


TIME TO FIGHT FOR THE LITTLE GUYS!



HOOT

BY CARL HIAASEN



 SCHOLASTIC

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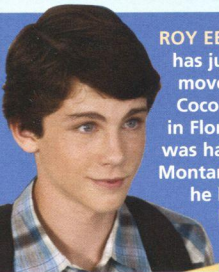
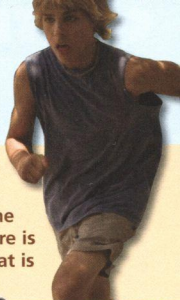
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HOOT



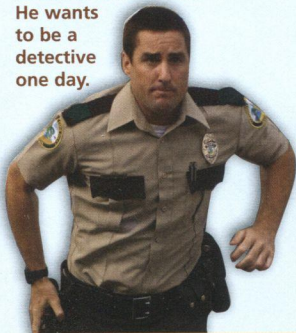
ROY EBERHARDT has just moved to Coconut Cove in Florida. He was happier in Montana where he lived before.

Who is **THE RUNNING BOY**? Why is he running? Where is he going? What is his secret?



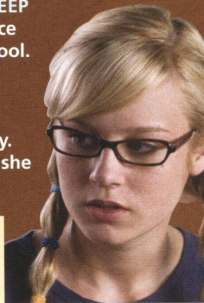
OFFICER DAVID DELINKO

is a policeman with Coconut Cove Police. He wants to be a detective one day.



MR AND MRS EBERHARDT are Roy's parents.

BEATRICE LEEP goes to Trace Middle School. She knows something about the running boy. What does she know?



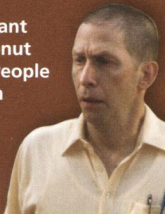
DANA MATHERSON is a kid at Trace Middle School. He's not a nice person. He hits the smaller kids.



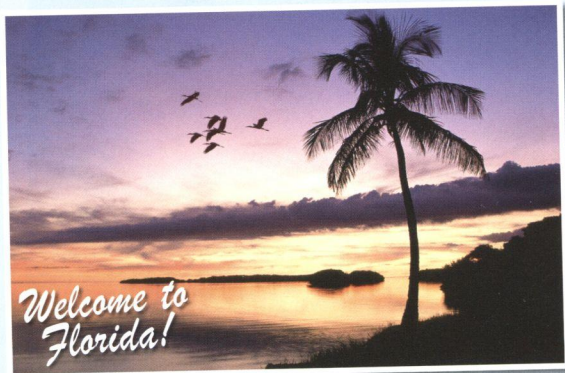
CHUCK MUCKLE is the President of Mother Paula's All-American Pancake House. He is only interested in money.

KIMBERLY LOU DIXON is a beautiful young woman. She plays old Mother Paula on television, with white hair and old-fashioned clothes.

LEROY BRANITT is the boss at the building site for the new Mother Paula's restaurant in Coconut Cove. People call him Curly.



PLACES



TRACE MIDDLE SCHOOL is a school for 11-14 year olds. Roy, Beatrice and Dana go to school here.

COCONUT COVE is a small town in Florida in the United States. It is very hot here all year.

MOTHER PAULA'S ALL-AMERICAN PANCAKE HOUSE is a group of restaurants. They are going to build another Mother Paula's in Coconut Cove.

HOOT

CHAPTER 1 THE RUNNING BOY



It all started on a Monday. Roy was on the school bus. He was sitting at the front as usual. Suddenly Dana Matherson was behind him. He smelled of cigarettes. Dana put his big, dirty hands around Roy's head and pushed his face against the window.

That was when Roy first saw the running boy. He was running very fast along the street. The boy was very thin. His hair was blond and he was very brown from the sun. He was wearing shorts and an old basketball shirt, but he wasn't wearing any shoes. His feet were black. He had no shoes, no bag and no books – on a school day! And when the bus stopped, he didn't get on. He just ran and ran.

Dana Matherson pushed Roy harder against the glass.

'Had enough, cowgirl*?' he said.

'Yeah,' said Roy. 'I've had enough.'

Dana took his hands away. Roy opened the window and put his head out. The strange boy was nowhere.



Mother Paula's All-American Pancake** Houses were very famous. They were everywhere in the United States. And they wanted to build a new one in Coconut Cove. That day Police Officer David Delinko was at the restaurant building site.

'What's the problem?' he asked Curly, the site boss. Curly's real name was Leroy Branitt. He was very angry.

'Come and see!' he said.

Officer Delinko followed him. Curly pointed to lots of long sticks all over the ground.

'Those sticks tell us where to dig,' said Curly. 'Someone pulled them out and filled in all the holes. Now we have to start again.'

'Probably just kids. Is it a big problem?' asked Officer Delinko.

'Of course it is,' said Curly angrily. 'We'll lose a lot of days, and that will cost a lot of money.'

As they walked back to the police car, Officer Delinko suddenly fell down.

'Stupid owls,' said Curly. He helped Delinko to his feet.

'Owls?' said Officer Delinko, surprised. 'Did you say owls?'

Curly pointed to a large hole in the ground. It was as big as one of Mother Paula's pancakes. 'That's why you fell down,' he said. 'It's an owl hole.'

* A cowgirl is a woman cowboy. Roy has moved from Montana where there are lots of cowboys and cowgirls.

** A pancake is a hot, round cake which is cooked in butter.

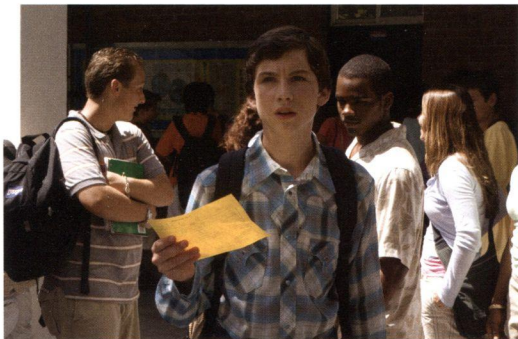
'Owls live down there?' The policeman looked carefully at the hole. 'How big are they?'

'They're small,' said Curly. 'About as big as your hand.'

They walked back to the police car. Officer Delinko got in and put on his sunglasses.

'What's going to happen when the digging starts, Mr Branitt?' he asked. 'What's going to happen to the owls?'

'Owls?' Curly laughed. 'What owls?'



Roy was new to Coconut Cove in Florida, and he didn't like it. It was too hot and it was horrible. His family travelled a lot and Roy lived in a lot of different places. The last place, and the best, was Montana. He loved the mountains, the green rivers and the blue, blue skies there. On his first day at Trace Middle School, a teacher asked him where he was from. Roy said 'Montana'. Ever since that day, everyone called him 'cowgirl'.



All day Roy couldn't stop thinking about the strange running boy. Where was he running and why? Roy looked for him at school, but he wasn't there. The next morning, he looked for him out of the window of the school bus. No one. No one on Wednesday or Thursday morning either.

