Write down a few of the types of snakes that you find in the novel. Go to this website to learn more about the [snakes](#). Write a paragraph about one or more of the snakes that interest you. Which do you think is the most dangerous? The least dangerous? Discuss with a partner what you might do if you encounter one of these snakes.

**How Dangerous Are Bears?** When Billy's dad is threatened by a bear, he uses effective techniques to avoid being attacked. Billy thinks about different methods for dealing with bears. To learn more about how to handle bears, go to [this website](#).

Explain in your own words the three most important things to do if you are confronted by a bear. What is the difference in being attacked by a brown bear and a black bear? What are some strategies you can use to avoid an encounter with a bear?

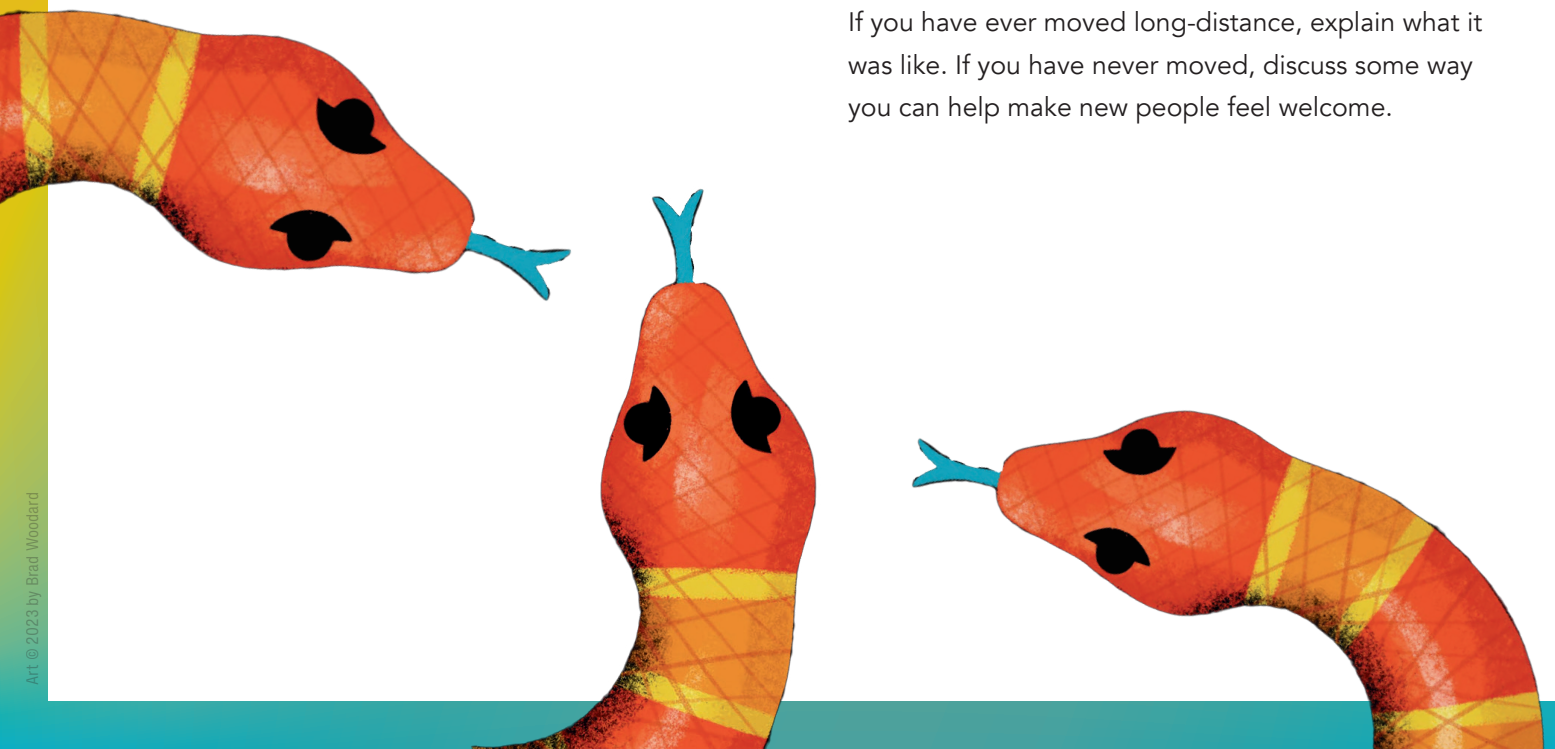
## Extension Activities

**How to Deal with Bullies** In *Squirm*, Billy confronts two different bullies and gets them to stop their harmful actions toward others. However, confronting someone is potentially dangerous and could lead to violence. There are other ways of dealing with bullies that greatly lessen this chance of violence. Write down three or more ways that you can deal with a bully. Discuss these with a neighbor.

