

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Goats

by

### Brock Cole

### Book Information

Brock Cole, The Goats  
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Stripped and marooned on a small island by their fellow campers, a boy and a girl form an uneasy bond that grows into a deep friendship when they decide to run away and disappear without a trace.

**Award:** ALA Notable/Best Books; SLJ Best Book

**Topics:** Adventure, Lost/Abandoned; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 10, 90%; Family Life, Growing Up; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 9+

### Main Characters

Bryce and Murphy the boys who leave Howie on the island

Calvin, Tiwanda, Lydia, Pardoe campers at another camp where Howie and Laura seek refuge

Howie Mitchell a young boy who is left on an island as part of a camp prank

Laura Golden a thirteen-year-old girl who is left on an island as part of a camp prank

Maddy Golden Laura's mother, who struggles to find her daughter after realizing her daughter's circumstances

Margo Cutter a senior camp counselor who looks for the missing campers

Miss Haskell the camp secretary

Mr. Wells the camp director, who downplays the seriousness of the "goat" incident

Mrs. Pritzer a woman who works with Maddy

Pearly Hofstadder the deputy sheriff who tries to arrest Howie and Laura

### Vocabulary

**despicable** deserving of contempt or scorn

**hypocrites** people who preach certain beliefs, feelings, and virtues but do not practice them

**ludicrous** laughable or hilarious because of its obvious absurdity

**municipal** pertaining to local affairs

**serrated** having notched, tooth-like projections

### Synopsis

Fellow campers leave Howie Mitchell and Laura Golden naked and alone on Goat Island as a cruel prank. Later, when Howie hears the sound of canoe paddles, he realizes some of the campers are coming back to spy on them. He tells Laura they have to leave. Since Laura cannot swim, they use a log to drift away from the island. When they land ashore, Howie spots a summer cottage. They break in and get some sleep. Upon waking, Howie finds them old clothes, and the two eat leftover food in the cottage. Howie reveals that his archaeologist parents are in Turkey, and Laura tells him she will call her mother and ask her to take them both to her house. While on their way to locate a phone at the municipal beach, Laura steals some change from a car.

At this point, Laura's mother, Maddy, is unhappy about the phone call from her daughter. Unaware of the current situation, she feels Laura is not making enough of an effort to get along at camp. When Laura begs her to come and pick her up, Maddy tells her she will come for Parents' Weekend, and she should stick it out two more days. Laura hangs up on her mother. Immediately after Laura's call, Maddy receives another call. Mr. Wells, the camp director, informs her Laura is missing. She rushes to the camp, unsatisfied with Mr. Wells's attempts to assure her that what has happened is nothing serious.

Believing they have two days before Laura's mom

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will arrive, Laura and Howie steal more clothes, this time from two young people at the beach. Down the road, they find a gas station where they decide to get something to eat with their small amount of money. When Howie spots a vehicle from the camp, a police car, and Margo Cutter, a camp employee, both children sneak aboard a nearby school bus to escape. Undetected, they are able to stay on the bus as it pulls away from the gas station. On the bus, a girl named Tiwanda befriends them. After a long ride, the bus pulls into another camp, and Howie and Laura act as if they are two of the campers. However, they are noticed as they make an attempt to disappear into the woods. A boy named Calvin stops them and concludes they are running from the police. He suggests they stay for the night. He and Tiwanda do everything they can to make Howie and Laura fit in. One camper, Pardoe tries to make trouble, but Howie kicks him, and Pardoe leaves them alone. The next morning, as the pair prepare to leave, Tiwanda gives Laura some money and makes her promise she will call her mother again.

Meanwhile, Maddy visits the sheriff's office in Ahlburg. The sheriff has nothing to offer except a report about stolen clothing from the beach. Back at her hotel, Margo Cutter pays her a visit. Maddy is horrified to learn the details of what has happened to her daughter. Maddy hears a message on her answering machine left by Laura, who explains all the terrible things the campers did to her and Howie. Laura then tells her mother she will meet her in the camp parking lot during Parents' Weekend. She also tells Maddy that Howie needs to come home with them. However, Margo has doubts that it will be legal to take Howie with them.

Later that day Howie and Laura end up outside a motel. Laura thinks of a plan to get them a room for a while. She watches guests carefully and chooses a family that is leaving the motel. She pretends to be a motel employee, discovers the family's name, and gets their room key. They enter the room and Laura calls the motel clerk to tell her they (the Hendricks) will be staying another night while their car is being fixed. Laura also initiates a plan to get a meal at the

motel restaurant. However, the plan goes awry. While Howie is in the bathroom, the motel cleaning woman comes into the restaurant and accuses Laura of wrongdoing. She takes Laura back to the motel office where Howie eventually distracts everyone by setting off car and fire alarms. The two narrowly escape and find shelter in the backseat of somebody's car.