Then on Friday, there he was! He was running again, with the same shorts, the same old basketball shirt and the same black feet.

The bus stopped at a bus stop. Roy took his bag and jumped up quickly. But Dana Matherson jumped up with him and pulled his head back.

'Where are you going, cowgirl?' he said.

'Let go, Dana,' Roy cried. 'Please!'

But Dana didn't want to let go. Roy lifted his hand and brought it up over his head as hard as he could. He hit Dana hard on the nose.

'Aargh!' shouted Dana. He let go. Roy ran to the door. A tall girl with red glasses was getting on. He pushed past her.



'Hey, wait!' she shouted.

But Roy was running now. He followed the strange boy

through the streets. They ran and ran. The boy turned off the road onto a golf course. Roy followed, but he was becoming very tired.

‘This boy is amazing!’ he thought.

Suddenly the boy disappeared into some trees on the edge of the course. Now Roy could see a group of four golfers in front of him. They were shouting and waving.

Roy didn’t see the golf ball until it was too late. It hit him hard above his left ear. He felt himself falling – then everything went black.



Roy was in the Principal’s* room. Miss Hennepin was not happy.

‘Why did you hit Mr Matherson?’ she asked.

‘Because he was hurting me,’ said Roy.

‘He says you started it,’ said Miss Hennepin. ‘And did you know that you broke his nose? Your parents will have to pay his hospital bill!’

‘Matherson always hits the smaller kids,’ said Roy.

‘Nobody else has said anything,’ said Miss Hennepin.

‘That’s because everybody is frightened of him,’ said Roy.

‘Well, I don’t know who to believe,’ said Miss Hennepin. ‘But you must write to Mr Matherson and say you’re sorry. And you can’t travel on the school bus for two weeks.’

‘Really?’ Roy said. He was trying not to laugh. ‘No school bus – no Dana,’ he thought. ‘That’s fantastic!’



* *The Principal is the head of a school.*



Roy was having lunch. A tall girl with red glasses sat down next to him. She looked strong ... and a little scary.

'I'm Beatrice Leep,' she said. 'You pushed me on the bus this morning.'

'Sorry,' said Roy. 'I needed to get off fast.'

'Why? Were you running after someone?' asked the girl.

'Did you see that boy, too?' Roy said. 'The boy with no shoes?'

'No, I didn't see anyone,' said the girl. 'And you didn't see anyone either. Do you understand? You just mind your own business.'

CHAPTER 2

ALLIGATORS AND SNAKES

Officer Delinko was back at the Mother Paula's building site.

'What's the problem this time?' he asked.

Curly took Delinko to a corner of the site and pointed at three toilets.

'These are for the men when they start work,' he said. 'But I thought I heard noises inside.'

Officer Delinko opened one of the toilet doors. Curly watched as the policeman looked into the toilet. Suddenly there was a loud shout. The policeman jumped out and threw himself to the ground.

'What is it?' cried Curly.

'Alligators!' shouted Delinko.

'You're joking!' said Curly. He couldn't believe it. 'Are they ... big?'

'They'll look very big,' said Officer Delinko, 'when you're sitting over them!'



When Roy arrived home from school, he told his parents what happened on the bus. His mother looked at him very carefully.

'You seem to be OK, Roy,' she said, 'but you say Dana Matherson has a broken nose?'

'Oh?' said Roy's father. He looked quite pleased. 'So you can't go on the school bus and you have to say sorry. What about him?'

'I don't know, Dad.'

'Call the school tomorrow, Liz,' said Mr Eberhardt. 'Ask what's happening to Dana Matherson.'

Up in his bedroom, Roy wrote his letter. It went like this:

*Dear Dana,
I'm sorry I broke your nose. I hope it's better now.
Don't hurt me again and I won't hit you again.
I think that's fair, don't you?
Sincerely
Roy A. Eberhardt*

He showed it to his parents.
'It's a good letter,' they said. 'Well done.'



At the police station, Officer Delinko was standing in front of his boss.

'How many alligators?' asked his boss.

'Two in each toilet,' said Officer Delinko. 'Real ones. We had to find an alligator man to get them out.'

'Find out who's doing this, Delinko. Send a police car to the building site every hour.'

'Yes, boss,' Officer Delinko said. 'I'll go myself.'



It was Officer Delinko's dream to be a detective. He got up at five the next morning and drove to the site. He parked his car and waited. It was still dark and he was very tired. He fell asleep.

When he woke up, it was still dark. He couldn't see anything, but he felt hot. What time was it? He heard a noise outside the car and opened the door. Curly was there ... in the brilliant sunshine.

'Has something happened?' Delinko asked.

'Come and see for yourself,' said Curly.

Officer Delinko got out of his car and looked.

'Oh, no!' he said. There was black paint all over his car windows.



Roy didn't want to go to school on Monday. He was worried about Dana Matherson. But Matherson wasn't there. Dana's mother phoned the school to say he was ill.

'Everyone is talking about you, Eberhardt,' another boy told him. 'Nobody's ever hit Matherson before.'

After school, Roy took his letter to Dana Matherson's house. Dana came to the door. His face wasn't pretty.

'That's terrible,' thought Roy. 'I didn't know I hit him so hard!'

'What do you want?' said Dana.

'I came to give you this,' said Roy. He gave Dana the letter.

'Get lost, cowgirl,' said Dana. 'I'm going to get you. Then you'll be sorry!'



Later that day, Roy got out his bicycle and rode to the golf course. He soon found the trees on the edge of the course. It was dark under the trees, but he could see an old

fire and three big bags. In the first bag there were bottles and cans. In the second bag there were a lot of boys' clothes: T-shirts and jeans ... but no socks or shoes. The third bag was heavy. Roy opened it and turned it over. Some long, fat things fell onto the grass. Then they began to move.

'Uh-oh,' Roy said. 'Snakes!'

And not just ordinary snakes. Very dangerous ones.

'Don't move!' said a voice behind him.

'I can't!' said Roy. 'I'm too frightened!'



'OK,' said the voice. 'Now move slowly back. Very slowly.'

Roy could hardly walk, but he did what the voice said. Suddenly a hand pulled his shirt and threw him onto the grass. Then someone threw a bag over his head and tied his hands.

'Who are you?' said the voice. 'Why are you here?'

'My name is Roy Eberhardt. I saw you from the bus. You were running. I wanted to know who you were.'

'You must go,' said the boy. He helped Roy to his feet.

'Now start walking.'

Roy couldn't see anything through the bag.

'What about the snakes?' asked Roy. 'What are you going to do with them?'

'Don't worry about them,' said the boy. 'Keep walking.'

Soon Roy could smell the grass of the golf course. The boy untied Roy's hands.

'Don't turn around,' he said.

'What's your name?' asked Roy.

'Sometimes people call me Mullet* Fingers. Don't turn around until you count to fifty, OK?'

Roy began to count. 'One, two, three ...' When he reached fifty, he took the bag off his head. He turned around quickly. He was alone in the centre of the golf course. The boy with no shoes wasn't there.