**Native American Names** When Billy arrives in Montana, he encounters his cousin Summer Chasing-Hawks and stepmother Little Thunder Sky (referred to as "Lil"), who are members of the Crow Nation. Many Native Americans' names reveal something about the character or temperament of the person or place being named. Based on what you know about each of these characters, how do you think Summer and Lil fit the names that were chosen for them? Explain citing evidence from the book. If YOU had to give yourself a name based on who you are, what would it be and why?

**Moving** Christine moves Billy and Belinda frequently so she can observe eagles' nests. How does this affect Billy and Belinda?

If you have ever moved long-distance, explain what it was like. If you have never moved, discuss some way you can help make new people feel welcome.



## About the Book

When Wahoo Cray's dad—a professional animal wrangler—takes a job with a reality TV show called Expedition Survival!, Wahoo figures he'll have to do a bit of wrangling himself to keep his father from killing Derek Badger, the show's inept and egotistical star. But the job keeps getting more complicated: Derek Badger insists on using wild animals for his stunts; and Wahoo's acquired a shadow named Tuna—a girl who's sporting a shiner courtesy of her father and needs a place to hide out.

They've only been on location in the Everglades for a day before Derek gets bitten by a bat and goes missing in a storm. Search parties head out and promptly get lost themselves. And then Tuna's dad shows up with a gun . . .

It's anyone's guess who will actually survive Expedition Survival. . .



Grades 5 & Up • Themes: Science & Nature, Mystery & Suspense, Reality TV, Family & Relationships

## About the Author

Photo credit: Elena Selbert



**Carl Hiaasen** was born and raised in Florida, where he still lives. He is the author of many bestselling novels, including *Squeeze Me* and *Razor Girl*. His books for younger readers

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## Praise for the Book

★ **"Humorous adventure tales just don't get any more wacked . . . or fun to read than this."**

—Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review

★ **"Mystery, action, humor, and exotic animals and settings, all tied together by a writer with an exceptional grasp of language, make this a sure hit with any mystery-loving readers."**

—School Library Journal, starred review

- A #1 New York Times Bestseller
- A USA Today Bestseller
- An ALA-YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults Nominee
- A Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Book of the Year
- A #1 Indie Bestseller
- A Chicago Public Library Best Book of the Year
- A Florida Book Award Silver Medalist
- A Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award Winner

## Discussion Questions

- 1 How would *Chomp* have been different if Wahoo's mom and Mickey's wife did not go to China? Do you think Mickey would have still chosen to be the wrangler for *Expedition Survival*? Why or why not?
- 2 *Expedition Survival*'s slogan is "Keeping it real." Although it may SEEM real to its millions of viewers, discuss all the ways that the show is the exact opposite.
- 3 Explain how Derek Badger's view of himself turning into a vampire helps him perform a heroic action at the end of the book.
- 4 Although the *Expedition Survival* seems to follow a script, Derek Badger wants to fight real animals all the time. Does this make him a hero in some way? Why or why not?
- 5 Gerry Germaine, an executive for the network behind *Expedition Survival*, seems happy that Derek Badger is lost in the Everglades because it will bring more publicity to his show. Do you think any of publicity is good publicity, or is it sometimes bad? Why?
- 6 Discuss whether you would like to be a production assistant like Raven Stark, who has to provide Derek Badger with everything he needs and calm him down when there are problems. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a job like this?
- 7 Who do you think is the biggest hero in *Chomp*? Discuss your chosen hero with a partner who has chosen someone different.
- 8 Even trained handlers say that regardless of how tame a wild animal seems, it's still a wild animal and you need to be respectful and cautious. When Wahoo loses a thumb to the alligator Alice, he decides that it's his fault because he was being careless. If you were Wahoo, would you continue to be an animal wrangler after this incident? Why or why not?
- 9 Pick any of the main characters in the book (Wahoo, Mickey, Tuna, Derek, Raven, Jerald), and discuss the best decision and the worst decision they made in the story. What do these choices tell you about your chosen character?
- 10 What do you think is the main theme of *Chomp*?



