

Hoot Study Guide

Hoot by Carl Hiaasen

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Contents

Hoot Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapters 3-4.....	7
Chapters 5-6.....	9
Chapters 7-8.....	11
Chapters 9-10.....	13
Chapters 11-12.....	14
Chapters 13-14.....	15
Chapters 15-16.....	16
Chapters 17-18.....	18
Chapters 19-20.....	20
Chapter 21 and Epilogue.....	21
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	25
Themes.....	28
Style.....	30
Quotes.....	32
Topics for Discussion.....	33



Plot Summary

Hoot is the first novel for young readers by bestselling author Carl Hiaasen. In Hoot, Roy Eberhardt is the new kid in school and as such he is the current target of school bully, Dana Matherson. While under attack on the school bus by Dana, Roy sees a barefoot boy running away from the bus stop. Roy becomes fascinated with this boy, determined to find out who he is. Roy has no way of knowing that befriending this running boy will set him on a course that will end with a demonstration against one of the country's largest pancake houses. Hoot is a story of childhood that includes Hiaasen's trademark wit and takes a whole new group of readers on a ride through Hiaasen's Florida.

Roy Eberhardt is on the school bus when Dana Matherson, the school bully, forces his face against the window. While forced to look out, Roy sees a barefoot boy running away from the bus stop. Roy tries to find out who the boy is later at school, but no one seems to know anything about him. A few days later, Roy sees the boy again and starts to chase him, but Dana strikes again, choking Roy. Roy punches Dana and chases after the boy. However, before Roy catches up with the running boy, he is hit with a golf ball.

Back at school, Roy runs into a red haired girl who wants to know why Roy was leaving the bus that morning. Roy tries to explain himself, but the girl is tough and angry. The girl tells Roy to back off of his quest to uncover the identity of the running boy. However, Roy's curiosity is inspired and he decides to search for the boy anyway. Roy finds his camp beside the golf course, but the boy covers his head with a bag and leads him back out, not allowing Roy to see his face. The next day, the boy is gone.

The red haired girl, whom Roy now knows is Beatrice Leep, steals his bike and forces Roy to accompany her to a salvage yard. There, Beatrice tells Roy that the running boy is her stepbrother, Mullet Fingers. Mullet Fingers has run away from home and does not want anyone to know where he is because he believes his mother will have him sent to juvenile hall if she learns where he is. Roy promises to back off.

A few days later, Beatrice saves Roy from Dana and in return she asks his help with Mullet Fingers. It turns out that Mullet Fingers has gotten bitten by several dogs while vandalizing a construction site. The construction site is for a new Mother Paula's All American Pancake House, but there are burrowing owls on the property. Mullet Fingers has tried to stop the construction through letters to the corporation, but received a form letter in reply. Mullet Fingers is now trying to stop construction by repeatedly pulling out their survey stakes and vandalizing their equipment. This time, however, Mullet Fingers has gotten an infection from multiple dog bites.

Roy and Beatrice take Mullet Fingers to the hospital and Roy gives the hospital his own name as Mullet Fingers. This causes the hospital to call Roy's parents. When Roy overhears his parents arguing with hospital staff, he reveals the truth. However, Roy cannot tell them Mullet Fingers' real name, therefore protecting Mullet Fingers from discovery.



The corporation building the new restaurant becomes frustrated with the delays and decides to have the ground breaking ceremony that week despite the repeated vandalism. However, Roy and Beatrice manage to convince a large number of their friends and classmates to appear at the ceremony. Mullet Fingers too appears, buried in one of the owl's burrows. The students protest the danger to the owls and force the site to shut down once more. In the aftermath, it is revealed to the press that the corporation does not have the proper paperwork for building over the owl burrows. The corporation blames the whole ordeal on a hotheaded vice-president and decides to turn the site into a conservatory for the owls.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Carl Hiaasen is a well known writer of adult fiction that is often set in Florida, incorporating aspects of environmental issues set in Florida. This novel is Hiaasen's first attempt at young adult fiction, an attempt that resulted in the reception of the Newberry Award for young adult fiction.

In chapter 1, Roy is on the bus when Dana Matherson presses his face against the window. Had Dana not done this, Roy might not have seen the running boy. Later, Roy cannot stop thinking about this boy who was running away from the school bus with no shoes on. Roy asks his new friend, Garrett, about the boy, but Garrett has no clue who Roy is talking about. At the same time, Officer Delinko is investigating vandalism at the new site of Mother Paula's All American Pancake House. Someone has pulled out all the survey stakes and covered the holes, causing a delay in the start of the construction project. Officer Delinko files a report.

In chapter 2, Roy sits at the front of the bus for the next couple of days, hoping to catch sight of the running boy again. When Roy finally catches sight of the boy and prepares to jump off the bus to chase him, Dana Matherson grabs him around the throat. Roy struggles and finally throws a punch behind him, connecting with something soft and squishy. Roy jumps off the bus, nearly knocking over a girl who is boarding. Roy chases the running boy through people's yards and across a golf course. Before Roy can catch up to the boy, he is hit on the side of the head by a golf ball. Roy returns to school and has a conversation with the vice principal because Dana's nose is broken. Even though Roy has bruises on his neck from Dana's hands, Roy is suspended from the bus for two weeks and ordered to write an apology to Dana. Later when Roy goes to lunch, the girl from the bus corners him and tells him to stay away from the running boy.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The first two chapters of the novel introduce three main characters and the conflict that drives the plot. The first character introduced is Roy Eberhardt. Roy is new to Coconut Cove and because of this he is experiencing the wrath of the local bully. On the bus, Dana Matherson mashes Roy's face against the window, causing Roy to see the running boy. Roy is immediately fascinated with the running boy because he is about Roy's age, but he is clearly not enrolled in school. This fascination causes Roy to break Dana's nose in an attempt to break free of him and chase down the elusive boy. This puts Roy in trouble not only with the bully, but with the school. It also shows the reader that while Roy is normally a quiet, shy boy, he is also willing to do what it takes when it is necessary.