Roy ran back to his bicycle and rode home as fast as possible. He wasn't frightened. He was really excited now.

* *A mullet is a small fish.*

CHAPTER 3

A RIDE WITH BEATRICE

At breakfast the next morning, Roy's father was reading the newspaper.

'Listen to this,' he said. "'Early Monday morning at a building site on East Oriole Avenue, someone painted the windows of a police car black. A police officer was asleep inside the car at the time.'" Can you believe that?'

'A police officer asleep at work? That's terrible,' said Roy's mother.

Mr Eberhardt read some more. 'It says this is the third problem at the site this week,' he said.

'What were the others?' asked Roy.

His dad looked for the information. 'Here it is. "Last Monday, someone pulled out all the planning sticks. Four days later, someone put alligators in the toilets."'

Roy was thinking hard. The street where he first saw the strange boy was West Oriole Avenue. But he decided not to tell his parents about Mullet Fingers.



Officer Delinko was in trouble.

'Did you see the newspaper?' asked his boss.

'I'm very sorry,' said Delinko. 'It won't happen again.'

'No, it won't happen again, Officer Delinko. You're not going anywhere. You're going to work at your desk for a month. We've got you another car ... a golf car. You can drive it home and back to work. But nowhere else. Is that clear?'

'Yes, boss,' said Delinko. He felt so stupid. He really wanted to catch those kids now. Luckily the building site was on his way home. Perhaps he could have a look when he drove past – in secret.



After school, Roy took a shoe box from his bedroom and went quietly out the back door. He rode back to the golf course. He left his bicycle and walked as far as the trees. He was ready for anything, but this time there was no fire, no bags, no snakes. Nothing. Mullet Fingers was gone.

Roy walked back along the golf course. 'I'm going to be late,' thought Roy. He needed to find his bicycle quickly and get home. His parents were probably worried.

But his bicycle wasn't there. Roy couldn't believe it.

'Hey, you!' shouted a voice behind him.

Roy jumped and turned. There was Beatrice Leep, sitting on his bicycle.

'What's in the shoe box, cowgirl?' she asked.

'That's my bike,' Roy said.

'Yes, it is,' said Beatrice. 'Get on. We're going for a ride.'

Beatrice rode fast through the streets. She was a very strong rider.

They arrived at a small park full of old cars. In one corner was an old pizza truck.

'For the last time, what's in that shoe box?' asked Beatrice.

'Shoes,' said Roy. 'They're for the boy that I told you about. He needs shoes.'

'How do you know he wants to wear shoes?' said Beatrice. 'Perhaps he can run faster without them. Why do you care about this kid anyway?'

It was a good question and Roy couldn't answer. There was something about the look on the boy's face. He looked like he had something important to do.

'I don't know,' said Roy. 'I don't know why.'

'OK, I'll give them to him. But only if you leave him alone.'

'Do you know him?' said Roy.



'Of course I know him,' Beatrice said. 'He's my stepbrother.'

'Why doesn't he go to school?' asked Roy.

'My parents sent him to a school in Alabama. But he ran away. My parents don't know he's here. And nobody is going to tell them,' Beatrice said. 'Do you understand?'

Roy agreed to keep the secret.

'You're late!' said Beatrice. 'How are you going to explain that to your mom and dad?'

'I've no idea,' said Roy.

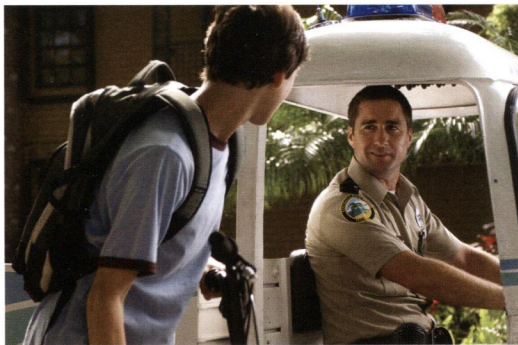
Beatrice suddenly lifted up his bicycle. She made a hole in the back wheel with her teeth, like she was eating pizza.

'There,' she said. 'That's why you're late!'



Officer Delinko was driving home along East Oriole Avenue. On the police radio he heard about a boy called Roy Eberhardt. The police were looking for him. His parents thought he was lost.

'His mom and dad must be really worried,' he thought. Suddenly he saw a young boy by the side of the road. He was walking with his bicycle.



Delinko slowed down.

'Is your name Roy?' he called.

'That's me.'

'Put your bike in the back and get in. I'll take you home. Your parents will be really happy to see you.'

'I hope so,' said Roy.

CHAPTER 4

BACK ON THE BUS

Leroy Branitt was having a bad time. The building work was two weeks late because of all the problems. After the newspaper story, he got a phone call from Chuck Muckle, the President of Mother Paula's.

'What do you think you're doing, Branitt?' shouted the President.

'It's not my fault,' cried Curly.

'Of course it's your fault,' shouted Muckle. 'You're the site boss. Hurry up and start the digging! Get some dogs. The biggest you can find. And no more problems, OK?'

'OK, OK!' cried Curly.

'The site opening must not be late,' Muckle went on. 'The television and newspapers will be there. And Kimberley Lou Dixon, too.'

Curly knew this was important. Kimberley Lou Dixon was a beautiful young woman. She played old Mother Paula on television, with white hair and old-fashioned clothes.

'If the site isn't ready for the big day, you can get another job, Branitt!'

'OK, OK!' cried Curly.



At half past four, a truck arrived at the site and a man got out. The man was a dog trainer. Curly could hear the dogs inside the truck.

'I've got the dogs you wanted,' the man said. 'They don't like strangers. You go home before I let them out.'

'Good idea,' said Curly. He quickly got in his car and drove out of the site. Then he stopped and watched.

The dog trainer opened the truck door. Four very large black Rottweilers* jumped out and ran all over the site. They looked very scary.

‘Great!’ thought Curly. ‘Everything will be fine now.’



‘Roy!’ his mother called. ‘I spoke to Miss Hennepin today. She’s agreed that you can get the school bus again tomorrow.’

‘That’s great, Mom,’ said Roy, but he was not happy at this news.



The next morning, Roy was waiting at the bus stop. When he got on the bus, everybody stopped talking.

‘Oh no,’ he thought. ‘This is bad.’

He sat down and started to read his X-Men comic book. Then he felt someone behind him.

‘Hi, cowgirl,’ said Dana. ‘You’re going to be sorry you hit me.’

‘Didn’t you read the letter?’ Roy asked. ‘Don’t hurt me and I won’t hit you.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I said why don’t you hit me back?’ said Roy. ‘Then you’ll feel better.’