## Activities

**Wranglers are Real!** Mickey Cray and his son Wahoo are reptile wranglers—people who specialize in handling reptiles for use in TV and movies. In *Chomp*, they're hired to work with *Expedition Survival* and its host Derek Badger as they film in the Everglades.

Florida had a real reptile wrangling expert named Ross Allen, who specialized in snakes, ran his own reptile institute, and was a huge tourist attraction in pre-Disney World Florida. Learn more about [Ross Allen](#). How did Mr. Allen help Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings get over her fear of snakes? What was the worst injury he ever received from a snake?

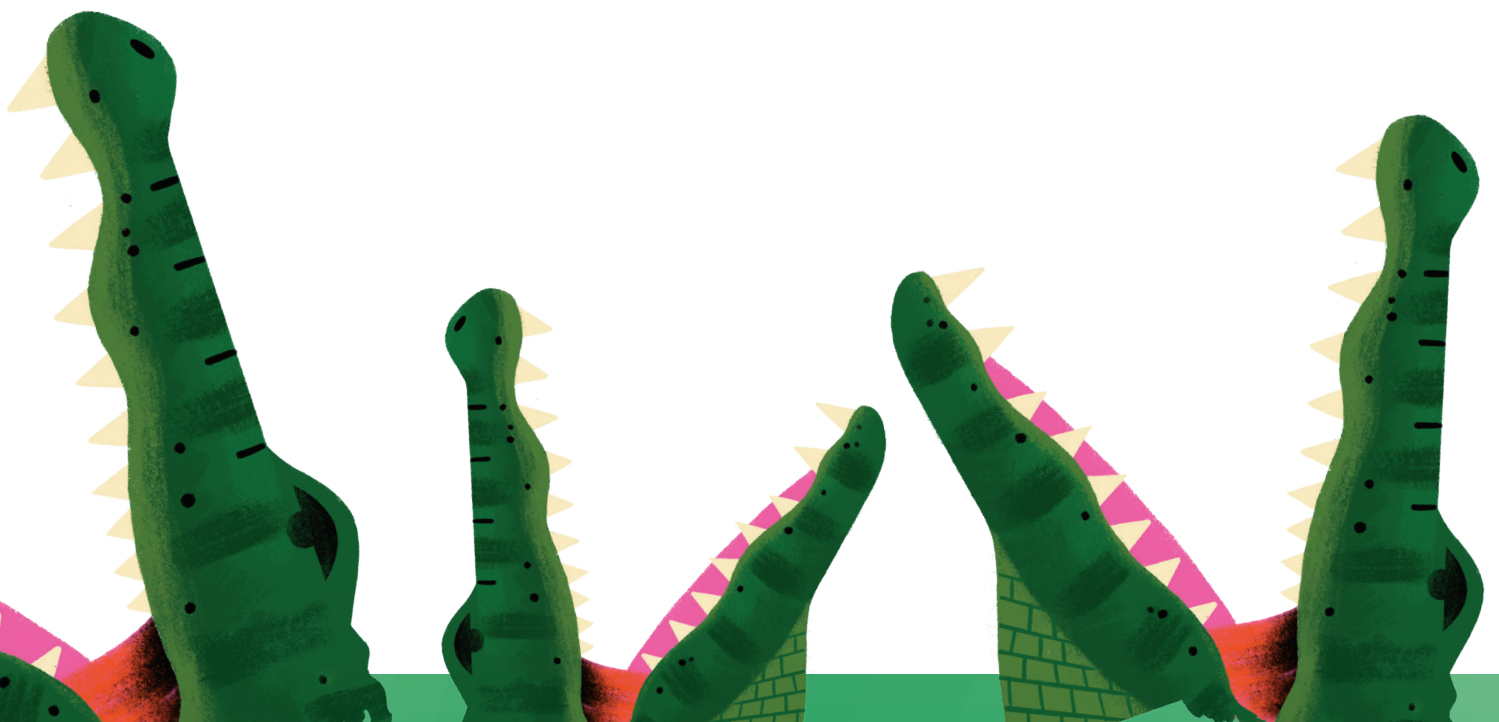
**Reality TV: Is It Scripted?** Only the producers and participants of reality TV know for sure how much of what they're doing is real and spontaneous and how much is following a script. Tuna believes that everything that happens on *Expedition Survival* is real until he finds a script.