Along with Roy and the running boy, a young girl is introduced in the second chapter. Although the reader does not yet know the girl's name, it is clear she has an interest in the running boy. This girl is also a bully, but there appears to be a reason for her behavior. Finally the reader is introduced to the conflicts that will propel the plot. The first conflict is the battle between Roy and Dana Matherson that is unresolved and will most likely become an ongoing problem. The second is the vandalism at the pancake house site. This vandalism appears random and unrelated to Roy and the other characters, but it will soon become the one conflict that will drive a large portion of the plot.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

In chapter 3, Officer Delinko arrives once more at the Mother Paula's site to learn that the vandal has again pulled up the stakes, filling in the holes, and flattened all the tires on a flat bed truck carrying port-a-potties. Officer Delinko checks the potties to be sure they were not tampered with and finds small alligators in each one. Across town, Roy arrives home and has to explain to his parents about the fight he was in on the bus. Roy's father is outraged that Roy was punished, but Dana Matherson was not. Therefore, when Roy writes his apology letter, Roy's father is supportive of his less than regretful tone. Back at the station, Officer Delinko meets with his sergeant and captain to discuss the vandalism at the pancake house site. The captain is under pressure from the chief and the mayor to resolve this problem, so he orders more patrols in the area. Officer Delinko volunteers to sit on the site early the following morning on his own time.

In chapter 4, Roy returns to school the following morning worried about Dana's retribution, but Dana calls in sick. Garrett warns Roy, however, that when Dana returns he will most likely be in trouble. Roy asks Garrett about the girl on the bus and learns her name is Beatrice Leep. Beatrice is just as tough as Dana, therefore Garrett worries that Roy will be beat up by both. The next morning, Officer Delinko wakes early and sits in his car beside the pancake house site. Officer Delinko falls asleep and wakes to find his car's windows have been spray painted black. At lunch that same day, Roy approaches Beatrice Leep at lunch and suggests a truce. Beatrice is so shocked by his behavior she does not know what to say. After school, Roy asks his mother to drive him to Dana Matherson's house. Roy gives Dana the apology letter and leaves as Dana and his mother begin to wrestle over the letter.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Roy returns to school afraid of Dana's wrath, but Dana does not show up. Later Roy takes Dana the apology letter he was told to write, but Dana does not forgive him and makes threats to be acted out when he returns to school. As Roy drops off the letter, however, he sees where Dana gets his violent behavior. Mrs. Matherson is as violent and unkind as her son. Roy also learns that the girl from the bus, Beatrice Leep, is known as something of a bully as well. Roy confronts her and leaves her speechless, suggesting that Beatrice might not be the threat Roy believes her to be.

Officer Delinko is called to the pancake house site again and finds that a vandal has not only pulled up the survey stakes, but has placed alligators in the toilets. This causes pressure on the police department because the Mother Paula restaurant is a large chain and its arrival in Coconut Cove is a big deal to the local politicians. Officer Delinko sees it as a chance to advance in his career. Officer Delinko goes to the site early in the morning, offering surveillance off the clock in hopes of catching the vandal. Instead,



Officer Delinko falls asleep, making himself a target. This suggests to the reader that Officer Delinko is prone to making mistakes and that he will be harshly punished for this mistake. This also suggests that Officer Delinko will become even more determined to find the vandal.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

In chapter 5, Roy finishes his homework quickly and sneaks out of the house to go find the running boy. Roy returns to the golf course where he goes into the trees searching for signs of the running boy. Roy finally finds a camp fire and three bags. One bag contains trash, one clothing, and the third Roy pours out because he cannot see its contents. At his feet, Roy has poured out nine cottonmouth moccasin snakes. These are highly poisonous, so Roy stands very still to keep from being bitten. A voice behind Roy tells him to jump back on the count of three, but Roy is so scared that the voice has to yank him back. Roy then finds himself tied to a tree with a bag over his head. The voice asks why Roy has come here and then the voice leads Roy out of the area. Roy is left alone in the middle of the golf course.

In chapter 6, Roy questions his parents about the laws governing children and school. When Roy learns it is against the law for a child not to go to school, he decides not to tell his parents about the running boy. Roy's father reads an article in the paper about the vandalism of a police car while the officer was asleep inside. Roy's mother thinks they should fire the police officer. At that same moment, Officer Delinko is being lectured for his actions. Officer Delinko is placed on desk duty for a month as a result of his actions and warned to not let anything like it happen again. At school, Roy discovers that Dana is out sick again. Garrett warns him to leave town to stay safe. After school that day, Roy sneaks out of the house and returns to the golf course in search of the boy. However, the boy is gone. It begins to rain so Roy goes back to where he left his bike, but it is not there. Roy begins to walk home, worried about making it there before his parents become too concerned. While waiting to cross a busy street, Beatrice Leep comes up behind Roy with his bike.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

Roy attempts to befriend the running boy, but has little luck. Instead, Roy is nearly bitten by a poisonous snake and then has a bag placed over his head. This suggests to the reader that the running boy either has something to hide or is afraid of being found by someone. Roy leaves with more questions than answers, so he returns to the spot the next day. The boy is gone and so is all his stuff. Roy moves to leave, but someone has taken his bike. On his long walk home, Roy is approached by Beatrice Leep with his bike. Roy is not sure what Beatrice wants, and neither is the reader, but her actions have all been related to the running boy in some way thus far, therefore it is reasonable to think this might have something to do with him as well.