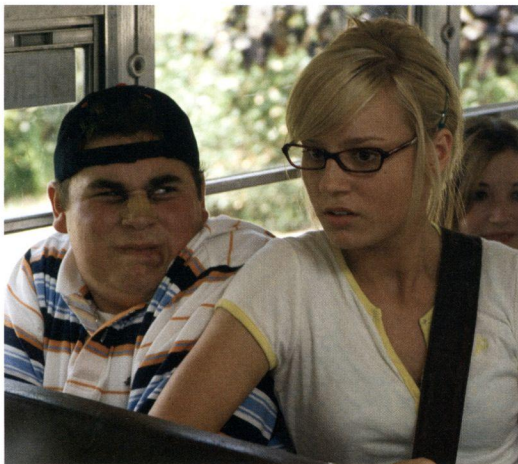
Dana hit Roy on the side of his head. Then he hit him again. And again. Roy’s head hurt terribly. Then, suddenly, Dana stopped.

Roy didn’t move for a long time. Finally he looked behind him. Dana was sitting by the window. He looked frightened.

* A Rottweiler is a strong and dangerous kind of dog.

'What are you looking at?' said the big girl who was sitting next to Dana. She was wearing red glasses.

Roy smiled. 'Hi, Beatrice,' he said.



When Curly arrived at the site that morning, the four dogs were running and jumping everywhere. Curly knew this meant trouble. The dog trainer was running after them and shouting. He caught the dogs one by one and locked them in his truck. Then he walked up to Curly.

'You tried to kill my dogs!' he shouted.

'What do you mean?' said Curly.

'Snakes!' said the dog trainer. 'Really dangerous snakes. They're everywhere.'

He took Curly around the site and pointed to all the snakes. Curly couldn't believe it. 'I've never seen any snakes here before,' he said.



'Snakes kill dogs,' the dog trainer said. 'Do you know how much a dog costs? \$3,000! So I'm going and I'm taking my dogs with me. Goodbye.'

And with that, he got in his truck and drove away.

Curly hated snakes. He was really frightened of them. So he called the alligator man who helped him before. The man arrived two hours later. He looked everywhere. But he couldn't find any snakes at all.



Roy had a difficult day at school. Everywhere he went, the kids stopped talking. They looked at him strangely.

'Go home early,' said a friend.

'Why?' asked Roy. 'What have you heard?'

'Dana is planning to get you after school.'



'I can't run away from him for ever,' Roy said. 'If it's not today, it will be tomorrow.'

When school finished, Roy walked quickly through the school towards the bus stop outside. Dana was hiding in the cleaner's room. As Roy walked past the door, Dana pulled him into the room. He shut the door fast. Then he pushed Roy down onto the floor and sat on him. He held him so hard that Roy couldn't breathe. Roy started to cry.

'This is it,' he thought. 'This stupid kid is going to kill me!'

Suddenly the door opened and Dana flew through it. Roy saw the surprised look on Dana's face as he disappeared. As soon as Roy could breathe again, he got up. He looked out of the door. No one there. Roy waited a moment. Then he ran to the main door as fast as he could. He almost got there when somebody jumped on him from behind.

CHAPTER 5

THE HOSPITAL

'Beatrice!' said Roy. 'You saved my life. What have you done with Dana?'

'I took his clothes and tied him up in front of the school,' she said. 'Listen, cowgirl, I need your help. My brother's had an accident. I need a first aid box from your house.'

'Why can't you get one from your house?' asked Roy.

'Mind your own business,' said Beatrice.

'Tell me or I won't ask my mom,' said Roy.

'Listen ... My stepmom hates my stepbrother, OK? She thinks he's a problem child. That's why she sent him away.'



Roy agreed to help. Beatrice 'borrowed' a bicycle from outside the school and they rode to his house. Roy's mom was pleased he had a new friend.

Then they rode to the pizza truck with the first aid box. At last, Roy could see Mullet Fingers clearly. He was very

hot and his left arm looked terrible.

'What happened?' he asked.

'Dogs,' said the boy.

Beatrice and Roy cleaned the arm. As soon as they finished, the boy got up.

'Time to go,' he said.

Roy looked surprised. Mullet Fingers was clearly not well.

'Come on,' said Beatrice.

They rode to the building site on East Oriole Avenue.

Roy was slowly starting to understand. 'Does Mullet Fingers have anything to do with black paint on a police car? Or alligators in the toilets at the building site?' he asked Beatrice.

'Yes,' she said. 'And he used snakes to frighten the dogs. That's when the dogs hurt his arm.'

'The snakes couldn't kill the dogs – just frighten them,' said the boy. 'I tied their mouths shut.'

'But why?' asked Roy. 'What does this all have to do with pancakes?'

'That's why,' said Mullet Fingers. He pointed towards the site. Roy looked. And there on the ground were two very small owls.



'Wow!' said Roy. 'Those are the smallest owls I've ever seen!'

'Yes,' said Mullet Fingers. 'Mother Paula's diggers are going to kill those owls ... and all the owls that live here. I want to save them.'

Suddenly Mullet Fingers fell to the ground.

'Help me get him on the bike!' shouted Beatrice.

'Where are you going?' asked Roy.

'Back to the truck.'

'No!' cried Roy. 'We have to get him to hospital. You ride. I'll run behind.'



Officer Delinko was driving past the building site. He saw some children running away. One of them looked a bit like Roy Eberhardt. Where were the dogs? He couldn't see them.

The policeman stopped the golf car and got out. Then he heard a noise: 'Hoot, hoot.' That wasn't a dog! Something flew past him. It was a little owl.



Now there were no dogs, Curly had to sleep in a trailer on the building site. He was still worried about the snakes, so he had a gun with him. It was on the table next to him. He was watching television when he heard a noise. It was coming from the bathroom. Curly jumped up and took his gun. He ran into the bathroom.

'Bang! Bang!'

A cat jumped out of the window. Luckily it was unhurt. The toilet was not so lucky. It was in pieces all over the bathroom floor.



Officer Delinko was at the Eberhardts' front door.

'Is Roy at home?' he asked.

'No, he went to a friend's house to do his homework,' said Mrs Eberhardt.

Just then they heard the phone. Roy's mother answered it.

'Oh no!' she said. 'We'll be there in five minutes. Thank you.'

'What's wrong, Lizzy?' asked her husband.

'That was the hospital!' she cried. 'Roy's there. He's hurt!'



'Please don't tell them my real name,' said Mullet Fingers when Roy and Beatrice arrived at the hospital. 'I don't want my mother here. Please!' So they said his name was Roy Eberhardt.

A doctor came into the waiting room.

'I'm Doctor Gonzalez,' she said. 'Tell me exactly what happened to Roy.'

'He was playing football when some dogs jumped on him,' said Beatrice.

'And why did *you* bring him here?' asked the doctor. 'Where are your parents?'

'They work on a fishing boat at night,' Beatrice lied. 'Can we see him, please?'

'No, not yet,' said the doctor. 'He's sleeping. You can see him soon.'

The doctor left them in the waiting room.

'I have to go now,' said Beatrice. 'I'll be back as soon as I can.'



Roy's parents went to the hospital as quickly as they could.

'We'd like to see Roy Eberhardt, please,' said Mr Eberhardt when they arrived. 'We're his parents.'