Chose a scene from *Chomp* to rewrite as a TV script.

**Burmese Pythons: A Threat to Florida** Burmese Pythons are a real threat to Florida's ecosystems because they are a non-native species that interferes with the feeding patterns of Florida's native animals, such as panthers, alligators, and bobcats.

Watch [this video](#) to learn more about hunters who Florida is paying to try and capture and eliminate these snakes. How did these snakes become so prevalent in the Everglades? What populations have suffered because of these snakes?

**Taxonomy: Classifying Life** Wahoo's friend Tuna is an expert in taxonomy, or the classification of animals and plants. Her knowledge about the animal species the two encounter in the book is remarkable. The science of classifying flora and fauna has been developing for centuries. Learn about both [the Five-Kingdom System](#) and [the Three-Domain System](#). Which system do you think is better and why?





## About the Book

Noah's dad is sure that the owner of the Coral Queen casino boat is flushing raw sewage into the harbor—which has made taking a dip at the local beach like swimming in a toilet. He can't prove it though, and so he decides that sinking the boat will make an effective statement. Right. The boat is pumped out and back in business within days and Noah's dad is in the local lock-up.

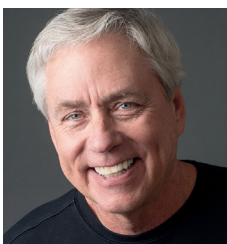
Now Noah is determined to succeed where his dad failed. He will prove that the Coral Queen is dumping illegally . . . somehow.



Grades 5 & Up • Themes: Science & Nature, Mystery & Suspense, Family & Parents, Adventure

## About the Author

Photo credit: Elena Seibert



**Carl Hiaasen** was born and raised in Florida, where he still lives. He is the author of many bestselling novels, including *Squeeze Me* and *Razor Girl*.

His books for younger readers

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## Praise for the Book

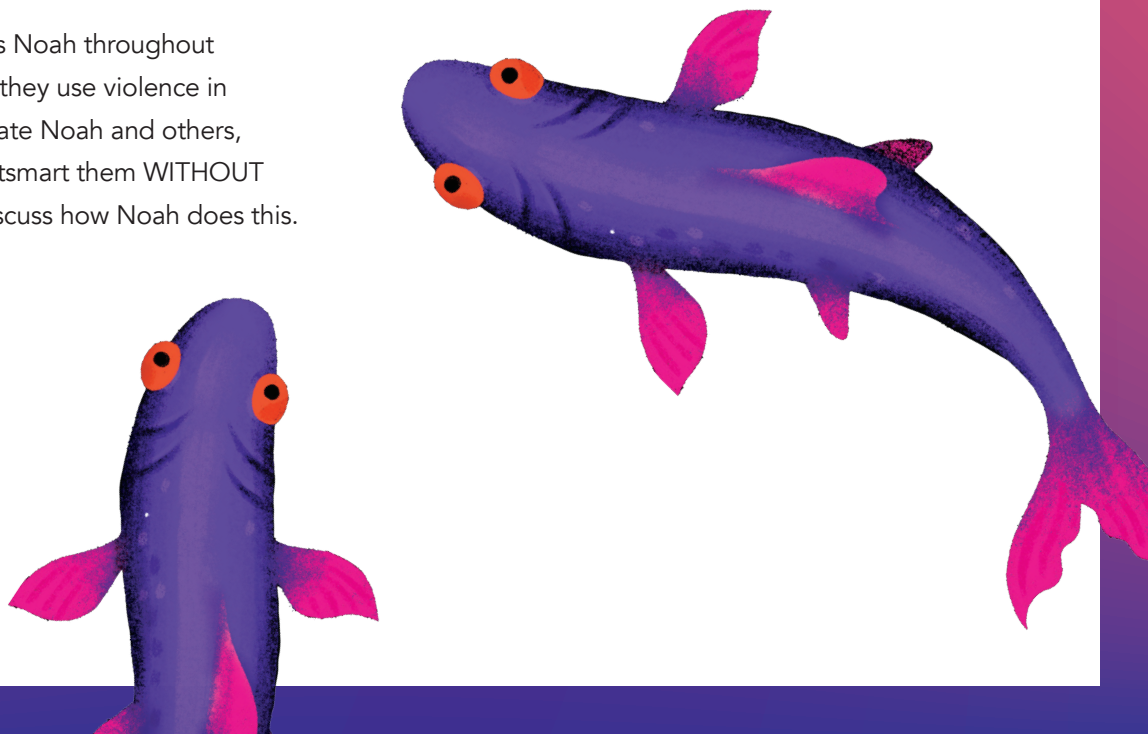
"Hiaasen scores again. **Fans of spy stories, action, environmental intrigue, and, well, Hiaasen, will cheer for this one.**" —*The Bulletin*

