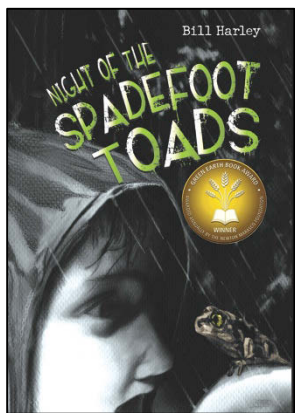


TEACHER'S GUIDE



Night of the Spadefoot Toads

Written by Bill Harley

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Ages 8–12 | Realistic Fiction
AR • RC • Lexile • GRL T; Gr 5

ABOUT THE BOOK

After a recent move from Tucson, Arizona, to Edenboro, Massachusetts, nature enthusiast Ben Maroney has found himself struggling to fit in with his peers. Missing his Arizona friends, the desert, and his pet lizard Lenny, Ben soon finds himself exploring nature with his eccentric science teacher, Mrs. Tibbets. Ben begins to become infatuated with his new environment in Massachusetts, particularly the Eastern Spadefoot Toad. Upon learning that Mrs. Tibbets will have to sell her, Ben takes action to protect the endangered species on their land, proving that one can make a difference at any age. Through a series of difficult decisions, Ben learns the true meaning of friendship and what it means to truly feel at home.

THEMES

- Friendship, relationships
- Moving, fitting in
- “Home Is Where the Heart Is”
- Environmental issues, conservation
- Vernal pools, ecosystems

BEFORE YOU READ

- Have students keep a reading response journal to track their thoughts throughout the book. Prior to discussion of the book, have students brainstorm in their journals possible responses to the following questions: what is the meaning of “home”? After students volunteer and share answers, create an anchor chart incorporating their responses. Keep this anchor chart to refer to after the completion of the story. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1**
- Prior to discussion of the book, have students hold a brainstorming session about friendship. After students volunteer and share answers, create an anchor chart incorporating their responses. Keep this anchor chart to refer to after the completion of the story. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1**
- Introduce the book and explain that Ben Moroney has recently moved from Tucson, Arizona, to Edenboro, Massachusetts; ask if anyone has ever moved or been “the new kid.” Ask students to talk to a partner or group about being new and to discuss how it feels to be new. Share ideas and make predictions about the story based on student responses. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1**

MEETING THE STANDARDS

The activities in this guide directly address a variety of standards across the curriculum. Following each activity, you'll find an abbreviation for the standard(s) it supports. For a complete list of the Common Core English Language Arts Standards addressed, please see page 3.

- Ask students to locate Arizona and Massachusetts on a map. Discuss the climates of both Arizona and Massachusetts. If possible, show clips of the environment and geography. Have books and photographs or pictures available for student viewing. Together, create a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the two locations.
- Explain to students that we constantly make inferences about the character of people around us. Discuss how we examine a person's appearance, words, decisions, feelings, and actions without always realizing it. Before beginning the book, create a two-column chart with *character trait* in the left-hand column and *evidence* in the right-hand column. Demonstrate completion of the chart with someone well known to the class, such as the principal. It may be helpful to have a list of character traits readily accessible for students to view. Ask students to describe in their reading response journals the character of a person they know well, such as their mother, father, sibling, etc. Explain that throughout the reading of the story, students will be keeping track of the main characters (Ben and Mrs. Tibbets) in their journals. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3**

AS YOU READ CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Have students keep track of both Ben and Mrs. Tibbets using the two-column chart previously created. Periodically discuss both characters, placing emphasis upon examining decision-making, actions, and words as evidence for character traits. For example, chapter one (last paragraph on page 9) describes Mrs. Tibbets's appearance; what can you infer about Mrs. Tibbets based on the author's description of her? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 & 2**
- Explain that color is often associated with mood and feeling; briefly review colors and associations, for instance, red is often associated with anger, tension, or frustration; it can also represent action or commotion, etc. For each chapter, have students choose a color to describe the chapter and write one summarizing sentence that explains their color choice. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 & 4**
- There are various points throughout the book when characters make important decisions that give us insight into their thinking and temperament. In their reading response journals, have students write a letter to a character describing their reaction to a choice made by that character, while citing specific evidence from the story. For example, students could write a letter to Ben about his decision to pick up the mouse, or to Mrs. Tibbets about her calm demeanor upon entering a chaotic classroom (based on chapter one). **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 & 3**
- Call attention to turning points in the text such as when Lenny the lizard dies, or when Ben's box of belongings from his room in Arizona arrives. How are these events important? Ask each child to write a response in his or her reading journal, discussing these turning points and Ben's reaction to them. Next, students should swap journals and respond to their partners thinking. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4**