'You're Roy's parents?' said a surprised Dr Gonzalez. 'You don't look like you work on a fishing boat!'

The Eberhardts looked surprised, too. 'Can we see our son, please?' they said.

'No, not yet,' said the doctor. 'He's very ill. Anyway, he's probably asleep.'

'We want to see our son!' said Mr Eberhardt. 'Now!'

Dr Gonzalez took Roy's parents to a bed in the corner. It was empty.

'Roy! Roy! Where are you?' cried Mrs Eberhardt loudly.

In the waiting room, Roy heard the cry. He ran to his parents.

'Mom! Dad! I'm here!' he shouted.

Mr and Mrs Eberhardt were really happy to see their son. The doctor wasn't happy at all.

'You're Roy?' she said. 'So who was the young man in the bed? And where did he go?'

'I'm so sorry. I don't know his name,' said Roy, 'and I don't know where he is.'

CHAPTER 6

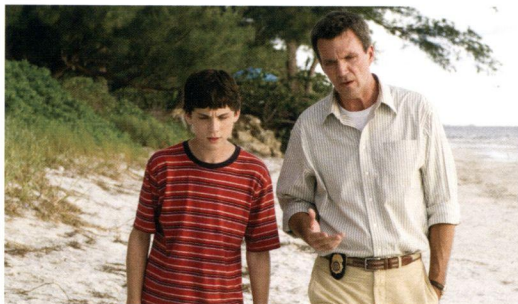
ROY HAS A PLAN

'OK, Roy, you're in a lot of trouble. What's it all about?'

Roy and his father were walking along the beach.

'Owls, Dad. It's all about owls.'

'Owls?' said his father. 'How? Tell me.'



So Roy told him everything. Well, almost everything. He didn't tell him about the snakes. But he told him about the strange boy and the building site for the new pancake house. And the owls.

'Mother Paula's diggers will kill the owls,' Roy said.

'The owls will fly away,' said his father.

'No, they won't, Dad. Not the young owls,' said Roy.

'The young owls can't fly. And their parents will probably stay with them.'

'Well,' said Mr Eberhardt, 'Mother Paula's own the site. They can do what they want if they have the right papers. It's sad, but true.'



When Roy was in bed, his mother came in to say goodnight.

'I lied at the hospital tonight, Mom,' he said. 'I'm sorry, but I thought it was important.'

'I know, Roy,' said his mother. 'Sometimes it's difficult. You think one thing but you feel something different. You just have to decide what's best.'



After breakfast on Saturday, Roy rode his bike to the old pizza truck. Beatrice's stepbrother looked much better.

'I brought you some water,' said Roy.

'Thanks, Roy,' said Mullet Fingers, 'and thanks for last night, too.'

'I talked to my dad about the site,' said Roy. 'He says there's nothing we can do. Mother Paula's can build on that site if they have the right papers.'

Mullet Fingers got up and put on some clothes. 'It isn't right that they can kill the owls. We have to fight back,' he said. 'Come on, there's a special place I want to show you. Follow me.'



Roy went with Mullet Fingers down to the river. He was surprised when Mullet Fingers got into a boat. The boy started the motor.

'Come on, Roy!' he called. 'Get in!'



'Listen!' said Mullet Fingers.

He stopped the motor. The boys were in the middle of the river. Roy listened. He couldn't hear anything – only the trees, the water and the birds.

'This is amazing,' he thought. It was beautiful and he felt completely safe.

'Here they come!' Mullet Fingers was pointing at something near the boat. 'Hold my legs!'

Roy held the boy's legs as he reached out over the water.

'Don't let go!' shouted the boy. 'I've got one!'

Roy pulled him back. In his hands was a shining fish – a mullet.

'So that's how you got your name,' said Roy. 'How do you do it?'

'Lots of practice,' said Beatrice's stepbrother. 'It's better than homework.'

He put the mullet back in the water.

'Bye, little guy,' he said. 'Swim fast.'

Then he turned to Roy.

'Are you coming to Mother Paula's tonight?' he asked. 'I'm planning something special.'



Roy was too frightened to go to the building site that night. But he couldn't stop thinking about the owls. What could he do to help? Suddenly he had an idea.

'I'm going out, Mom,' he called. 'I'll be back for dinner.'

He rode his bicycle to Dana's house. He could see Dana in his bedroom. Roy threw an empty can at Dana's window. When Dana looked out, Roy turned around. He pulled his trousers down. Then he pulled his trousers up again and ran slowly down the street. Minutes later, Dana ran out of the house. He was very angry. He caught Roy and jumped on him. They fell. Dana started to hit Roy.

'What do you think you're doing?' he said.

'I'm sorry,' said Roy. 'It was a joke.'

Dana lifted his hand again.

'Wait!' cried Roy.

'For what?'

'Cigarettes. I know where there are a lot of cigarettes.'

'Where?'

'First, say you won't hurt me.'

'OK. I won't hurt you,' said Dana. 'Where are these cigarettes?'

'In a trailer on a building site on East Oriole Avenue.'

'If you're lying, cowgirl, you're in big trouble,' said Matherson.



In his trailer on the building site, Curly was half asleep. Suddenly he heard a noise outside the door. He got up very quietly. Then he took his gun and waited behind the door. The door opened and a big boy came in. Curly hit him hard and he fell to the floor.

'Don't move!' shouted Curly. He pointed his gun at Dana Matherson.

'I won't! I won't!' cried Dana.

'So we've caught you at last!' said Curly. 'No more alligators and no more snakes!'

'What are you talking about?' said Dana.

'Get up!' said Curly and took the boy's hand. That was a mistake. Dana hit him in the face and ran out.



Officer Delinko was driving past the building site when he saw a big teenager. He was running down the street.

'That's strange,' he thought. 'What's he doing?'

He stopped the golf car and ran after him. The boy was very tired and Delinko caught him easily. He put him into the car. Then he heard shouts.

'Stop! Stop!' Curly ran up.

'That's him!' shouted Curly. 'That's the kid we were looking for.'

'He's the one?' Delinko smiled to himself. Now *this* was a story for the newspapers!

CHAPTER 7

THE NEWS LESSON

Curly woke up in his own bed on Sunday. The police had Dana Matherson so he didn't need to sleep at the site any more. He was very happy about that. Then, suddenly, he thought about his gun. He couldn't remember where it was. Maybe it was still at the site. He got up quickly and drove to the trailer.

He looked everywhere. Nothing. He looked inside one of the diggers. There was no gun there. But something looked strange. Suddenly Curly knew what it was. The driver's seat wasn't there. He looked in the other two diggers. No seats there either. Curly was angry. It was impossible to drive the diggers without seats. Where could the seats be? Perhaps they were in the toilets. He opened the door of one of the toilets and looked in. There, in the water, was something black and shining. But it wasn't an alligator. It was his gun.



That Sunday afternoon, Roy went for a boat ride through the Everglades* with his parents. It was wonderful. They saw birds and snakes and alligators. His parents took lots of photos. Roy was starting to like Florida. He was also starting to understand Mullet Fingers better. He saw why it was so important to save the owls. It wasn't just about saving owls. It was about saving everything. It was about life.

