

DISCUSSION GUIDE



WE COULD BE HEROES

By Margaret Finnegan

HANK HUDSON IS IN A BIT OF TROUBLE. After an incident involving the boy's bathroom and a terribly sad book his teacher is reading aloud, Hank is left with a week's suspension and a slightly charred hardcover—and, it turns out, the attention of new girl Maisie Huang.

Maisie has been on the lookout for a kid with the meatballs to help her with a very important mission: Saving her neighbor's dog, Booler.

Booler has seizures, and his owner, Mr. Jorgensen, keeps him tied to a tree all day and night because of them. It's enough to make Hank even sadder than that book does—he has autism, and he knows what it's like to be treated poorly because of something that makes you different.

But different is not less. And Hank is willing to get into even *more* trouble to prove it. Soon he and Maisie are lying, brown-nosing, baking, and cow milking all in the name of saving Booler—but not everything is as it seems. Booler might not be the only one who needs saving. And being a hero can look a lot like being a friend.

"Finnegan successfully explores bullying, physical and mental differences, empathy, trust, intergenerational friendships, and compassion for animals. A sweet story with excellent read-aloud potential." —BOOKLIST

"A coming-of-age story of friendships young, old, and canine." —KIRKUS REVIEWS



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Unless otherwise noted, all discussion questions meet the following Common Core State Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1](#)

- Describe how the main character, Hank, is introduced in the beginning of the story. What is evident about his personality from the opening scene? What is your initial reaction to Hank and his behavior? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#)
- As Hank slips into his class line during the fire drill at school, he goes unnoticed: “No one ever noticed Hank. They didn’t notice him enough to be friends with him. They didn’t even notice him enough to be mean to him.” How does this new information about the disconnect between Hank and his peers affect your opinion of his character? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#)
- What is the reaction of Hank’s mother when she discovers what he has done at school? What is revealed about Hank as his mother discusses the situation at school with him?
- Hank’s fascination with rocks provides a powerful metaphor to describe his difficult moments. To what does he compare his meltdowns? How does Hank connect this comparison to his “worst feeling ever”?
- Hank’s classmate Maisie finds Hank looking for rocks on the edge of the school playground during recess. Maisie decides to invite Hank over to her house after school. How do the interests of Hank and Maisie differ during the visit? Describe Hank’s reaction to his time at Maisie’s house and his reaction to Maisie’s special request.
- Mrs. Vera, Hank and Maisie’s teacher, unexpectedly seats the two new friends next to one another in class. With Maisie close by, Hank is less affected by Mrs. Vera’s choice of an afternoon read-aloud to the class. After school at Maisie’s house, why do you think Maisie chooses the events of the book Hank despises as a theme for their game? What is the connection that Maisie makes between the topic of the book Mrs. Vera reads to the class and the special qualities of Maisie and Hank?
- Maisie concocts a plan to rescue her neighbor’s dog Booler that involves Hank and his family. Hank’s parents are not in favor of keeping the dog, and more importantly they realize that Maisie may not have had honest motives when she convinced Hank to rescue Booler. What do Hank’s parents believe about Maisie after this incident? How does this affect your opinion of Maisie? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#)
- As Hank and Maisie work toward repairing their strained relationship, Hank outlines his expectations in a friendship. What important points does Hank make to Maisie about what makes a good friend?
- Maisie persists in her plan to free Booler from his backyard prison as he sits day after day chained to a tree. Maisie calls 9-1-1 from the school phone to report the animal cruelty they think is happening to Booler. Hank and Maisie get in trouble for this incident at school, but Hank’s dad has a very different reaction to Hank’s lie about the 9-1-1 call. How does Hank’s dad react and why does he feel this way?
- Upon meeting Mr. Jorgensen, Hank’s attitude toward Booler’s owner shifts. How does Hank’s change of opinion affect Maisie’s approach to understanding Mr. Jorgensen and Booler’s situation? What is Maisie’s goal in presenting herself to Mr. Jorgensen as a “do-gooder”?