At the same time Roy is trying to befriend the running boy, Officer Delinko is making mistakes and paying for them. Officer Delinko falls asleep and someone vandalizes his car, making him look like a fool. The article in the paper makes it seem even worse,

causing a great deal of publicity for both the police department and Mother Paula's that is undesirable. This suggests that Officer Delinko is on a thin leash with his job, rather than facing a promotion. However, Officer Delinko is now more determined than ever to find the vandals and become the hero, suggesting he might go beyond his current authority to do so.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

In chapter 7, Beatrice orders Roy to get on to the handlebars of his own bike and she takes him to a large salvage yard. Once there, Beatrice takes Roy into the back of an ice cream truck on cinder blocks. Beatrice wants to know what is in the shoe box Roy has. Roy tells her that he has brought the running boy shoes because he is concerned he might step on something. Beatrice takes the shoes and promises to get them to the running boy, confessing that he is her brother. Roy is told that the running boy is Beatrice's stepbrother and that he has run away from military school. Beatrice and her brother are afraid that if anyone finds out where he is, he will be sent to juvenile hall, so they have been hiding him out.

At the same time, Officer Delinko is working late and finally decides to leave just as the rain begins. Officer Delinko waits the storm out rather than get his uniform wet and retrieves his newly cleaned patrol car. On his way home, Officer Delinko hears a report of a missing boy. When Officer Delinko sees a boy of the same age on the street, he stops and asks his name. It turns out the missing boy is Roy and that is who Officer Delinko has found. Officer Delinko gives Roy a ride home. Officer Delinko hopes that by returning the missing boy he will receive accolades from his bosses.

In chapter 8, Roy spends the next couple of days around the house because of the weather. At the end of the week, Roy's mother tells him that she got his suspension from the bus lifted. At the same time, Leroy Branitt is under a lot of pressure from the Mother Paula Corporation to make sure nothing else happens to delay the construction of the new restaurant. The corporation wants to have a big party to celebrate the ground breaking, but they only have a small window in which the actress who plays Mother Paula in the commercials can appear at the party. Branitt hires a dog trainer to bring dogs to the site every night. Branitt believes this will finally end the vandalism. The next morning, Roy boards the bus and finds Dana has returned. Dana begins bashing Roy over the head. However, when Beatrice boards the bus, she sits beside Roy and stops the beating.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Beatrice tells Roy that she is the running boy's, or Mullet Fingers', sister. Beatrice's father married Mullet Fingers' mother, but she does not care about Mullet Fingers and has sent him to multiple military schools, each of which Mullet Fingers has run away from. Now they are afraid that if his mother finds him, she will send Mullet Fingers to juvenile hall. This explains to the reader why Mullet Fingers acted as he did when Roy found him the first time.



Roy returns to the bus to find Dana there waiting for him. Dana begins hitting Roy on the head and Roy refuses to fight back, causing Dana to continue what he is doing. Dana is clearly a person who understands little beyond violence. However, Dana also understands danger because he stops hurting Roy when Beatrice, who is also known for her own brand of violence, gets on the bus. This suggests some kind of truce between Roy and Beatrice that might grow into friendship.

Officer Delinko is more determined than ever to become a hero so that he can get the promotion he so desperately wants. For this reason, Officer Delinko rescues Roy off the streets. The only problem with Officer Delinko's hopes, however, is that he is too eager for accolades.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

In chapter 9, Roy is nervous at school because he learns Dana plans to grab him on his way to the bus and beat him up. Roy tries to avoid Dana by walking with a teacher and then taking a short cut. However, Dana grabs him anyway and drags him into a janitor's closet. Dana and Roy struggle for a time. At one point it looks like Roy will get away, but Dana drags him back. Just as Dana is about to kill Roy, someone pulls him off of Roy.

That morning at the construction site, Branitt arrives to find the dog trainer wrangling his dogs with an umbrella in his hand. Branitt learns that there are nine cottonmouth snakes on the property and the trainer is angry because one bite can kill his dogs. The trainer also twists his ankle in an burrowing owl hole, causing him to threaten a law suit.

In chapter 10, Beatrice meets Roy outside after tying Dana to the flagpole in his underwear. They take a stolen bike to Roy's house where Roy collects first aid items and hamburger, telling his mother that they are doing a science project at Beatrice's. Instead, they go to the salvage yard where Mullet Fingers is suffering an infection from several dog bites. Beatrice and Mullet Fingers explain that Mullet Fingers put snakes inside the fence of the construction site in order to upset the dogs. The snakes had their mouths taped shut, so they were not a danger, but his arm got stuck. After Roy treats Mullet Fingers' wound, they go to the construction site where Mullet Fingers shows why he has been causing so much trouble at the site. There are burrowing owls living in three different burrows at the site.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Once again, Beatrice saves Roy from being beaten up by Dana. This time Beatrice has helped Roy because her brother is in trouble and she needs his help in saving him. Roy does as he is told, surprised by Beatrice's easy way of reading adults and lying to them. Roy finally learns the truth about Mullet Fingers' beliefs and actions. It is Mullet Fingers who has been vandalizing the construction site in an attempt to save some burrowing owls who live on the site. It seems a noble thing for such a young person to do, but it is clearly way above his abilities to stop the construction, leaving the boy desperate enough to leave snakes on the property.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

In chapter 11, Officer Delinko stops by the construction site and finds a piece of green shirt on the fence. At the same time, Beatrice and Roy are rushing away from the site with an unconscious Mullet Fingers. The infection in Mullet Fingers' arm has gotten bad and they are desperate to figure out what to do. Across town, Branitt is preparing to spend the night in the construction trailer in order to keep a watch out for the vandals. Alone in the trailer, Branitt hears a noise in the bathroom. Although it is only a mouse, Branitt fires his gun and destroys his toilet. Back at the Eberhardt house, Officer Delinko has come by to ask questions about Roy. Officer Delinko thought he saw Roy waving him down in the street, but when he approached, Roy was gone, leaving behind a stolen bike. As Officer Delinko talks to Mr. Eberhardt, Mrs. Eberhardt gets a call that Roy has been admitted to the emergency room.