When they got home, there was a message from Officer Delinko.

'That's great,' said Roy's father. 'They've caught someone at the building site. It's Dana Matherson.'

**The Everglades is an area of wetlands in Florida.*

Roy tried not to smile.

'Um, Dad,' he said, 'you know what you said about the pancake people? About how they can do what they want if they've got the right papers? How can I find out if they have the papers?'

'Ask the City Building Office,' said Mr Eberhardt.



Curly had a surprise visitor – Chuck Muckle.

'What's the news?' asked Muckle.

'I've got some good news and some bad news,' said Curly.

'OK,' said Muckle. 'What's the good news?'

'I caught a teenager here on Saturday night,' said Curly. 'He's at the police station. The bad news is that someone else took the seats out of the diggers. We can't dig until the new ones arrive on Wednesday.'



'Wednesday is the only day Kimberly Lou Dixon can come to open our site,' said Muckle. 'You'll have to start digging as soon as everyone leaves.'

'But that's in two days!' cried Curly.

'Listen, Mr Branitt ...' said Muckle. 'If you want to keep your job, there will be no problems on Wednesday. Understand?'

'But what about the owls?' cried Curly.

'There aren't any owls,' said Muckle. 'Those holes are empty. If anyone sees an owl, tell them it's a strange cat.'



Officer Delinko's boss was pleased.

'Nice work, Delinko,' he said. 'We've caught that kid.'

Officer Delinko was not so sure. Maybe Dana Matherson wasn't the right kid. Dana wasn't clever enough.

'But ...' he started to say.

'No 'buts', Delinko,' said his boss. 'Watch that building site. Make sure there are no more problems. And don't fall asleep!'

'Yes, boss,' said Delinko. He was very pleased to get out of the office.



Roy rode to the City Building Office on his bicycle.

'Can I see the papers for Mother Paula's All-American Pancake House, please?' he asked.

'Why?' asked the man behind the desk.

'Um, it's for my homework,' said Roy.

'Just a minute,' said the man. He went away. A moment later, he was back.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'Those papers aren't here. Someone's borrowed them.'



It was dark. Officer Delinko was walking around the building site. He put his foot in a hole and fell over.

'Oh no, not again!' he thought.

'Heh!' came a noise from the hole. 'Heh. Heh. Heh.'

Delinko looked down and saw two yellow eyes. It was a young owl. 'Heh,' it said again.

'Heh,' said Officer Delinko. 'Where's your mom?'

'Mom' suddenly arrived out of the sky and Officer Delinko moved back quickly. He crashed into something big and cold behind him. He turned around and saw it was a big digger. He looked at the digger. Then he looked at the owl hole. And he felt very sad.



At breakfast, when Roy saw the back page of his father's newspaper, he felt terrible.

'WELCOME TO MOTHER PAULA'S SITE OPENING DAY,' it said. 'JOIN US AT EAST ORIOLE AVENUE AT 12 O'CLOCK ON WEDNESDAY.'

'What's wrong, Roy?' asked his mother.

'Nothing, Mom. I have to go.'

'Here. Take the newspaper,' said his father. 'Isn't it your news lesson today?'

'Oh, yeah,' said Roy. 'I forgot.' Every Tuesday, students talked to their class about a story in the news.

Roy put the newspaper with his books and ran to the bus stop. On the bus he sat next to Beatrice. He showed her the newspaper.

'Do you think your brother has seen this?' he asked.

'No,' she said. 'We have to tell him.'

'I think we can do more than just tell him,' said Roy. 'Let's help him. I have a plan.'



It was the news lesson at school. Roy decided to talk about pancakes.

'I like pancakes,' he said. 'And I was pleased about the new Mother Paula's at Coconut Cove. But then a friend showed me a beautiful little bird which lives on the site. It was an owl.' He showed the class a photo from the Internet.

'These owls are very special,' he said, 'because they live in holes in the ground. And tomorrow, they will all die.'

The class listened to him with open mouths.

'In our lessons we learn about famous people – people who fight for something they believe in,' Roy continued. 'OK, it's only a few owls and we all love pancakes. But this is wrong. If you think it's wrong too, be there tomorrow at 12 o'clock.'

CHAPTER 8

THE BIG DAY

It was the big day and Officer Delinko was back at the building site.

'I'm worried about the owls,' he told Curly.

'What owls?'

'You know!' said Delinko. 'Can't you move them somewhere safe?'

'Look, it isn't our problem,' Curly answered. 'There's nothing we can do.'

'Did you tell the pancake people?'

'They already know,' said Curly, 'and they don't care.'



'Can I leave school during lunch?' Roy asked his parents at breakfast.

'Sure,' said his father. 'I'll write a letter. But be careful.'

At school, Roy saw Beatrice. She had a letter, too.



A little before 12 o'clock, a big black car stopped outside the site. Chuck Muckle got out.

'Officer!' he shouted. 'Come here!'

Officer Delinko came over.

'Do you know who I am?' said the man. 'I'm Chuck Muckle, President of Mother Paula's!'

A beautiful young woman got out of the car.

'And this,' said Chuck Muckle, 'is Miss Kimberly Lou Dixon. You know her as Mother Paula!'

Above the entrance to the site, in big red letters, it said 'WELCOME, MOTHER PAULA'. Roy was surprised to see so many children from his class there. All Beatrice's

friends were there, too. The newspaper people were there and the television cameras were filming.



'We're very happy to be at Coconut Cove today,' said Chuck Muckle to everyone. 'And I promise that Mother Paula will be a good friend to you all.'

'Not if you're an owl!' shouted Roy.

'You've got a really nice town,' Mother Paula said. 'I'll see you again next spring when the restaurant opens.'

'Oh no, you won't!' shouted Roy again. 'I'm not going to eat your pancakes if you hurt our owls!'

'What owls?' said Mother Paula.

'The owls that live here,' said Roy. 'This site is their home.'

'I don't want to hurt any owls,' said Mother Paula. 'I love birds.'

'This is stupid,' said Chuck Muckle. 'There aren't any owls here. Can you see any?'

'No,' said Roy. 'But that's because we are making too much noise. Let's all stay quiet for one minute and maybe

they'll come out.'

Everyone agreed and they all went quiet. Roy looked at the holes in the ground. Nothing. Chuck Muckle was smiling to himself. Roy felt very upset.

Then, suddenly, Beatrice pointed to a hole behind him. Something was moving. It was a young owl.

'As I was saying ...' Muckle laughed. 'There aren't any owls here. Thank you very much for coming. That's all for today.'

'No, it isn't,' shouted a voice.

Everybody looked. The voice came from the ground. It was Mullet Fingers. He was lying in one of the owl holes.

'Hi, Mother Paula,' he said. 'If you kill those owls, you have to kill me, too.'

It was suddenly too much for Chuck Muckle. He ran towards the boy.

