



Hoot by Carl Hiaasen

Caution! It is likely that the following reading guide will reveal, or at least allude to, key plot details. Therefore, if you haven't yet read this book, but are planning on doing so, you may wish to proceed with caution to avoid spoiling your later enjoyment.

About the Book

In this humorous ecological mystery, three unlikely middle-school kids lead a protest to save endangered burrowing owls that live on the property where a Mother Paula's All-American Pancake House is about to be built.

Roy Eberhart is accustomed to being the new kid in school, so when his father's job moves the family to Coconut Cove, Florida, Roy enters Trace Middle School with the full knowledge of what it feels like to have no real friends. What he doesn't expect is an immediate encounter with the school bully. Dana Matherson is everyone's fear, but at the very moment he mashes Roy's face against the school bus window, Roy notices a barefoot boy running away from the school bus and across a field. His curiosity about the boy leads him to Beatrice, the boy's stepsister, and Beatrice leads him to the burrowing owls that are about to become homeless because a Mother Paula's All-American Pancake House is about to be built on the land where the owls live. The three unlikely allies take on the construction guys, the corporate PR honchos, and the police — all for the sake of the owls.

Thematic Discussion Questions

Belonging: Roy never quite feels that he belongs anywhere. Coconut Grove is the tenth school that he has attended, and he doesn't feel that he has a hometown. Discuss Roy's attempt to belong at school. What finally makes him feel that he belongs in Florida? How is being labeled an outcast related to belonging? Discuss why Mullet Fingers and Beatrice might be considered outcasts. What other characters in the book display a need to belong? What can schools do to help new kids like Roy feel welcome?

Bullying: Brainstorm behaviors that characterize a bully. What causes a person like Dana Matherson to become a bully? Discuss the difference between acting tough and bullying. Why is Roy upset when he gets the reputation of being a tough guy after he beats up Dana? Sometimes a person who is bullied becomes a bully. How does Mullet Finger's mother bully him?

How might people like Leroy Branitt consider Mullet Fingers and Beatrice bullies? Discuss ways of dealing with school bullies.

Family: Discuss Roy's relationship with his parents. Why is Roy so conscious of being an only child? How might his life be different if he had a sibling? Compare and contrast Dana's and Mullet Finger's families. Discuss why Mullet Fingers is so willing to trust Beatrice, his step-sister. Why does she feel such a need to shield him from his mother? Discuss whether there is a correlation between Mullet Finger's family life and his desire to save the owls.

Values in Conflict: Mrs. Eberhardt tells Roy, "Honey, 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." (p.160) Discuss places throughout the book when Roy's heart tells him one thing, and his brain tells him something else. How do his heart and his brain come together at the end of the novel?

Friendship: Roy's mother worries that he doesn't have friends, so she is delighted when he brings Beatrice home. Discuss the friendship that develops between Roy and Beatrice. What does each individual gain from the relationship? How does Mullet Fingers fit into the friendship?

Roy gives Mullet Fingers his name so that he can get medical help. Mrs. Eberhardt says, "Your father and I don't want to see you get in trouble. Even for the sake of a friend." (p.159) Discuss whether Roy's decision to help Mullet Fingers is for the sake of friendship.