In chapter 12, Roy and Beatrice lie to the doctor about the boy they have brought in for treatment. Roy gave his name and address in place of Mullet Fingers's information because he was afraid they would not treat him otherwise. The doctor clearly does not believe their story, but Mullet Fingers is receiving care. Beatrice leaves to make dinner for her father, so Roy goes in search of a soda. When he returns to the emergency room, Roy can hear arguing. When Roy recognizes his parents' voices, he goes inside. Mullet Fingers is missing from his bed. Roy tells the adults that he has no idea what the boy's name is or where he might have gone.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Mullet Fingers is desperately sick because of the dog bites, leaving Beatrice and Roy with a dilemma. They do not know what to do to help their friend without revealing his presence to the authorities. Roy comes up with a solution, but this only leads to fear and confusion for his parents, suggesting to the reader that Roy has just gotten himself into deep trouble. However, Mullet Fingers has gotten help and that is what really matters to the kids.

Officer Delinko is still desperate to catch the vandals at the construction site, so he continuously goes by there. In the afternoon, Officer Delinko finds a piece of Mullet Fingers's shirt. Officer Delinko suspects that Roy is involved in the vandalism when he finds him on the street later, causing him to be present when Mrs. Eberhardt gets word that her son has been admitted to the hospital. Officer Delinko is closer to the truth than he has been thus far in the novel, but he does not know it until it is too late. Finally, Branitt has become frightened of snakes as he takes up watch duty at the construction site. Branitt is so frightened that he shoots his own toilet, suggesting that Branitt might pose a serious danger to Mullet Fingers if he continues on his vandalism.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

In chapter 13, Roy goes to his father's office to explain everything. Roy tells his father all about Mullet Fingers except for a few details he is afraid his father can use to find Mullet Fingers. Roy then shows his father a copy of *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, open to the section on burrowing owls. Roy's father feels sympathetic toward Mullet Fingers's cause and promises not to cause him any trouble. That night Roy discusses Mullet Fingers's situation with his mother. Mrs. Eberhardt shows sympathy and agrees with her husband's assessment of the situation.

In chapter 14, it is Saturday and Roy goes to Beatrice's house to talk to her. There is a fight going on and Roy is chased off by Mrs. Leep. Next Roy goes to visit Dana Matherson, hoping again for some sort of truce. Instead, Dana tries to punch Roy and ends up damaging his own hand. Finally Roy goes to the salvage yard to see Mullet Fingers. Mullet Fingers shows Roy a response he got to a letter he wrote to the Mother Paula Corporation about the owls. The letter is clearly a form letter that does not even mention the owls. Together they go out onto the river where there is a half sunk crab boat. They talk for a while and Mullet Fingers invites Roy to help him on his next attack against the construction site.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Roy's parents now know all about Mullet Fingers. Mrs. Eberhardt, who suffered a late miscarriage many years before, is heartbroken over the idea that a mother could not want her child, assuring the reader she will be sympathetic to Mullet Fingers as the plot continues to develop. Mr. Eberhardt, too, seems sympathetic when he thinks about the poor owls who will be buried and lost when construction finally begins. This sympathy suggests the kids might have adult help in stopping the construction at the pancake house site.

Mullet Fingers proves to Roy that he has tried everything he can think of to stop the construction from beginning. However, the corporation does not care about the environment. Mullet Fingers is taking the whole thing into his own hands in hope of protecting the poor birds. This shows the reader how deeply this child cares. However, the reader continues to wonder how a child can stop such a large corporation.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

In chapter 15, Roy goes over to Dana's house and peeks in the windows until he finds the one to Dana's room. Roy gets Dana's attention and then moons him, making him mad. Roy runs and Dana runs after him. However, Dana is so out of shape that Roy actually has to slow down in order to allow Dana to catch him. Finally Dana falls on Roy, more from exhaustion than a desire to hurt him. Roy begs Dana not to hurt him and then tells him about a case of cigarettes Roy and a friend hid in a trailer on an empty lot. Dana falls for the trick and runs off.

Branitt is watching a bad movie featuring Kimberly Lou Dixon. Branitt hears a noise and he grabs his gun. Branitt bursts out of his trailer and finds Dana attempting to break in. They struggle on the ground, but Dana manages to get free when he throws dirt in Branitt's face. However, Dana has two rat traps on his toes that Branitt had left outside the trailer to catch mice. Dana runs away, but Officer Delinko happens to be out to get food from the local mini mart and sees him running in the street. Officer Delinko arrests Dana. As he is driving to the police station, Officer Delinko sees Branitt and stops for him. Officer Delinko is excited to learn that Dana is the vandal attacking the Mother Paula site.

In chapter 16, Roy learns of Dana's arrest from Garrett. It turns out Dana has a record and will most likely be sent away this time. Roy is excited, feeling as though he has done society a service by ridding it of a boy like Dana. At the same time, Branitt returns to the construction site to pick up his video tape. While there, Branitt searches for his gun that he left behind the night before. As Branitt searches the site, he discovers that the seats of the bulldozers and other heavy equipment have been stolen.

The Eberhardt family goes for a ride on an airboat in the Everglades that Sunday. Afterward, Roy's parents tell him that Officer Delinko has called to let them know of the arrest of the vandal. When his parents leave, Beatrice reveals she has been hiding under the bed all day. Roy allows her to stay the night when he learns that her parents have been fighting all day.

Chapters 15-16 Analysis

Roy sets up Dana Matherson to be arrested, but in doing so, Roy also makes sure that no one will be guarding the construction site during the night. It becomes clear that this is Mullet Fingers' idea so that he can get on the site to take the seats from the heavy machinery.

Officer Delinko has captured who he believes to be the vandal, but in reality he has simply fallen for the same trick Dana Matherson has fallen for. This leaves the reader wondering how long it will take Officer Delinko to figure out that Dana is not the real

vandal. This episode also leaves Branitt in a bad position, wondering if he will even have a job on Monday morning when Chuck Muckle from corporation finds out that they will not be able to break ground for at least another three or four days.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

In chapter 17, Branitt calls corporate and tells Muckle about the vandalism over the weekend. Muckle is angry and tells Branitt that he will be fired if anything else happens. Muckle then tells Branitt that they will be having the ground breaking ceremony on Wednesday, two days away, and afterward they must be prepared to begin construction or else. Branitt agrees to stay at the site for the next two days to guard the area. Roy goes to school that same day and learns more details about Dana's arrest. At the police station, Officer Delinko is placed back on active duty and a letter added to his permanent folder for the arrest of Dana Matherson. However, Officer Delinko is concerned that Dana is not the vandal. Officer Delinko visits Dana at the juvenile detention center and gives him a fake alligator. Dana reacts so violently that Officer Delinko knows he cannot possibly be the vandal.