'Get lost!' he shouted. 'Or you'll be sorry!'

Roy jumped in front of Muckle.

'Move!' shouted Muckle.

Beatrice stood next to Roy. Then all the students in Roy's class stood next to them. And all of Beatrice's friends. They all joined arms and started to sing. And all the time the television cameras were filming.

'Can I join you, too?' said a voice.

Roy looked up and smiled. 'Yes, of course,' he said. It was Mother Paula.

Something flew down from the sky and sat on Mullet Fingers' head. It was an owl.

'Don't worry, little guy,' said the boy. 'You're safe for now.'

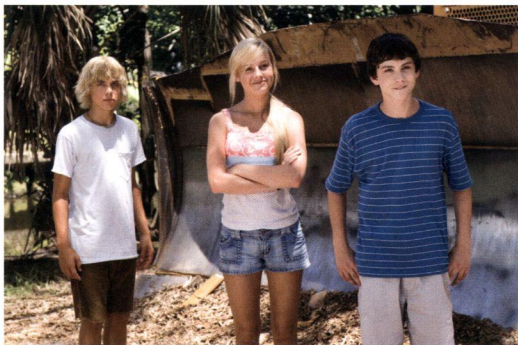


'His name's Napoleon Bridger,' said Roy.

'Napoleon?' said his mother.

'That's what it says here,' said Roy. He was looking at the

front page of the morning newspaper. Roy's name was also there, and Beatrice's. There was a big photo of the three of them in front of a digger.



'Are they still going to build the pancake house, Mom?'

'I don't know, Roy,' said his mother. 'Someone from the newspaper asked Chuck Muckle the same question and he hit her.'

'You're joking!' said Roy.

'That's what it says here,' said his mother.

Roy couldn't believe there were so many stories in the newspaper about the building site and the owls.

'Roy!' called his father. 'Could you please answer the front door?'

Roy opened the door. A thin young woman with black hair stood there. She had a black eye.

'Hello,' she said, 'I'm Kelly Colfax, from the newspaper. You're Roy Eberhardt, aren't you? Can I ask you some questions?'

'Help!' thought Roy. 'I don't know what to say.'

'Look,' he said to Kelly Colfax, 'I just went there to save the owls. That's all.'

Suddenly Mr Eberhardt came to the door.

'Excuse me,' he said. 'Can I talk to my son for a moment?'

They went inside.

'Give her these papers, Roy,' said his dad. 'They're copies of papers from the City Building Office.'

'So *you* borrowed them, Dad!' said Roy. 'What do they say?'

'It's what they *don't* say,' said Mr Eberhardt. 'Every new building must have proof that they will look after the environment. The building site doesn't have proof.'

Roy gave Kelly Colfax the papers.

'Thank you, Roy,' she said.

'Thank my dad,' thought Roy, and he smiled to himself. 'My dad cares about the owls, too.'

EPILOGUE

A SAFE HOME

They never built Mother Paula's All-American Pancake House in Coconut Cove. The building site became a safe home for the owls. People came to see them from all over Florida.

Kimberly Lou Dixon said goodbye to Mother Paula. 'I won't work for people who kill owls just to sell a few pancakes,' she said.

Chuck Muckle lost his job. He took classes on how to be less angry. He was a bad student.

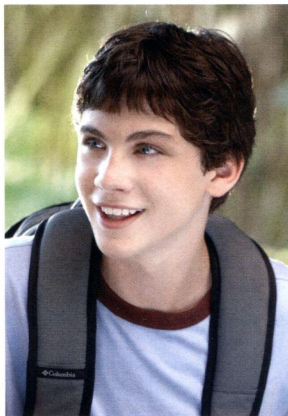
Napoleon Bridger disappeared. Roy rode his bicycle to the old pizza truck many times, but it was always empty. Only Beatrice knew where her stepbrother was.

'I'm sorry I can't tell you, Roy,' she said. 'It's a secret.'



One Saturday, Roy took the boat out on the river again. The place was as quiet and beautiful as ever. He sat on the boat once more, with his legs in the water. Suddenly the river was full of shining mullet. Roy put his hands in the water and tried to catch one. Nothing. He thought he heard a laugh.

'Is that you, Napoleon?' he called. There was no answer.



Roy looked for his shoes. One of them was very wet. Roy looked inside. In the shoe was a fish – a mullet. Roy laughed and put it carefully back into the water.

‘I’ll have to practise,’ he thought to himself. ‘And one day, I’ll be able to do that, too.’



FLORIDA'S

Roy isn't at all happy when his family move to Florida. But as Roy soon discovers, Florida isn't just about beaches and Disney World. Let's take a look at the wild side of Florida ...

THE EVERGLADES

In the south of Florida is a very large and very important area of wetlands called the Everglades. The best way to see the Everglades is by boat. Here is just some of the wildlife you can see in this beautiful place ...



TREE FROGS

There are lots of tall trees in the Everglades. Tree frogs live in some of the trees. They make a special sound. You can hear this call everywhere in the Everglades.

BIRDS

There are around 400 different kinds of birds in the Everglades. This is a Great Blue Heron. It's a very tall bird – about 1.3m high.



What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.

wild / wildlife frog protect panther

WILD SIDE

AMERICAN ALLIGATORS

In the 1960s the alligators were in danger and there were very few left. People decided to protect them. Now there are lots of alligators in the Everglades again.



WILDLIFE IN DANGER

Some wildlife in the Everglades is still in danger. For example, Florida Panthers need a very large area to live. All the new buildings in Florida have taken land from the panthers. There are only about 80 Florida Panthers left.



In your country, is there a special area which has lots of wildlife?
What can you see there? Is any wildlife there in danger?

SAVE THE OWLS



The owls in the story of *Hoot* are burrowing owls. Their name is *Athene cunicularia floridana*. What do we know about these small and very beautiful birds? And why are they in danger?

What do they look like? special It is important

They have long legs and round heads. They are brown and white with big, yellow eyes. They are only about 25 cm high. environment and its

Where do they live? the new homes. animals.

This kind of burrowing owl only lives in Florida. They usually live in open grassland. They make their nests in deep burrows in the ground. Sometimes they dig these burrows themselves. Usually they use burrows that other animals have left.

What about the young owls?

The owls lay about 6 eggs in March or April. The young owls stay in the nest for about 45 days. Then they fly away and find their own food.

What do these words mean?

You can use a dictionary.

**burrow / burrowing nest animal
lay protect / protected wildlife**



How long do they live?

They can live for about 9 years. Pairs of owls usually stay together for life. They often return to the same burrow every year.

What sounds do they make?

They don't usually hoot! They make sounds like *Hey, hey, hey* and *Kshh, kshh, kshh*.

Why are they in danger?

There are probably only a few hundred pairs of these owls left in Florida. New buildings have changed the environment. Now there aren't many safe places for the owls to live.

Can anyone save the owls?

The owls are protected in Florida. No one can hurt or kill them. There are also special centres that help owls. These centres care for owls that have lost their homes. They can also move the owls to safe new homes.



