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The Owls Have Come to Take Us Away

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“As delightful and jovial as Santa Claus himself.”
—Kirkus Reviews

**Orca Origins Teacher Guide.**

Gr 4-8—Younger Carter Jones opens the front door one morning to find an English butler on his doorstep. Sent to the Jones family by his late grandfather, Mr. Bowles-Fitzpatrick reforms the household with his wit, precision, and commitment to decorum. As Carter deals with his father’s deployment, Mr. Bowles-Fitzpatrick also takes on the role of emotional caretaker and support for Carter. Together, they play cricket and learn that the rules of the game are also the rules for a healthy and happy life. Schmidt, author of the celebrated *Wednesday Wars,* strikes gold again with this emotionally complex character who learns to navigate change and disappointment, and, more importantly, how to receive help. Schmidt writes with a clear and compelling voice, and masterfully crafts Mr. Bowles-Fitzpatrick as an endearing family helper and friend with a Mary Poppins–like disposition. The use of cricket as a narrative tool to embolden Carter is clever and will surely peak young readers’ interest in the sport. VERDICT A rich and nuanced middle grade novel that will appeal to readers who feel a little on the outsides. A perfect pairing of story and guide: energetic go-getter Moxie relies on steady Milton but doesn’t respect him. It’s not until the siblings become crime-solving partners that Moxie realizes two isn’t a crowd after all. 

**SIMON, T.R. Zora and Me: The Cursed Ground.** 272p. Candlewick. Sept. 2018. Gr 5-8—Two years have passed since their last adventure in *Zora and Me* (2010), but the fictionalized Zora Neale Hurston and her best friend Carrie Brown are as curious as ever about the goings-on in their town of Eatonville, FL, the first all-black incorporated town in the United States. When their mute friend and neighbor, Mr. Polk, is the victim of a seemingly senseless attack and speaks to the town’s hoodoo lady, Old Lady Bronson, the friends use their skills and town connections to get to the bottom of the mystery at hand, uncovering a curse that dates back to the time when slavery was legal in the United States. And slavery, to the surprise of Carrie and Zora, wasn’t really that long ago. The story of a city separated by 48 years and a war—1903 Eatonville and 1855 Westin, as Eatonville was formerly known—is told in alternating chapters. Simon offers keen insight into how the past affects the present, no matter how many years between them. VERDICT A worthy purchase for all upper middle grade and middle school collections. A perfect pairing of story and guide: energetic go-getter Moxie relies on steady Milton but doesn’t respect him. It’s not until the siblings become crime-solving partners that Moxie realizes two isn’t a crowd after all. Behr’s black monochromatic illustrations bring dialogue and text to vibrant life and excel at capturing character reactions and timing. Pages with an abundance of clear space show Moxie slowing down, clearly conveying her sadness over the fall-out with Milton. Swanson keeps the pace moving briskly while carefully developing secondary characters like Dad McCoy and teacher Mr. Shine, who provide just the right touch of adult wisdom and guidance. Thoughtful details that add realism balance the overall effect for some. 

Gr 5-7—Twelve-year-old Simon has a wild imagination: he loves playing video games and reading fantasy novels and is even writing his own book about fairies and a talking dog. When he isn’t occupied with those things, he obsesses over aliens. On a camping trip with his parents, Simon loses consciousness; upon waking, he is convinced he has been abducted. But when he tells his parents, his mother is fretful and his father is derisive. Simon is afraid, but determined to find out if the aliens are real. Despite having moved frequently throughout the years, Simon has led a sheltered life. He has few friends, is nervous about leaving the Air Base where he currently lives, and is bullied at school. Parallels between Simon and the main character of the book he is writing further call into question the reality of Simon’s experience, leaving readers to wonder about what really happened on that camping trip until the very end. VERDICT A rich and nuanced middle grade novel that will appeal to readers who feel a little on the outsides. A perfect pairing of story and guide: energetic go-getter Moxie relies on steady Milton but doesn’t respect him. It’s not until the siblings become crime-solving partners that Moxie realizes two isn’t a crowd after all. Behr’s black monochromatic illustrations bring dialogue and text to vibrant life and excel at capturing character reactions and timing. Pages with an abundance of clear space show Moxie slowing down, clearly conveying her sadness over the fall-out with Milton. Swanson keeps the pace moving briskly while carefully developing secondary characters like Dad McCoy and teacher Mr. Shine, who provide just the right touch of adult wisdom and guidance. Thoughtful details that add realism balance the overall effect for some. 

Gr 5-7—The team who reimagined how art and text work together to tell a story in the first entry in this series (*The Real McCoys*) have done it again and reinvented the classic who-done-it with a modern twist. Siblings and elementary school detectives Moxie and Milton return with a new case: Who is “The Squiggler,” an anonymous author of flattering notes sent to their classmates? Identifying the writer proves to be as difficult as negotiating their fledgling partnership: energetic go-getter Moxie relies on steady Milton but doesn’t respect him. It’s not until the siblings become crime-solving partners that Moxie realizes two isn’t a crowd after all. Behr’s black monochromatic illustrations bring dialogue and text to vibrant life and excel at capturing character reactions and timing. Pages with an abundance of clear space show Moxie slowing down, clearly conveying her sadness over the fall-out with Milton. Swanson keeps the pace moving briskly while carefully developing secondary characters like Dad McCoy and teacher Mr. Shine, who provide just the right touch of adult wisdom and guidance. Thoughtful details that add realism balance the overall effect for some. 

**SMITH,(instance)