"**Classic Hiaasen—laugh-out-loud satire in a Florida setting.**" —*Life*

- A *New York Times* Notable Book
- A *New York Times* Bestseller
- A #1 Book Sense 76 Pick
- A Book Sense Book of the Year Honor Award Winner
- An ALA-ALSC Notable Children's Book
- An ALA-YALSA Best Book for Young Adults
- An ALA-YALSA Quick Pick
- A NAPPA Gold Award Winner
- A Green Earth Book Award Winner
- A Quill Award Nominee
- An Edgar Allan Poe Award Nominee
- A New York Public Library Stuff for the Teen Age Selection
- A New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing Selection

## Discussion Questions

- 1 What are some heroic characteristics of Noah's dad, Paine Underhill? Support each claim with evidence from the book.
- 2 In what ways is Noah like and unlike his father? Compare the two characters using evidence from the book.
- 3 *Irony* is when you can reasonably expect one result or something to be a certain way and the opposite or nearly the opposite occurs. Explain how the final fate (the second sinking) of the boat *Coral Queen* boat is a good example of irony.
- 4 Noah's father believes he is doing right by standing up for his beliefs. However, this causes problems with his wife and Noah's mother, Donna. How much should we consider other people when trying to do what we think is right? How far is too far when it comes to pursuing your ideals if it impacts others?
- 5 Lice Peeking and his girlfriend Shelly end up helping Noah and his father in their quest to bring Dusty Muleman to justice. Discuss how author Carl Hiaasen makes these characters both sympathetic and heroic while at the same time having them serve as examples of how NOT to live.
- 6 Jasper Jr. and Bull harass Noah throughout the novel, and although they use violence in their attempts to intimidate Noah and others, Noah uses his wits to outsmart them WITHOUT resorting to violence. Discuss how Noah does this.
- 7 Noah comes up with a brilliant idea to catch Dusty Muleman dumping toilet waste into the ocean: flushing dye down the toilets that will leave a trail that government agents can spot. Imagine that Noah never came up with this plan, and you are Noah's friend and he asks you to come up with your own plan to help him. Explain in detail what you would have done. How would it stop the *Coral Queen* from dumping waste into the water?
- 8 Noah's father gets a job with Tropical Rescue, an independent boating service that rescues boaters who are stranded. This comes in handy when Noah and his sister Abbey are stranded when the motor on their dad's boat stalls out while they are attempting to sabotage the *Coral Queen*. Noah doubts that his father can faithfully do his job, rather thinking that Paine will become so upset with boaters who have done something to harm the waters that he will take action against them. Do you think this is true? As Paine, write an essay discussing whether you will be able to fulfill the duties of your job regardless of circumstance.



## Activities

**Waste in Our Water** In the novel, when Dusty Muleman and the crew of the *Coral Queen* dump waste into the waters around Key West, it's clear that it is illegal. What are the problems human waste can cause in the ocean? Watch [this video](#) from Surfrider.org to learn more and answer these questions: How can human waste accidentally leak into our water? What are recommendations from the video that would lessen this waste for the future?