The Author

The author of *Hoot*, Carl Hiaasen, has lived in Florida all his life. He writes about Florida and cares about its wildlife. His stories show people that it is important to protect the environment and its animals.



The Film

In 2006 they made a film of *Hoot*. They used real animals in the film – real snakes, alligators and owls! The owls came from a special owl centre. The animals were always comfortable and safe while they made the film. An animal trainer looked after them.

What can you do to help wildlife near your home?



STOP THE BULLIES

If you're the victim of bullying, you're not alone. Bullying can happen to anyone – even some people who are now very famous and successful.

Sarah Michelle Gellar is probably most famous as Buffy the Vampire Slayer. When she was at school, she lived just with her mum. Her mum couldn't buy Sarah all the things the other



girls had. At school the other girls called her horrible names.

Eminem went to a school where there were only a few white kids. The other kids used to take his shoes. Once he had to walk home in the snow without any shoes. Now Eminem is one of the most successful rappers in the world! One of his songs, 'Brain Damage', is about someone who bullied him at school.



Orlando Bloom was fat when he was young. The kids at his school bullied him and called him names. Now of course Orlando is a big Hollywood star.

Is someone bullying YOU?

- ★ Tell someone – a teacher or your parents. Remember that it's difficult to stop bullying on your own.
- ★ Don't take expensive things to school. Some bullies just want your money or your mobile phone.
- ★ Keep your friends around you. Go to places like toilets when there are other people there.
- ★ Find out about your school's bullying policy. Many schools have stopped bullying successfully.

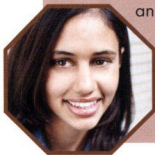
What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.

bully / bullying victim successful / successfully policy

What can we do to stop bullies like Dana Matherson? We asked some British teenagers what they think.

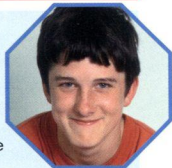
'Some kids were bullying me because I'm small. At home I thought of some good answers. They were really surprised - and they stopped bullying me.'

Lila



'Don't be a victim! If someone is bullying you, it is not your fault. No one has the right to hit you or say horrible things to you.'

Sam



'Bullies think they are popular, but the other kids in their group are frightened of them. No one really likes a bully.'

Daniel



'Bullies can seem scary, but usually they're just kids with problems. They only feel big when they bully other kids.'

Eve



'Don't fight back - it's too dangerous and you can get into big trouble. The best thing to do is just walk away.'

Jordan

FACT

Bullying can happen on the phone. 25% of British children say this has happened to them.



**What do you think about bullies and bullying?
Do you agree with the teenagers?**

CHAPTERS 1-3**Before you read**

- 1 Answer the questions. You can use a dictionary.
alligator cigarette finger hoot site snake truck
Which of these words ...
- is the sound an owl makes?
 - is a part of the body?
 - is bad for you and smells horrible?
 - is a place where people are building something new?
 - has very big teeth?
 - has wheels?
 - has a long, thin body and no legs?

- 2 Complete the sentences with these words.
amazing dig ground paint stepbrother tied
- Don't sit on that chair! The ... is still wet.
 - Maria ran ten kilometres without stopping. That's ... !
 - Look! Over there on the ... – it's a snake!
 - They ... the man to a tree so that he couldn't escape.
 - My dad got married again. His new wife's son, Brian, is my ...
 - The builders need to ... a very big hole for the new Olympic swimming pool.
- 3 Read 'People and Places' on pages 4–5.
Guess which people in the story are the good guys.
Guess which people are the bad guys.

After you read

- 4 Answer these questions.
- What three things does the running boy not have?
 - Who does Roy have to write a letter to, and why?
 - Roy meets Beatrice three times. What happens each time?
 - There are three problems at the building site. What are they?
 - What is Officer Delinko's dream?
 - What birds live on the building site? Where do they live?
How big are they?

CHAPTERS 4-6

Before you read

- 5 Choose the correct definition. You can use a dictionary.
- a) A **first aid box** is a special box where you put ...
 - i) ... your sandwiches and a drink for lunch.
 - ii) ... things to help people who are hurt or ill.
 - b) A **trailer** is ...
 - i) ... a small house on wheels.
 - ii) ... a person who walks a lot.
 - c) We **breathe** ...
 - i) ... through our mouth and nose.
 - ii) ... through our eyes and ears.

After you read

- 6 Number these sentences in the correct order.
- a) Beatrice ties Dana up in front of the school.
 - b) They tell the doctor the boy's name is Roy Eberhardt.
 - c) They go to the pizza truck and clean Mullet Fingers' bad arm.
 - d) Beatrice and Roy go to Roy's house for a first aid box.
 - e) When Mr and Mrs Eberhardt arrive, they find an empty bed.
 - f) Beatrice and Roy take Mullet Fingers to the hospital.
 - g) Mullet Fingers shows Roy the owls at the building site.
 - h) Mullet Fingers falls down.
- 7 What do you think?
- a) What was the lie Roy told at the hospital? What did Roy's mother say about that? Do you think it's never OK to lie, or OK sometimes? Why / Why not?
 - b) What was Roy's plan? How did he trick Dana? Was this the right thing to do?
 - c) Describe the special place that Mullet Fingers showed Roy. Why was it so special? Do you have a special place you like to go to?

CHAPTERS 7-8 AND EPILOGUE

Before you read

- 8 What do you think?
What is special about the owls?
What will happen to the owls? Do you think this is right?
What can Roy and his friends do?

After you read

- 9 Answer these questions.
- What does Roy talk about in the news lesson?
 - What does Roy ask the class to do?
 - Look back at pages 4–5. Which people were at the Opening Day? Who else was there?
 - What does Roy ask the people to do?
 - What does Mullet Fingers do?
 - What do all the students do?
 - What landed on Mullet Fingers' head?
 - What is Mullet Fingers' real name?
 - Why did the woman from the newspaper come to Roy's house?
 - What did Roy give her?
- 10 What happens later? Match the parts of the sentences.
- | A | B |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| a) They don't build | i) tries to find Napoleon. |
| b) The building site | ii) loses his job. |
| c) Kimberly Lou Dixon | iii) disappears. |
| d) Chuck Muckle | iv) keeps her stepbrother's secret. |
| e) Napoleon Bridger | v) leaves her job. |
| f) Roy | vi) becomes a safe home for owls. |
| g) Beatrice | vii) a new Mother Paula's in Coconut Cove. |
- 11 What do you think?
Which people in the story do you like most? Which people in the story do you like least? Why?

NEW WORDS

What do these words mean?

alligator (n)

amazing (adj)

breathe (v)

cigarette (n)

dig (v) / digger (n)

digging (n)

environment (n)

finger (n)

first aid (n)

ground (n)

hoot (n/v)

owl (n)

paint (n/v)

seat (n)

site (n)

snake (n)

stepbrother (n)

stick (n)

tie (v) / tied (past)

trailer (US) (n)

truck (n)