At home, Roy researches burrowing owls on the Internet. After printing some pages, Roy goes to city hall and requests the Mother Paula records from the building and permits department. However, when the clerk pulls all the files the one containing the permits is missing.

In chapter 18, Officer Delinko goes to the construction site to begin his twelve hour shift of guard duty. Officer Delinko talks to Branitt for a little while, then begins walking the perimeter of the site. Officer Delinko hears a noise and turns to find a tiny owl watching him. Officer Delinko is touched by the sight and suddenly realizes what will happen to the owls when the bulldozers begin their job.

The following morning, Roy sees the advertisement for the ground breaking ceremony in the paper. Roy is upset, so he leaves early to meet with Beatrice. Roy shows Beatrice the advertisement, but she cannot satisfyingly answer the question of whether or not they should tell Mullet Fingers. At lunch, Roy goes to see Mullet Fingers himself. However, Mullet Fingers does not want Beatrice and Roy involved even though Roy has an idea. Mullet Fingers kicks Roy out of the ice cream truck, but keeps the camera Roy has brought for Mullet Fingers to take pictures of the owls. Later, during history class, Roy uses the owls as a current affairs story. Roy tells everyone about the owls, explaining the danger and how it is illegal for Mother Paula's to move or endanger the owls without special permits.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

Branitt's job is in danger, but still Muckle does not fire him. Instead, Muckle wants him to guard the site until a ground breaking ceremony in two days. Muckle is not optimistic about the chances that no more vandalism will take place, but he is also losing his enthusiasm about bulldozing the owls in their burros as well. Officer Delinko also begins



to feel guilt about what will happen to the owls now that he is not as focused on how finding the vandal will improve his career. This appears to suggest that Roy and his friends might have support from a surprising source in their fight for the owls.

Roy is forced into action by the impending ceremony. Roy looks up the laws on the owls and checks for necessary permits. Roy convinces the kids in his history class that what Mother Paula's is doing is wrong. Where this will lead, the reader is not sure, but suspects it can only help the owl's cause.



Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary

In chapter 19, Roy gets permission from his parents to attend the Mother Paula ceremony. At the site, Officer Delinko is preparing to go home when Muckle arrives with Kimberly Lou Dixon. Officer Delinko reluctantly remains at the site to show Ms. Dixon to the construction trailer so she can change her clothes.

In chapter 20, the ceremony begins with Muckle showing around the local politicians. Roy arrives with Beatrice and is happy to discover that most of his history class have come along with most of Beatrice's soccer team. When Kimberly Lou Dixon begins to make her speech, Roy heckles her, commenting on how they are about to kill the owls. This causes Ms. Dixon to become upset because she does not want to hurt owls. Muckle insists there are no owls and asks Roy to show proof. Roy tries, but the pictures Mullet Fingers took the night before did not come out. However, Mullet Fingers has buried himself in an owl burrow with a bucket of snakes above him. Muckle freaks out and begins screaming at Officer Delinko to arrest Mullet Fingers. When he refuses, Muckle tries to get Branitt to dig him out. Muckle refuses. Finally Muckle goes after the snakes himself and becomes enraged when he learns they are fake. Muckle then tells everyone to leave, but the students link arms and stand protest against him, including Kimberly Lou Dixon. As they begin to sing, an owl flies down out of the sky and lands on Mullet Fingers' head.

Chapters 19-20 Analysis

The ceremony at the construction site comes together as planned with a good turn out that includes local politicians. However, Muckle does not expect Roy and his friends to show up. Roy himself does not expect so many kids from his school to show up. With Mullet Fingers in one of the burrows, the ceremony goes crazy. Muckle shows his true colors by attacking Mullet Fingers and his fake snakes. It seems more people care about the owls than Mullet Fingers could have ever imagined. Even the actress who plays Mother Paula takes the side of the owls.



Chapter 21 and Epilogue

Chapter 21 and Epilogue Summary

In chapter 21, Roy learns Mullet Fingers' name is really Napoleon Bridger. The newspaper is filled with stories about the owls and the protest at the ceremony. Roy watches his mother clip the articles as he prepares to leave for school. When Roy slips out the front door, a reporter is waiting to talk to him. Roy's father takes him back inside to talk to him. Roy's father checked out the permit file from the building department and made a copy. Roy's father tells Roy to give the file to the reporter.

In the epilogue, Roy returns to school, but tries to avoid most of the media attention over the owl protest. At home, Roy and his parents discuss Mullet Fingers and his brief return home. Mullet Fingers tried to run away, so his mother had him put in juvenile hall. Mullet Fingers uses Dana Matherson to help him escape. Beatrice knows where Mullet Fingers is, but she promised not to tell anyone. Roy and Beatrice are friendly now. Officer Delinko has gained another commendation for recapturing Dana Matherson. Branitt is unemployed, but not terribly upset about it. The owls are still on the empty lot, happily undisturbed.

One afternoon, Roy goes out to the old crab boat and lies out in the sun for a time. When the mullets swim by, Roy tries to catch one but fails. Roy believes that Mullet Fingers never really caught one, it was some sort of trick. However, when Roy finds a mullet in his shoe when he dresses to leave, he realizes it is no trick and he hopes to learn how to do it himself one day.

Chapter 21 and Epilogue Analysis

Roy and his father make sure the media learn the truth about Mother Paula's corporation in order to be sure the owls are truly safe. The rest of these chapters contain more about the follow up on the characters. Mullet Fingers goes home, but he quickly runs away again when his mother follows through with the threat to put him in juvenile hall. Officer Delinko gets him commendations and Branitt loses his job. However, all the characters seem to have ended up in a place that makes them happy. In fact, Roy has come out of this experience with an appreciation for Florida he never thought he would have after being forced to leave his beloved Montana.