**What's your most cherished possession?** Before Grandpa Bobby leaves Noah and Abbey's family, he gives Noah a gold coin necklace and Abbey a pair of Emerald earrings. Since neither had really known their grandfather before this trip, these were precious to them. Do you have a favorite thing that was given to you by someone else? If so, write to explain why this item is special to you, including who gave it to you, what it is, and why it's important. If not, explain what your most-prized possession is and why.

**Civil Disobedience** Noah's father Paine Underwood calls his sinking of the *Coral Queen* "an act of civil disobedience." In 1849, the philosopher Henry David Thoreau wrote a book titled *Civil Disobedience*. The main idea of this book is that a person's sense of right and wrong is more important than laws. Clearly Paine thought that the government's inability to catch the boat dumping waste into the ocean made it okay for him to sink the boat. Write to persuade that this was either the right or wrong thing to do. Beyond this, write to persuade whether we should be able to break laws if our conscience tells us we're doing the right thing.

**It's the Principle of the Thing** Paine Underwood, in trying to explain that what he was doing was right and that sometimes you have to suffer for what you believe, says that Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years in jail in South Africa because he believed the government's policy of Apartheid, or separation and segregation of people by race, was wrong. Learn more about [Nelson Mandela](#) and answer these questions: What was the African National Congress, and what was Mandela's role in that organization? What title did he gain once he was finally released from prison? What were Mandela's greatest accomplishments? What is his legacy?

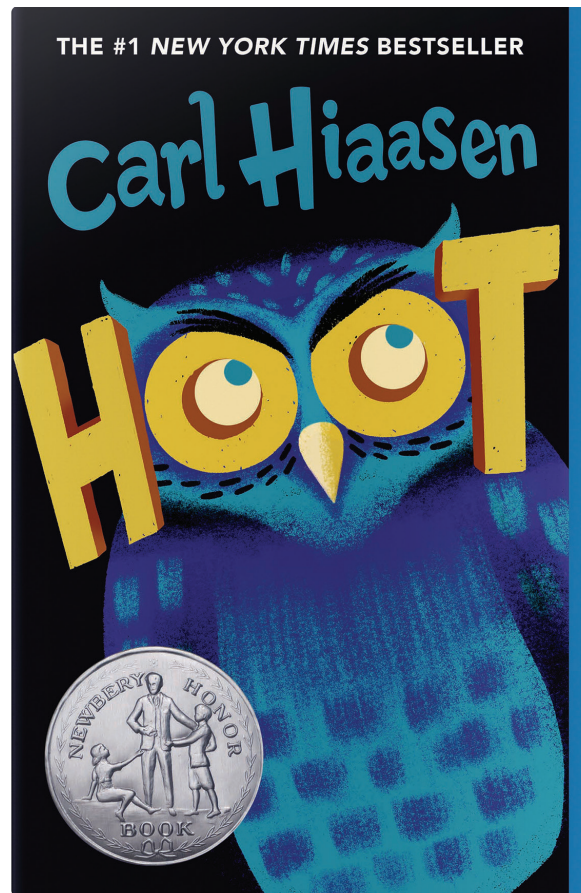




## About the Book

Newbery Honor-winning and #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Carl Hiaasen's beloved *Hoot* delivers an adventure full of new kids, bullies, alligators, eco-warriors, pancakes, and pint-sized owls.

Everybody loves Mother Paula's pancakes. Everybody, that is, except the colony of cute but endangered owls that live on the building site of the new restaurant. Can the awkward new kid and his feral friend prank the pancake people out of town? Or is the owls' fate cemented in pancake batter?



