

LEVEL 4: ADVANCED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Hidden Patterns and Power Dynamics

1. The orange sailboat cheers positively for Bubbles during his near-fall, but later laughs at Skip when Flash makes fun of him.

Why do you think the orange sailboat behaves differently in those two moments?

What does this say about how group behavior can shift when someone “popular” or “powerful” sets the tone?

2. Flash never apologizes out loud, yet she softens at the art show.

Do you think a small gesture can still be meaningful even without an apology?

Why or why not?

3. Compare how Skip treats Breezy at the end with how Flash treated Skip earlier in the book.

What changes when kindness is freely given instead of earned through performance?

Character Arcs Interwoven

1. Bubbles practices far away from others in some illustrations.

What might it mean when someone learns loudly but alone?

Is that isolation or independence, or something else?

2. Breezy is watching Skip before he even knows she exists.

Why do you think she pays attention to him early on?

What might she see in Skip that others overlook?

Symbolism and Meaning

1. The palm tree becomes a symbol for Skip, wobbly, bending, but steady.

If Bubbles or Breezy had to choose a symbol for themselves, what might it be and why?

2. The Open Dock appears twice: once when Skip feels like he does not belong, and once when he finally does.

How can the same place mean two completely different things depending on how someone feels inside?

3. Mr. Groggin shows up in only a few scenes but always calmly observes.

Why might the author include a quiet, steady adult figure in the background instead of the foreground?

What does that mirror in real life?

Moral Ambiguity and Interpretive Thinking

1. Flash is unkind, but she is also a child boat learning her own lessons.

Do you think she is “mean,” or is she trying to protect something inside herself?

What evidence do you see?

2. The orange sailboat is encouraging one moment and mocking in another.

Is this inconsistent behavior wrong, or is it realistic?

How does peer pressure affect ‘fairness?’

3. The other boats laugh along with Flash.

Does laughing make them “mean,” or just unsure how to act?

What would you do if you were one of those boats?

4. Skip discovers that practice fosters pride, not performance. How does this belief change the way he treats Breezy, Flash, and Bubbles?

LEVEL 4: ADVANCED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CONT.

Emotional Subtext and Internal Change

1. Skip's feelings shift several times: relief, doubt, sadness, pride.

Which shift do you think is the most important, and why?

How do emotions guide his growth?

2. When Skip helps Breezy at the end, he teaches something he only just learned himself.

What does that say about the nature of learning and confidence?

3. Do you think Skip's painting changed him, or did it reveal something already inside him?

Explain how effort can uncover strengths people did not know were there.

Ethics, Empathy & Social Complexity

1. When Skip worries that he doesn't fit, none of the other boats are unkind except Flash.

Do you think the group is responsible for how Skip feels, or only his own thought?

How much responsibility do friends have when someone feels left out?

2. Should Flash have been confronted by someone, or was Skip's quiet emotional growth enough of a resolution?

What kind of ending do you think teaches more?

3. Breezy gains bravery because Skip helped her.

What responsibility do we have to others when our own courage helps someone else begin?

Authorial Craft Choices

1. The narrator never says Flash is bad or wrong.

Why do you think the author avoids judgment?

How does that change how you interpret her actions?

2. The moment Skip wobbles in front of his classmates and corrects himself is small but important. What message might the author be sending about how change actually happens?

3. Why does the author let the reader notice things, like boat behavior patterns, without explaining them?

What does this expect of the reader?

Social Dynamics & Setting Design

1. Harbornook Haven is designed with two subtly different sides: one with simple, everyday places like The Kind Keel, Mr. Groggin's Fuel Dock, and the workshop; the other with more polished spots like Bay & Tide, the Library, and Harbor Haven Heights. The book doesn't list every place in the harbor, but this difference is intentional.

How do these two sides of the harbor quietly suggest ideas about class, comfort, or belonging?

Do the characters move through these spaces differently, and what might that say about how children feel in "everyday" places versus "fancier" ones?