Characters

Roy Eberhardt

Roy Eberhardt is a middle school student whose parents move frequently because of his father's promotions within the Federal Justice Department. Roy was happy at their last location, Montana, therefore he is exceptionally unhappy moving to Florida. This unhappiness is compounded by the attentions of the local bully who is determined to make Roy's life miserable. Roy sees a boy running away from the bus stop one day and becomes fascinated with him, curious why a boy who appears to be his own age would not be going to school.

Roy makes several attempts to meet the running boy, but his efforts are hampered both by the boy himself and his stepsister, Beatrice. However, Roy proves he can be trusted, causing Beatrice to finally allow him to meet the running boy, known as Mullet Fingers. When Roy meets Mullet Fingers, he finds himself drawn into the boy's battle against the construction of a new pancake house. In this battle, Roy reveals himself to be a thoughtful, caring person who is willing to put himself out on a ledge for his friends and for what is right.

Beatrice Leep

Beatrice Leep is a young athlete who attends the same school as Roy. Beatrice has a tough reputation and is known to beat up boys who touch her in inappropriate ways. Beatrice targets Roy when she sees him chase after the running boy one morning off the bus. At first it appears that Beatrice is just a bully like Dana, but in truth she is only attempting to protect her brother.

Beatrice lives in a home in which the tension between her stepmother and father is overwhelming. Beatrice dislikes her stepmother and goes out of the way to make her life miserable, which brings the misery back on her. Once, Beatrice even bites a ring off her stepmother's toe. However, Beatrice turns out to be a nice girl who only wants what is right for her brother, the only person she truly loves besides her father.

Mullet Fingers

Mullet Fingers is really Napoleon Bridgers, but he prefers to go by the nickname Beatrice has given him for his ability to catch mullet with his bare hands. Mullet Fingers lives on his own because his mother dislikes him and often sends him to military school. Rather than stay in these schools, Mullet Fingers lives on his own, dependent on his sister for clothing and food. Mullet Fingers likes living on his own in nature because he is a huge environmentalist who deeply cares about wild animals and the environment of Florida.



Mullet Fingers becomes aware that a huge corporation is going to build a new restaurant on a lot where burrowing owls live. Mullet Fingers takes matters into his own hands to stop this construction. Mullet Fingers vandalizes the site frequently, leaving dangerous animals and taking up the survey stakes. This postpones construction, but will not stop it. However, Mullet Fingers does not know what else to do.

Officer David Delinko

Officer David Delinko is a very ambitious police officer who wants to become a detective like his father and brother. When Delinko becomes aware of the vandalism at the construction site, he sees it as an opportunity to make an impression on his bosses, perhaps smoothing the way to promotion. However, early morning guard duty leads to the most embarrassing moment of Delinko's career when Mullet Fingers paints the windows of his car black. Delinko becomes more determined than ever to catch the vandal after this incident. However, while serving guard duty, Delinko becomes aware of the fate of the owls and becomes an unexpected ally to Mullet Fingers' cause.

Leroy

Leroy "Curly" Branitt is the construction foreman at the Mother Paula's All American Pancake House in Coconut Cove. Branitt is in charge of preventing construction delays, but the frequent vandalism on the site causes Branitt many problems. Branitt is afraid he will lose his job, so he begins sleeping on the premises. However, this does not stop Mullet Fingers. In the end, Branitt turns against the corporation vice-president to save the owls because the vice-president is a bully and Branitt has finally had enough.

Dana Matherson

Dana Matherson is a bully at Roy's school. Dana targets Roy and only becomes more violent when Roy tries to reason with him. Dana's mother is a bully as well, presenting a violent family life that more than likely influences Dana's actions. Dana refuses to give up with Roy, so Roy finally comes up with a scheme that both rids him of Dana and gets rid of the security on the construction site for Mullet Fingers. Dana is arrested for attempting to break into the construction trailer while Branitt is inside. Dana has a record, therefore he goes to juvenile hall. When Mullet Fingers is sent to juvenile hall, he uses Dana to help him escape.

Chuck Muckle

Chuck Muckle is the vice-president for Corporate Relations at Mother Paula's. Chuck is often angry with Branitt for allowing the vandalism to stop construction. When Muckle comes to town for the ground breaking ceremony, he becomes irate at Mullet Fingers' antics and begins acting violently toward him, his rubber snakes, and the people in the



crowd. In fact, Muckle attempts to choke a reporter who asks if the restaurant will be built despite the protests. Muckle is nothing more than a bully like Dana.

Kimberly Lou Dixon

Kimberly Lou Dixon is a beauty queen turned actress who portrays Mother Paula in the commercials. Kimberly Lou is something of a celebrity to Branitt and Muckle. When the ground breaking ceremony takes place, Kimberly Lou is the guest of honor. However, when Kimberly Lou learns about the owls, she not only quits her job with Mother Paula's, she joins the protest. It turns out Kimberly Lou is a card holding member of the Audubon Society.

Mr. Eberhardt

Mr. Eberhardt is Roy's father. Mr. Eberhardt works with the Justice Department, a job that causes him to have to move his family from state to state frequently. Mr. Eberhardt cares deeply for his son, therefore when he learns about Roy's involvement with Mullet Fingers and the owls, he uses his contacts to find out if the permits are all in order for the construction. When they are not, Mr. Eberhardt gives the file to Roy to turn over to a reporter in order to use the media to protect the owls.

Mrs. Eberhardt

Mrs. Eberhardt is Roy's mother. Mrs. Eberhardt had a traumatic miscarriage when Roy was only four, therefore Roy's mother is overprotective of her only child and deeply critical of any mother who does not want the children she has. Mrs. Eberhardt is deeply sympathetic to Mullet Fingers because of this.



Objects/Places

Apology Letter

Roy is forced to write Dana Matherson an apology letter for breaking his nose.