Grades 5 & Up • Themes: Science & Nature, Endangered Species, Mystery & Suspense, Humor, Adventure

## About the Author

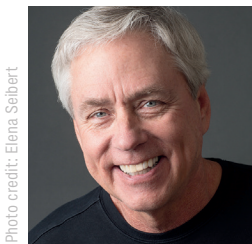


Photo credit: Elena Seibert

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## Praise for the Book

**"Hoot is quintessential Hiaasen—a mystery/adventure set in South Florida, peopled with original and wacky characters."**

—*The Horn Book Magazine*

**"Yes, it is a hoot."** —*The Washington Post*

- A Newbery Honor Winner
- A *New York Times* Bestseller
- A SEBA Book Award for Best Children's Book
- An ABC Children's Booksellers Choice
- An ALA-ALSC Notable Children's Book
- An ALA-YALSA Best Book for Young Adults
- A Child Magazine 50 Best Children's Books Selection
- A New York Public Library Stuff for the Teen Age Selection
- A New York Public Library Top 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing Selection
- A Book Sense Book of the Year Finalist
- A Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Book
- A Parent's Guide Children's Media Award Winner
- A Capitol Choices Noteworthy Book for Children and Teens
- An IRA YA Choice

## Discussion Questions

- 1 At the beginning of the book, Roy misses his old home in Montana. Have you ever moved to a new place? What was the most challenging thing about it? How did you adjust to your new surroundings?
- 2 Beatrice and Mullet Fingers have a very different family than Roy. Do you think the characters' home lives affected their approach to the Mother Paula's problem?
- 3 The Environmental Impact Statement is missing from the Mother Paula's file at City Hall. Is Roy correct in thinking that it was lost on purpose? What should the restaurant have done instead?
- 4 Mullet Fingers trespasses, pulls pranks, and vandalizes property in order to postpone the land development. Are his tactics effective? What would you do differently?
- 5 Roy's mother says, "Sometimes you're going to be faced with situations where the line isn't clear between what's right and what's wrong. Your heart will tell you to do one thing, and your brain will tell you to do something different. In the end, all that's left is to look at both sides and go with your best judgment." When was Roy faced with a decision like this? Have you ever been faced with a decision where there wasn't a clear right and wrong?
- 6 Do you think Roy handles the bullies he encounters the right way? What could he do differently? What do you think you should do if you're being bullied?
- 7 Do you think Roy's first impression of Beatrice is accurate? How do first impressions change over time?
- 8 Protecting the environment is an important theme in this story. Why is protecting the environment so important to the characters? What can you do to protect your local environment?
- 9 Curly the foreman works for Mother Paula's, hires attack dogs to guard the property, and even denies the existence of the burrowing owls. At the end of the book, Curly goes to the empty lot to watch the owls with Roy's family and Officer Delinko. Do you think Curly is a bad person or a good person? Why do you think he did those things? What would you have done if you were Curly?
- 10 By the end of *Hoot*, Roy is starting to feel better about living in Florida and doesn't miss Montana as much. Why do you think he changed his mind?



## Activities

**About Those Owls** While doing research, Roy finds out that the Latin name of the owl he's trying to save is *Athene cunicularia floridana*. Use Audobon.org to find interesting facts about owls in general and owls that may be found close to where you live.

**Protecting Our Environment** Roy finds out later in the book that the pancake restaurant Mother Paula's had to file an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which under federal law is required for certain projects to help protect our environment. What are things that you, your school, and your family do to help protect our precious land and water? Research to find other ways you can protect our planet.

**What Are the Important Environmental Issues Around Me?** Roy and his friends act as watchdogs for the proposed Mother Paula's site by saving owls who would have lost their homes and lives if the groundbreaking for the new restaurant had begun. Similarly, the U.S. government's Environmental Protection Agency is designed to help us preserve our natural resources, acting as a watchdog to make sure that people and companies are treating our environment with the care it deserves. Go to the EPA website to find more information about air and water quality in your area. Write a report about what you find.

## Fun with Names

Authors sometimes give their characters names or nicknames to give readers a hint about who that person really is. In *Hoot*, the protagonist's name is Roy, which for some readers might bring to mind Roy Rogers, a famous American actor and singer best known for being a cowboy. Roy had just moved from Montana, known for its cattle. This connects also to Dana Matherson giving him the nickname "cowgirl" to make fun of him. There is also a character named Chuck Muckle, the corporate vice president of Mother Paula's. *Muck* is dirt, rubbish, or waste matter. Get the picture? Try it for yourself. Can you find other names or nicknames that have hidden meanings in this book or others by Carl Hiaasen?