The next day while at a gas station, the teenage attendant realizes Laura and Howie are the two missing campers. He tells the deputy sheriff, who is at the station. The deputy follows the pair and offers them a ride into Ahlburg. However, he does not have a sensitive approach. He tells them they are under arrest and, as he is calling the sheriff, Laura and Howie drive his vehicle away, running over his foot as they leave. Laura ends up borrowing money and uses it to call her mother. Maddy is relieved to hear her daughter and promises Howie can stay with them. While Laura and Howie wait for Maddy to pick them up, Howie emotionally backs away from Laura by telling her he does not need her. They fight, but affirm they are true friends. Howie reveals his idea that the two should live together in the woods. Laura tells him it is a nice idea to think about, but she has a renewed sense of her mother's love and is anxious to be reunited. As the pair approaches Laura's mother, they both have a feeling that everything will be all right because they will stick together.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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#### Initial Understanding

Why do you think Laura's mother is unwilling to help her daughter when she first calls for help?

*It seems likely that Laura has a habit of calling her mother when things get too tough for her. It is stated that Laura's life is "so tangled, so difficult" and that "other kids gave her a rough time." Maddy has probably had to rescue Laura before in situations where she has not felt comfortable or has been unhappy. Maddy would like to see her daughter take care of her problems by herself for once. Chances are that in other instances, Maddy has felt Laura could have resolved the crisis by herself, or perhaps even felt there was no crisis. In addition, Maddy had no idea of how severe the situation was this time. If she did she probably would have intervened immediately.*

#### Literary Analysis

It is never clearly stated as to why Howie and Laura are chosen to be the "goats." Mr. Wells implies it is because the other campers want to "Make them part of the community." This is obviously not correct. Why do you think these two were chosen for this terrible prank?

*Howie and Laura do not fit in well with the other campers. They might appear weaker, both physically and emotionally. Their physical appearance might be considered less attractive to others. They are easier to prey upon because they might not have the emotional strength to fight back. It is a case of the popular campers harassing less popular ones.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

How does Laura change from the beginning to the end of the story?

*In the beginning, Laura is emotionally weak and upset. She cries and becomes physically ill, claiming she needs someone to take care of her. Howie provides support for her by feeding her, finding her clothing, and telling her what they need to do. By the end of the book, Laura has become stronger. She is the one who has the plan for spending the night in the motel, and she quite efficiently lies to the motel clerk and waitress at the restaurant to get them the things they need.*

#### Constructing Meaning

How do you feel about what the other campers have done to Howie and Laura? What do you think should happen to these campers? What do you think of the way Mr. Wells handled the incident?

*Responses will vary. Students should be aware of how horrific this experience is for Howie and Laura. They should also indicate a punishment suitable for the actions committed. This might include removing the guilty campers from camp or having them admit wrongdoing and making amends. Students should realize Mr. Wells is looking for excuses as to why the prank occurred. He is concerned with the reputation of the camp and does not want any unnecessary publicity.*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** Laura and Howie go to many locations within a short period of time. Have students identify the places Laura and Howie go after escaping the island. Each chapter clearly lets the reader know where they are next headed. After compiling a list of places, students can create a map of where the pair went. The map should begin with the camp and end with the bridge where Laura and Howie wait for Maddy to pick them up. Students must illustrate their map with appropriate keys and headings.

**Making Predictions** It is obvious throughout the story that Laura and Howie grow closer during

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their time together. Howie wants them to live together in the woods away from everyone. Laura promises he can come stay with her until his parents can be reached in Turkey. They have struck a bond based upon survival and are true friends by the end of the story. Have students predict what happens to their friendship after they return home. Do they stay in touch? Will they see each other again? Will their relationship drift apart? Will it get closer? Predictions should be written in the form of a letter from Laura to Howie or from Howie to Laura. Students can set the tone with the first lines of the letter. (Example: Dear Howie, I was so glad to receive your latest letter..., or Dear Laura, It has been quite some time since we've talked...)

characters the pictures are describing.

**Recognizing Details** Howie and Laura escape the island by holding onto a log and drifting away. Pair students and tell them they are stranded on an island. They must write in detail how they would escape the island their own way. Add some difficulties to the situation. (They are miles from shore and have limited resources. One partner cannot swim. They have a pocketknife and a fifteen-foot rope, one flare, etc.) An alternative idea is to give the students a list of fifteen items they could have with them on the island for survival. Students must rank these items in order of necessity and explain in detail the ranking they gave.

**Responding to Literature** Have students work in small groups to create a list of characters from the story. Once the list is compiled, students should write several descriptive sentences about each character. Then, students must add one final sentence in which they describe their thoughts about the character. For example, students might write that they feel Mr. Wells is someone they would never want as a camp director because he seems uncaring in his attitude toward Laura and Howie. Finally, have students create a story collage in which they cut out pictures from magazines that correspond with the sentences they used to describe the characters. When projects are finished, students can share their collages and guess which