Seats

Mullet Fingers steals the seats to all the heavy equipment waiting to clear the ground at the construction site.

The Sibley Guide to Birds

The Sibley Guide to Birds is a book about the different known species of birds. Roy uses this to show his father the burrowing owls.

Bicycles

Roy has an old bicycle that is his main source of transportation around Coconut Cove. Beatrice steals Roy's bicycle at one point to get his attention. Later, Beatrice steals another bicycle to get Roy and herself off school property quickly after tying Dana Matherson to a flagpole in his underwear.

Construction Trailer

Branitt lives in the construction trailer for several days in hopes of catching the vandal. It is in the trailer that Dana is told a case of cigarettes is hidden, leading to his arrest for trespassing.

Crab Boats

There is a crab boat that was pushed up the river near Coconut Cove and sank. Mullet Fingers takes Roy here to discuss his plans against the Mother Paula's All American Pancake restaurant site.

Bus

Roy rides the bus to and from school every day. It is on the bus that Roy first sees Mullet Fingers. The bus is also where Dana Matherson makes his first attack on Roy, causing Roy to break his nose.



Cop Car

Mullet Finger spray paints the windows on Officer Delinko's car while Officer Delinko is sleeping inside it.

Mullet

A mullet is a small fish indigenous to Florida. Mullet Fingers earns his nickname because he can catch them with his bare hands.

Alligators

Mullet Fingers places six alligators in three port-a-potties on the construction site for the new pancake house.

Cottonmouth Water Moccasin Snakes

Mullet Fingers takes nine cottonmouth snakes and places them inside the fence at the new pancake house site in order to disturb the watch dogs left there. Although poisonous, Mullet Fingers tapes their mouths shut and paints their tails with sparkles so they are easy to see.

Burrowing Owls

Burrowing Owls are tiny owls, no bigger than a soda can, that are indigenous to the southern states. There are burrowing owls on the proposed site of a new pancake house.

Environmental Impact Survey

The E.I.S. or Environmental Impact Survey is a document that must be completed by anyone planning construction in Florida. This survey was done by the Mother Paula's Corporation, but a council member was paid to hide the survey because of mention of the owls in the report.

Mother Paula's All American Pancake House

Mother Paula's All American Pancakes is a chain of pancake houses. The newest restaurant is planned for Coconut Cove, Florida, but there are burrowing owls on the proposed property.

Coconut Cove, Florida

Coconut Cove, Florida is the small community outside Fort Myer where the Eberhardt moves to after Mr. Eberhardt's job transfer.

Themes

Protecting the Environment

Mullet Fingers, a young runaway, discovers burrowing owls on a site where a new Mother Paula's All American Pancake House is to be built. Mullet Fingers writes a letter to the corporation to alert them to the owls, but their response is a form letter that does not even mention the owls. Frustrated, Mullet Fingers begins vandalizing the site, removing the survey stakes and filling in the holes to delay the beginning of the construction. When this does not work, Mullet Fingers places alligators in the toilets, drops poisonous snakes inside a fence where guard dogs are located, and removes the seats to the heavy machinery.

Mullet Fingers is a child who cares deeply about the environment of Florida. Mullet Fingers lives in the outdoors and he is well adapted to Florida's creatures, including the poisonous snakes and dangerous alligators. Mullet Fingers can take a small fish out of the water with his bare hands. Mullet Fingers cares deeply about the environment of his state and therefore is willing to do anything to protect it. This includes going up against a large corporation to stop the destruction of protected, rare creatures.

Mullet Fingers is used to being alone and does not expect help from anyone. However, this time Mullet Fingers has the help of his sister and the new kid in town, Roy Eberhardt. Together, Roy and Beatrice manage to build a demonstration against the corporation at their ground breaking ceremony, effectively stopping construction for another day. Later, with help from Roy's father, they are able to prove the corporation has broken the law and stop construction completely. It is the fight for these owls that propels the plot and therefore environmental protection is a major theme of the novel.

Friendship

Roy Eberhardt is the new kid in town. Roy has no friends and has no plan to make friends because he would rather return to his beloved Montana. To add to Roy's unhappiness are the attentions of the school bully, Dana Matherson. Dana is constantly attacking Roy on the bus, hitting him and mashing his face against the windows. It is because of this last action that Roy sees the running boy and becomes fascinated with him.

Roy goes in search of the running boy and is nearly beaten for his efforts by Beatrice Leep, a young athlete at Roy's school who turns out to be the running boy's sister. Beatrice is wary of Roy, but eventually allows him into her confidence, aware that she cannot care for her brother on her own. Roy and Beatrice form an unlikely friendship that leads them both into a battle that neither ever imagined they would fight. However, this friendship also gives Roy a new appreciation for his newly adopted state, allowing



him to finally make peace with his situation. It is this reason that friendship is a theme of the novel.

Bullies

Roy Eberhardt must deal with Dana Matherson, the school bully who understands nothing but violence. Roy punches Dana in the nose to protect himself from being choked, causing him to get in trouble at school. As a result Roy must write Dana an apology letter. When Roy drops the letter at Dana's house, he discovers the source of Dana's violent streak. Dana's mother is also a violent woman. Roy watches as Dana's mother attacks him over the letter, giving Dana a busted lip.

Dana Matherson and his mother are not the only bullies in this novel, however. Chuck Muckle is a bully as well. Muckle is the vice-president with Mother Paula's Corporation who is charge of new construction. Muckle uses his position to bully Branitt into starting construction despite multiple delays. When Muckle comes to Coconut Cove to host the ground breaking ceremony, he loses his temper and begins attacking people. In fact, Muckle chokes a reporter much the same way Dana attacked Roy on the bus. Due to the behavior of these two characters, bullies is a theme of the novel.

Style

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person omniscient. The main characters are the narrators of the novel, including Roy Eberhardt and Leroy "Curly" Branitt. The point of view moves from character to character, allowing the reader to see the story from several points of view, including from the point of view of children and adults. From the differing point of views in this novel, the reader is allowed to see events that take place outside of the knowledge of one character but where another might be aware of these events.