- As Maisie and Hank grow closer to Mr. Jorgensen, a new nemesis appears in the character of Colleen Jorgensen, Mr. Jorgensen's daughter. How does Colleen bring new difficulty to the situation of Mr. Jorgensen and his dog Booter?
- Mr. Jorgensen shares with Maisie and Hank that the challenges of his living situation are not easy for him or for his daughter. Describe the difficulties of finding a solution for Mr. Jorgensen from Colleen's point of view.
- Maisie's concerns for Booter's welfare deepen when she learns about Colleen's plans for Mr. Jorgensen and his dogs. From where does Maisie draw inspiration for her plan to be a hero? What does her plan entail?
- Hank adheres to certain rules in his family. How does Hank break these established rules as he helps Maisie prepare for their "heroing"?
- Even with some preparation, Maisie, Hank, and Booter meet several challenges on their journey into the woods. What aspects of their adventure had they not anticipated? How did Maisie and Hank react to these difficulties?
- An important detail about Maisie is revealed on her journey with Hank and Booter. Describe what Maisie shares with Hank about her connection to Booter when they set up camp. Why is Maisie so sympathetic toward Booter's medical issues?
- As their rescue effort falls apart and hunger sets in, Maisie concocts a plan to get something to eat from a nearby home. What happens to Hank and Booter when they try to carry out Maisie's plan?
- Maisie and Hank's mission to rescue Booter comes with a steep price. Not only were there injuries, but their friends and families had strong emotional reactions about the kids' actions. How do Maisie and Hank go about repairing the emotional damage their actions caused?
- Many lessons about friendship, difference, and honesty are learned by the characters in this book. In your opinion, which was the most important lesson presented in the story? Give reasons for your opinion.
[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2](#)



ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

Soundtrack

The song “Heroes” becomes a sort of anthem for Hank and Maisie as they share adventures and a new friendship. Listen to the song as it’s played by The Wallflowers and the original recording by David Bowie. Record your responses to the following prompts: What do you hear in the song? What does the song make you think about? Why do you think the song became important to Maisie and Hank? Maisie prefers the version by The Wallflowers, but her father likes David Bowie’s original; which do you like best? Share your observations with a partner. Discuss your reactions and thoughts about what the song meant to Hank and Maisie and why you think the author chose the song’s refrain as the title of this book. If you had an anthem, what would it be?

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.9](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.9](#)

Understanding Empathy

As part of her discussion with Hank following the fire incident at school, Hank’s mother shares with him that, “Stories teach us empathy, to understand and care about how other people feel.” Identify scenes from the story where characters display empathy. Use one of these scenes to create a poster about empathy. Design a colorful illustration of the scene. Title your poster with the phrase, “Empathy is ...” and complete the sentence. Include a caption describing how the scene you’ve depicted exemplifies empathy. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1](#);

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1](#)

Different Is Not Less

Maisie reacts to Hank’s reluctance to adopt Booter by saying, “There’s something wrong with a kid who doesn’t want the best dog in the world.” Hank has an equally strong reaction when he replies, “Nothing is wrong with me. Different is not less.” Use Hank’s statement to create a persuasive essay on the theme that “different is not less.” Research examples of people who despite their differences excel and make powerful contributions to the world. Use these examples to support and illustrate the theme of your essay.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1](#)

What’s in a Name?

As Mr. Jorgensen discusses his past, he reveals to Maisie and Hank the origin of Booter’s name. Why was his dog given such a unique name? What is the story of your own name? Why was your name selected for you? Write a personal narrative that describes the origin of your name and how your name fits in your life. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3](#);

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3](#)

The discussion questions, activities, and worksheets in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

NAME: _____

INVESTIGATING IDIOMS

Hank has a literal understanding of language and is confused when people use figures of speech or idioms when they communicate with him. Look at the following examples of idioms people shared with Hank in the story. Write a definition of each idiom and create a new sentence using the idiom. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.4](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4](#)

IDIOM	DEFINITION	SENTENCE
You can't knock it out of the park every time.		
Her heart is in the right place.		
He'll be showing us his true colors.		
He'll be telling us where the bodies are buried.		
Our goose is really cooked this time.		
It will be curtains for sure.		

NAME: _____

TRACKING CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Frank Jorgensen, Maisie’s next-door neighbor, seems to be her nemesis. Maisie does not approve of the way that Frank treats his dog Booler. Think of adjectives to describe Frank Jorgensen’s perceived behavior at key points in the story. Locate text evidence to support your choice of adjectives. List the adjectives and evidence in the chart. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#)

