

LEVEL 5 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



I. Symbolism and Narrative Architecture

1. The harbor, the open water, and the buoy each represent different stages of independence and risk.

What does each space symbolically ask of the characters, and how might these spaces map onto a child's emotional development?

2. The palm tree bends but does not break.

How does this metaphor evolve throughout the book?

In what ways does Skip internalize this metaphor?

Where do you see characters not living up to the palm tree metaphor?

3. Skip paints something imperfect yet honest.

If creativity is a window into identity, what does Skip's painting reveal about how he sees himself?

What does the polished painting represent in contrast?

4. Light and glow appear repeatedly.

How does "glow" function as an emotional symbol in the story?

How is Skip's glow different from Flash's shine?

II. Moral Complexity and Social Interpretation

1. The orange sailboat cheers for Bubbles but laughs at Skip later.

What does this teach about situational kindness?

Why might someone be kind in one moment but unkind in another?

What role does power, such as Flash's presence, play in shaping that behavior?

2. Flash's insult is direct, but the orange boat's laugh is subtle.

Which one is more harmful?

How does the book help children understand the difference between active unkindness and passive conformity?

3. Mr. Groggin is wise and observant but never intervenes directly.

What philosophy of growth does his character represent?

Why might the author choose to make adults supportive but not rescuers?

III. Identity, Effort, and Internal Frameworks

1. Skip decides that effort, not approval, defines his worth.

Where in the story do you see him shift from external validation to internal pride?

What cues in the narrative and illustrations show this transformation?

2. Breezy begins the story nervous and isolated but ends empowered.

What does Breezy learn because Skip learned to value his own wobble?

How does Skip's self-discovery create space for Breezy's growth?

3. Bubbles is joyful, chaotic, and self-assured.

How does the story treat joy that is not disciplined?

Does Bubbles ever face consequences or challenges?

What does Bubbles reveal about pride that comes from fun rather than effort?

LEVEL 5 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONT.

IV. Social Dynamics, Tension, and Empathy

1. Why does Flash soften at the art show?

Is it remorse, surprise, respect, or something else?

What do we learn about characters who define themselves by performance?

2. The boats in the background are not just scenery, they communicate culture.

What does the harbor's collective behavior teach about

- bystanders
- group dynamics
- social courage
- silent empathy
- silent judgment?

3. Skip helps Breezy in a single sentence.

Why is this moment quiet instead of dramatic?

What does this say about how growth spreads socially?

V. Worldview, Themes, and Cross-Book Foreshadowing

1. Some locations in Harbornook Haven feel humble and practical, such as The Kind Keel, the workshop, and Mr. Groggin's fuel dock. Other spaces, like Bay and Tide, the Library, or Harbor Haven Heights, feel more polished or aspirational. The story does not name every location, but it hints at differences.

What might these subtle contrasts say about comfort, belonging, or the unspoken social structures children often sense?

2. The beacon and buoy appear quietly but hold huge symbolic weight in the series.

Even without naming them as "capital B landmarks," what future emotional or developmental thresholds do they represent for the boats?

3. If Skip is the emotional center of Harbornook Haven, what roles do these characters play in the ecosystem?

- Breezy as the mirror
- Bubbles as the wildcard
- Flash as the catalyst
- Mr. Groggin as the moral constant
- Ms. Dory as structured guidance

How do these archetypes work together to shape Skip's worldview?

4. Which moment in the story represents Skip's true turning point? Is it

- Flash's insult
- the quiet moment at the Open Dock
- the palm tree painting scene
- the art show
- helping Breezy?

Defend your answer with textual evidence.

LEVEL 5 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONT.

VI. Deep Psychological Questions

1. The book treats wobbling not as a flaw but a trait.

What is the psychological difference between accepting an imperfection and reframing it as a strength?

2. Skip's glow is something he feels, not something others give.

Why is internalized pride so much harder to teach, and why does this story succeed?

3. Why might a child identify most strongly with Flash, Bubbles, Breezy, or the orange sailboat instead of Skip?

What does that reveal about their social role, their fears, and their strengths?

4. Does Skip "win"?

Define what winning means in this story, then examine whether the word applies at all, or whether Skip has moved beyond the idea of winning.