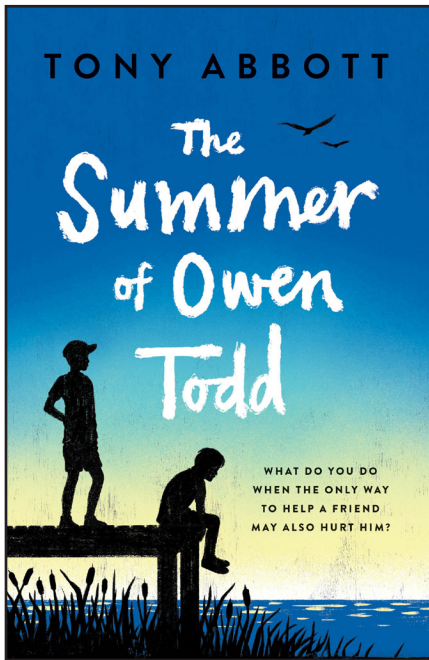


A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

The Summer of Owen Todd

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



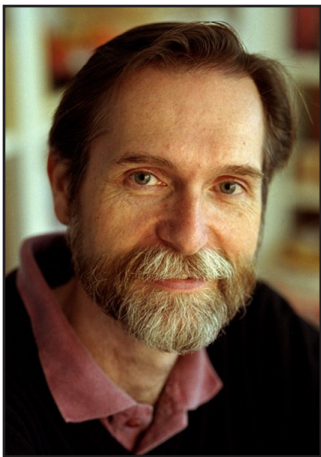
Ages 10–14 • 9780374305505 • e-Book 9780374305529

ABOUT THE BOOK

Owen and his best friend, Sean, are both eleven years old. They've lived on Cape Cod all their lives, and now that they're a little older, they'll finally be free to spend some time on their own. But Sean's mother has a different idea—she's hired a babysitter to look after Sean. Paul is in his twenties, and a well-liked guy from church.

Paul starts doing things that just feel wrong. Because they've always been as close as brothers, Sean tells Owen, and no one else. What's not clear to Owen is what he should do. Sean warns him not to tell anyone what is happening. But if Owen doesn't tell, could something even worse happen to Sean?

This harrowing and sensitively told tale of child abuse is a must-read for anyone who might ever be called upon to help a friend in need



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TONY ABBOTT is the award-winning author of more than a hundred books for young readers, including *Firegirl*, *The Postcard*, and *Lunchbox Dreams*. He lives in Connecticut with his family. You can find him online at tonyabbottbooks.com.

This guide is aligned with Common Core Standards for 8th grade but can be applied to grades 5–9. To attain specific Common Core grade-level standard for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!

USING THIS BOOK IN YOUR CLASSROOM

In his author's note, Tony Abbott says, "I view *The Summer of Owen Todd* as a work of fiction not solely about any one thing. It's about the Cape, about baseball, karting, summer, boys, families. Still, at its core is a horrifying and often unreported crime: the victimization of a child, a boy in this story, by a trusted male adult." Although Abbott deals with this subject in a sensitive manner, students will benefit from having the support of a teacher or other adult in processing the events in the story and being able to share their feelings about what Sean experiences. You can provide this support in individual conferences with students who read the book independently or in group conferences with students who read it in a small group. The author includes resources for those who need information on sexual assault or abuse.

Students should use a notebook to respond to questions, complete activities, and keep track of questions or concerns they have while reading. These entries can form the basis of your conferences and discussions with students.

The Summer of Owen Todd can be used as part of a Tony Abbott author study. Some of his other titles include: *Firegirl*, *The Postcard*, and *Lunchbox Dreams*. For more information, visit tonyabbottbooks.com.

This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. You know your students better than anyone else. Please review the book to determine if it is appropriate for your students and adapt the activities and questions as needed to meet their needs.

BEFORE READING ACTIVITIES

Previewing the Text

Distribute notebooks to students and explain that they will use them to respond to questions, complete activities, and make note of any questions they have during and after reading *The Summer of Owen Todd*. Provide a brief overview of the story and have students preview the text by reading the back cover and the first chapter. For their first notebook entry, have them write a brief description of what they think the book will be about, citing specific evidence they gathered during their previews. They should also include any questions they might have.

CCSS.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Describing a True Friend

Explain to students that the main characters in *The Summer of Owen Todd*, Owen and Sean, have been best friends since kindergarten and that their friendship will be tested during the story. Have students write an essay describing the qualities of a true friend. Tell them that while they read the book, they should think about whether they feel Owen and Sean are true friends.

CCSS.W.8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When did Owen and Sean become best friends? Describe their friendship.
2. Why are the boys looking forward to summer vacation? In what way is this summer a transition period for them?
3. Why does Sean's mother feel like he needs a babysitter? How does Sean feel about this?
4. How is this summer like other summers for Owen and Sean? How is it different?

5. How does Paul Landis make Sean feel uncomfortable? Describe the way in which his inappropriate behavior escalates.
6. Why do you think Sean tells Owen, not his mother, about what is happening with Paul? Do Sean's confidences create a conflict for Owen?
7. Why do you think Sean's mom doesn't notice that something is wrong with him? What about Owen's parents?
8. Why does Owen promise Sean he won't tell anyone about what Paul is doing to Sean? Do you think Owen should keep this promise? Why or why not?
9. What is Owen's plan to save Sean? How does it arise from "the ball of hate" that is growing inside him?
10. When Owen finally tells his parents about what is happening to Sean, he feels that the hate that had been choking him is gone, but another huge thing has started. What is this huge thing?
11. Why is Sean angry with Owen? Who tries to help Owen believe he did the right thing?
12. Sean's mom says, "Owen, what you did isn't the bad thing. It's the only good thing. It's the best thing you could do." Explain what she means by this.
13. What signs are there that Sean is starting to heal at the end of the book? How has Owen helped make this possible?

CCSS.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

Revisiting the Meaning of Friendship

Have students reread their essays on friendship and think about the events of the story. Ask them if their feelings about friendship have changed after reading the book. Do they feel Owen was a true friend to Sean? Encourage them to defend their opinions by referring specifically to the story.

CCSS.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.SL.8.3 Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

Writing Prompts

Provide students with the following prompts. Have them choose one prompt to respond to in their notebooks. Explain that they must support their thinking with specific evidence from the text. Provide time for students to share their responses during small group discussions.

- Write a letter to Owen and tell him whether or not you believe he did the right thing when he told his parents what was happening to Sean.

- Think about the saying “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Write a short piece explaining what this quote means and how it applies to *The Summer of Owen Todd*.
- Respond to the following question in writing: Is breaking a promise to a friend always a bad thing?
- In what way is this summer more than just a transition from elementary school to middle school for Sean and Owen?
- Think about the expression “Things aren’t always what they seem.” How does this apply to the events in the story?

CCSS.W.8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.W.8.9.a Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new”).

CCSS.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.SL.8.3 Delineate a speaker’s argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

AUTHOR STUDY

Have students visit Tony Abbott’s website (tonyabbottbooks.com) to learn about the author and his writing process and choose one of his books to read. After reading it, have them write a brief book review that provides a plot summary, information about the main characters, and any major themes. Have them also include their opinion about the book. Students can then share these reviews during book talks.

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This guide was written by Barbara McLaughlin, M.Ed., M.A., Literacy Consultant.