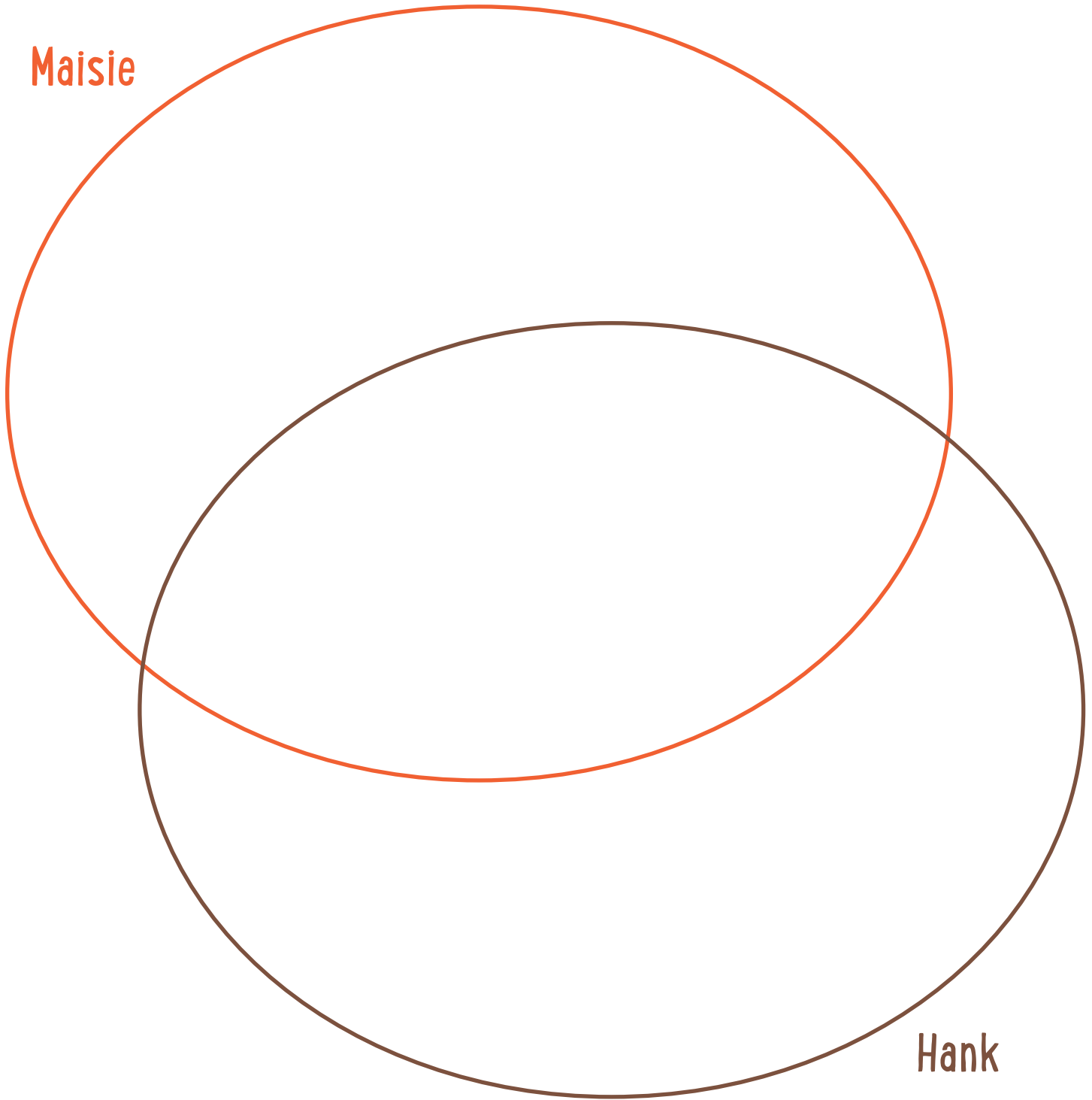
Adjective to describe Mr. Jorgensen	Text evidence to support the description
<p>At the beginning of the story, Maisie and Hank believe Mr. Jorgensen is:</p> <div data-bbox="129 882 600 976" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 45px; width: 100%;"></div>	
<p>After Maisie and Hank meet Mr. Jorgensen and learn how he came to have Booler, they believe that he is:</p> <div data-bbox="129 1354 600 1449" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 45px; width: 100%;"></div>	
<p>At the end of the story, when a resolution is reached about how to care for Booler, Maisie and Hank think that Mr. Jorgensen is:</p> <div data-bbox="129 1848 600 1942" style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 45px; width: 100%;"></div>	

NAME: _____

COMPARING CHARACTERS

Initially, Maisie and Hank seem like unlikely friends. As the story unfolds, the two characters find common ground upon which they build the foundation of a strong friendship. Use the Venn diagram to detail the differences and similarities between Maisie and Hank. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#); [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3](#)

Maisie



Hank