AFTER YOU READ CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

- Have students compose a letter to the author, Bill Harley. The letter should include their opinions of the book but focus on the discussion of one character. The character chosen does not have to be a favorite character, but could be a character they admire, or do not like at all. Each student should provide evidence from the text to support his/her line of thinking. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 & 3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4**
- Give students a clear definition of "theme," and lead a class discussion about the theme of the book. Explain that most books and stories have more than one theme, though one theme may be more prominent than others. Ask students for input about potential themes for this book supported by evidence from the text. Students could work in pairs or in small groups to create a poster that cites specific evidence supporting a chosen theme. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1**
- Home is a central theme to the story. Have students revisit their "meaning of home" brainstorm in their reading response journals and make any changes they feel are relevant after reading the text. Revisit the "home" anchor chart based on student response. Discuss how the idea of "home" has changed. Revisit the book to create a list of references to home (i.e. Ben moving, the spadefoots losing their home, the snakes leaving their home, etc.). **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1**
- Revisit the "friendship" anchor chart created as a class. Discuss the friendships formed throughout the story and modify the chart. Has the students' understanding of friendship been altered? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1**

LANGUAGE ARTS

- Close read the poem, “Spadefoot Toad” from *Desert Voices* by Byrd Baylor and Peter Parnell. Discuss the structure of the poem, including such features as stanzas, lines, and repetition. Have students talk about the theme of the poem.
- Choose a living organism from a vernal pool and write a poem following the same format as “Spadefoot Toad” from *Desert Voices*. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4**
- Often it is useful for readers to examine a piece of writing from the perspective of the writer. Choose a chapter or page from the book (such as page 50) to examine from the stance of a writer, noticing the details, descriptions, and very specific words an author has chosen. For example, if using page 50, explain that this page could have been written in two to three sentences: *Ben thinks he hears a peeper and he realizes he has been staring right at it. Ben tries to scoop up the peeper but misses. Ben gets tired but is excited he has seen the peeper.* However, the author, Mr. Harley, has instead created a feeling. Often we refer to this as “Show, Don’t Tell.” Ask the students to examine other passages from an author’s perspective. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4**
- Examine the figurative language within the text. Look for onomatopoeia, similes, metaphors, etc. Discuss why an author chooses to use figurative language. How does the figurative language add to the tone the author is creating? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4**
- Give students the choice to select a favorite or important scene from the story to rewrite as a script and work up as a performance. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4**

SOCIAL SCIENCES

- Have students (in pairs if possible) research an insect or animal from a vernal pool and give an oral report. Students could also create slide shows to aid in their presentations. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6 & 7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4**
- Ask students to research other habitats that are being destroyed and what efforts are being made toward conservation. Give students several format options by which they may relay their newly acquired findings. Some possibilities are oral reports, brochures, slide show presentations, songs, poems, newspaper articles, etc. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6 & 7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4**
- To help students gain an in-depth understanding of eastern spadefoot toads, have the class view video

clips, photographs, and diagrams, as well as read informational texts on the subject. In groups, have students create a chapter for a science book all about eastern spadefoots. Each group should demonstrate their understanding of informational text by incorporating both written work and text features to enhance the reader’s understanding. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2, 4, 5, & 6**

THE ACTIVITIES IN THIS GUIDE DIRECTLY ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS:

COMMON CORE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

- Reading Literature #1, 2 & 3: Identifying Key Ideas and Details
- Reading Literature #4: Craft and Structure
- Speaking and Listening #1: Comprehension and Collaboration
- Speaking and Listening #4: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
- Writing #1 & 2: Text Types and Purposes
- Writing #4,5,& 6: Production and Distribution of Writing
- Writing #7: Research to Build and Present Knowledge

RELATED READING

Spadefoot Toad

<http://a-z-animals.com/animals/spadefoot-toad/>

Eastern Spadefoot Toad

<http://srelherp.uga.edu/anurans/scahol.htm>

Freeman, Melanie. “**The Spadefoot Toad**” *Boys’ Quest Magazine*, Feb 2002, Volume 7, Issue 5.

Wechsler, Doug. *Frog Heaven: Ecology of a Vernal Pool*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2006

Ridley, Kimberly. *Secret Pool*. (Tilbury House Nature Book), Thomaston, ME, Tilbury House, 2013

REVIEWS

“Harley’s appealing story shows readers that adults and children can connect in meaningful friendships, and reminds them that conservation can begin in their own backyards.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“...the main character is a well-developed, realistic ‘child hero.’”

—*School Library Journal*

AWARDS

- Green Earth Book Award (children’s fiction)
—Newton Marasco Foundation
- KIND Children’s Honorable Mention Book
—Humane Society Youth
- Society of School Librarians International Book Awards (honor book, Language Arts K–6 novels)
—Society of School Librarians International
- Kansas State Reading Circle Recommended Reading List (intermediate, starred)
—Kansas National Education Association
- Keystone to Reading Book Award (intermediate nominee) —Keystone State Reading Association
- Volunteer State Book Awards (master list, 4–6)
—Tennessee Association of School Librarians
- Prairie Pasque Children’s Book Award (nominee)
—South Dakota Library Association, SD Reading Council, SD State Library, SD Elementary School Principals
- Golden Sower Award (nominee, intermediate)
—Nebraska Library Association



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Harley is a two-time Grammy Award-winning storyteller, musician, and writer who has been writing and performing for kids and families for more than twenty years. He is the recipient of Parents’ Choice and ALA awards. Bill won a 2007 Grammy Award for his children’s storytelling album *Blah Blah Blah* and a 2009 Grammy Award for his children’s spoken-word album *Yes to Running! Bill Harley Live*. He lives in Massachusetts.

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NIGHT OF THE SPADEFOOT TOADS
prepared by Lori LeBlanc

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