## Bullying

On the first page of the book, Roy was bullied by Dana Matherson, who "grabbed Roy's head from behind and pressed his thumbs into Roy's temple, as if he were squeezing a soccer ball." Roy decides to punch Dana in the face, which results in Dana's nose being broken, Roy being suspended from the bus for two weeks, and Roy having to write an apology letter to Dana. Only Roy's wits keep Dana from coming back later in the book and retaliating. We all know bullying is wrong and should not be tolerated, but what could Roy have done in that situation to avoid violence altogether?

## Friends Helping Friends Save the Planet

In *Hoot*, Roy's friends and classmates help him, Mullet Fingers, and Beatrice in their quest to save the owls by creating signs, forming a human chain, singing songs, and more. In the end, a group of middle schoolers save some endangered owls. Using their example as your guide, think of something in your world that could be changed, and design at least five strategies that you would use to help bring about that change.



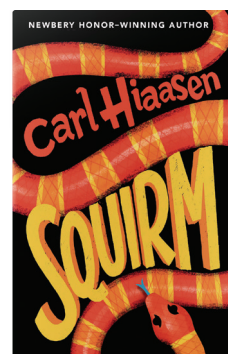
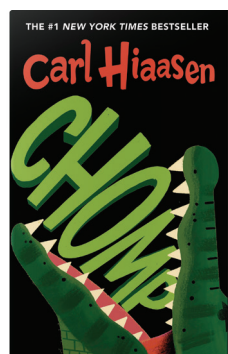
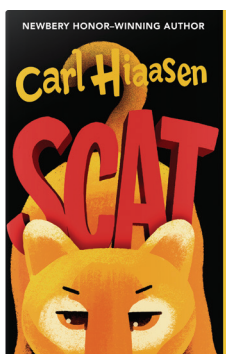
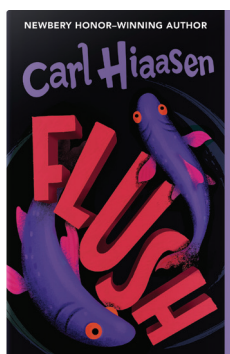
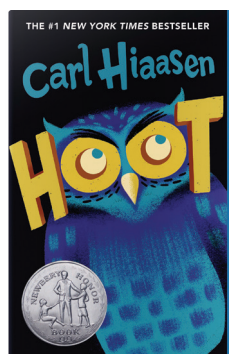
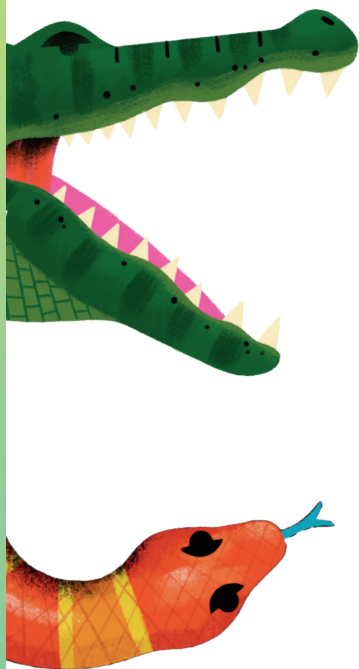


## Let's Write!

**Point of View** Authors write from a particular character's point of view because they want us to see through that character's eyes. Imagine how chapter one's bullying scene would have felt to a reader if written from Dana's point of view rather than Roy's, or how Chuck Muckle's meltdown in chapter twenty would look through his eyes. Choose either of these scenes or any other and write it from a new perspective.

**We're All New Sometimes** There are times in our lives when we are new in a group or situation, and we need to find friends and connections to feel like we belong. Roy finds a few friends who help him feel part of things in school and beyond. Write about two of the friends Roy finds in the book and how they both help him feel secure and help him in his quest to save the owls. You could also write about a time when you were new to a group or situation.





Greg Shafer has 27 years of experience teaching in Florida middle schools, and holds three degrees from the University of Florida: a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Bachelor of Science in Journalism, and a Master's Degree in English Education. As a National Board Certified Teacher, Mr. Shafer has taught middle school drama, language arts, and served as a peer evaluator as part of a \$100 Million Grant from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to Hillsborough County Public Schools. In addition, Mr. Shafer has served as team leader for seventh and eighth grades for the majority of his teaching career, and holds his professional certification to teach middle grades, gifted, English 6–12, and ESOL.



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