

LEVEL 1

Gentle Comprehension & Connection (Ages ~5-7)

Best for:

- Early elementary classrooms
- First read-alouds
- Children new to group discussion
- Social-emotional warm-ups

Purpose:

Help young readers understand the story, connect with characters, and begin naming emotions without pressure to analyze deeply.

What this level does well:

- Builds basic comprehension (“What happened?” “Who did what?”)
- Encourages personal connection (“Has this ever happened to you?”)
- Introduces themes of wobbling, effort, and belonging in simple language

Use Level 1 when:

You want a calm, accessible entry point that makes all children feel successful, especially those who might be nervous sharing or who are encountering SEL themes for the first time.

LEVEL 2

Theme Recognition & Early Interpretation (Ages ~6-8)

Best for:

- Small-group book circles
- Early SEL lessons
- Introducing vocabulary like “effort,” “pride,” or “comparison”

Purpose:

Guide children to notice patterns and themes, such as what pride feels like, how characters grow, and what wobbling symbolizes.

What this level does well:

- Moves beyond “what happened” into “why it mattered”
- Helps kids see the emotional arc
- Begins linking illustrations to the storytelling

Use Level 2 when:

You want children to put the story in their own words and start interpreting the emotional meaning without going too deep into symbolism or relational dynamics.

LEVEL 3

Symbolism, Choice, and Character Complexity (Ages ~7-9)

Best for:

- Classroom lessons with discussion experience
- SEL sessions exploring confidence and comparison
- Readers ready for deeper meaning

Purpose:

This level invites children to reconsider the story through motivation and symbolism, why characters act the way they do, and how the harbor itself teaches.

What this level does well:

- Explores the meaning of wobbling, the palm trees, the sailcloth painting
- Examines mistakes and growth
- Encourages children to articulate lessons in their own words
- Investigates peer dynamics (e.g., moments of kindness, teasing, hesitation)

Use Level 3 when:

You want students to begin analyzing characters' emotional choices and the story's symbolic elements, not just identifying them.

LEVEL 4

Moral Ambiguity, Relationship Analysis, and Harbor Dynamics

Best for:

- Advanced elementary readers
- Social-emotional workshops
- Group counseling sessions
- Book clubs

Purpose:

Invite readers to explore relationships, inconsistencies, and social complexity. Level 4 assumes children now understand the plot and themes and are ready to confront the messy, realistic, and intentional subtleties of Harbornook Haven.

What this level focuses on:

- The Orange Sailboat:

Why does this boat cheer for Bubbles in one moment but laugh at Skip later?

What does this reveal about social influence, conformity, and kindness?

What does it feel like when someone is kind only until someone “more powerful” sets a tone?

- Flash’s Behavior:

Why does her brief softening matter?

What does her inconsistency teach about confidence and insecurity?

- Bubbles as a Parallel Arc:

His wobbling joy comes naturally. What does it look like when joy has to meet effort?

- Skip and Breezy:

How two anxious learners help each other grow differently

Why their friendship forms the emotional heart of the harbor

- Mr. Groggin:

A mentor figure who teaches through presence, not lectures

What does this teach about encouragement?

Use Level 4 when:

You want students to grapple with realistic peer behavior, early social pressures, and the moral gray areas that mirror real school environments.

LEVEL 5

Deep SEL Inquiry, Meta-Analysis, and Reader Reflection

Best for:

- Gifted programs
- Advanced SEL groups
- Psychology, education, or counseling workshops
- Parent-child reflection at home

Purpose:

This is the highest level — examining the story as a system of emotional, symbolic, and social design.

Readers explore not only what the characters do, but what the book is teaching about growth, community, and identity.

What this level explores:

- The moral architecture of the harbor

How every location (Open Dock, Map House, M.G. Beach) reflects stages of emotional development.

- Skip as a model for inner pride (vs. outer pride)

How the painting scene teaches intrinsic motivation better than traditional didactic stories.

- Flash as a study in performative vs. authentic confidence

Why her tiny gesture matters more than any apology.

- Breezy as a portrait of anxious beginners

What it means to learn in front of others and why Skip's growth gives her courage.

- The Orange Sailboat as a symbol of social conformity

The complexity of cheering in private but laughing in public, and how children feel these contradictions even before they can articulate them.

- Bubbles as joy uncoupled from discipline

And how joy transforms when paired with effort.

- Palm Trees as a metaphor for emotional flexibility

Bending, not breaking, neither resisting nor collapsing.

- Skip's transformation as a template for resilience psychology

The idea that pride is not a reward; it is a feeling that grows through honest effort.

Use Level 5 when:

You want older children or adults to explore the story's deeper psychological, philosophical, and social frameworks.

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This guide invites reflection and conversation.
Any insights should be explored at the discretion of families and educators.