The point of view of this novel works because it builds an intimate relationship between the reader and several of the characters, allowing the reader to care what happens to these characters. The point of view also allows a well rounded story, revealing to the reader events that only certain characters have knowledge of, but that are important to the entire character cast and the developing plot.

Setting

The setting of this novel is Coconut Cove, Florida. Coconut Cove is a small to medium sized town not too far from the larger city of Fort Meyer. Coconut Cove is the kind of town in which there is only one middle school and all the kids know one another. It is also a town that is not too far from the Everglades, creating an environment that is both modern and filled with creatures that once lived in a more primitive environment.

The setting of this novel is important because it is close to the Florida Everglades. The writer of this novel is known for his stories that connect with the Florida environment and the encroachment of humans on areas that were once inhabited only by precious and rare animals. This theme is touched on with the setting of this novel and the conflict in the plot surrounding the fate of several burrowing owl families. If this novel were set anywhere else, the plot's main conflict might not have the impact that it has in this setting, making this setting an important part of the plot.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is simple English. The novel revolves mainly around pre-teens, therefore much of the language is simple and filled with minor examples of slang. The sections of the novel that are seen from the point of view of adults uses a somewhat more formal language, but the language here continues to be simple and direct.



The language of this novel is appropriate to the characters of the novel. The language of the children is simple and filled with the type of slang and relaxed grammar that a reader would expect children of that age to speak. The language of the adults is only slightly more formal, but the language continues to be simple, making the novel easy to read for the audience it is intended for.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-one chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter is divided by a change in scene, with a space indicating change in location and/or narrating character. The novel is told in both exposition and dialogue, with several flashbacks that allow the reader to understand past events that help explain the personalities and actions of the characters.

The novel has two main conflicts that push the main plot. The first conflict is the battle between Roy Eberhardt and Dana Matherson. Dana is a bully and Roy makes several gestures of peace toward him that are ignored. As a result, Roy sets Dana up for an arrest, feeling as though taking Dana off the streets is a benefit to society. The other conflict is the existence of burrowing owls on the site of a new restaurant's construction. This conflict causes three kids to take on a corporation to stop the construction. Both conflicts come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Roy would not have noticed the strange boy if it weren't for Dana Matherson, because Roy ordinarily didn't look out the window of the school bus." (Chapter 1, p. 1)

"Roy knew the rules against fighting on the bus, but he couldn't think of anything else to do." (Chapter 2, p. 14)

"Roy had saved the Yellowstone flyer because he was so amazed that anybody would be dumb enough to stroll up to a full-grown buffalo and snap its picture." (Chapter 3, p. 32)

"Roy ran all the way back to his bicycle and rode home as fast as he could. He wasn't frightened and he wasn't discouraged. He was more excited than ever." (Chapter 5, p. 57)

"The longer Dana had to stay away so his nose could recover from Roy's punch, the nastier he would be when he finally returned to Trace Middle." (Chapter 6, p. 65)

"He quit searching for Beatrice Leep's stepbrother, though it required all the willpower he could muster." (Chapter 8, p. 85)

"Roy dropped the broom handle and streaked for the nearest exit. He almost made it, too." (Chapter 9, p. 110)

"There, standing by the hole and peering curiously at one of the meatballs, was the smallest owl that he had ever seen." (Chapter 10, p. 124)

"The patrolman hoped that Mr. Eberhardt's son wasn't involved in the continuing mischief at the pancake-house construction site. What a sticky situation that would be!" (Chapter 11, p. 146)

"Officer Delinko fought to contain his excitement. He'd actually done it! He'd caught the Mother Paula's vandal!" (Chapter 15, p. 195)

"He wouldn't stop until he reached the crest of his imaginary Montana mountain and coasted downhill into the coolness of the valley." (Chapter 17, p. 228)

"The perfect decoy—that was Dana." (Epilogue, p. 287)



Topics for Discussion

Who is Roy Eberhardt? Why has Roy moved to Florida? Where did he live before? Why does Roy move so often? Where does Roy tell everyone he is from? Is this true? Why does Roy become fascinated with the running boy? Why does Roy take up the running boy's cause? How does Roy feel about the owls? Why?

Who is the running boy? Why is he known as Mullet Fingers? What is his real name? Why does the running boy live on his own? What will happen if the boy is found by his mother? Why? Is this the boy's fault? Why does Mullet Fingers begin vandalizing the Mother Paula's construction site? Can one boy really stop construction of a new restaurant?

Who is Beatrice Leep? What is Beatrice's home life like? How does this compare to Dana Matherson's home life? How does Beatrice deal with her home life? How does Beatrice come to know Roy? Do they have a friendship? How would you describe their relationship? Why does Beatrice trust Roy? Will they remain friends after the plot is resolved? Why or why not?

Who is Dana Matherson? Why does Dana treat Roy the way he does? Why does Dana refuse to accept Roy's multiple attempts at a truce? Why does Dana target Roy in the first place? How does Roy play a part in Dana's arrest? Is the arrest more Roy's fault or Dana's? Explain. Why does Mullet Fingers choose to escape juvenile hall with Dana? How does this work to Mullet Fingers' advantage?

Who is Officer Delinko? What is Delinko's main ambition? Why does Delinko think catching the vandal will allow him to be promoted? Why does Delinko never stop to think about the owls until it is nearly too late? How does Delinko eventually help the kids in stopping construction? Does this help hurt Delinko's career? Explain.

What are burrowing owls? Do they really exist? Why does Roy believe they are protected by the law? How might the corporation have dealt with the owls differently? Why does Mullet Fingers care so much about these owls? Who else might have protected these owls? Why did they not?

Discuss bullies. What is a bully? Why do bullies act as they do? How much of a bully's behavior comes from his family situation? Are all bullies bad people? Do all bullies grow up to be criminals or to use their careers to bully people? What can be done to stop bullies? Discuss any experience you might have had with a bully.