



# THE SKYHORSE

HL Carpenter

**The SkyHorse Reading Group Guide**  
**by**  
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This reading group guide includes an introduction, discussion questions, ideas for enhancing your book club, and an interview with author HL Carpenter. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for discussion. We hope these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

**Introduction**

When fourteen year old Tovi Taggart moves to Honeysuckle Hollow to take care of her grandmother, she has a hard time fitting in. For one thing, she's been tagged with the hated nickname Too-Tall Tovi. For another, everyone at Honeysuckle Hollow High believes Tovi played the Choking Game with someone else's boyfriend – and made out with him besides.

As if she doesn't have enough problems, after the latest standoff in the school hallway, Tovi finds a gorgeous speckled egg nestled in a feather lined nest. She takes the egg home – and mysterious visitors begin appearing almost immediately. Even more worrisome, whatever is inside the egg starts chipping its way out. When the egg hatches, revealing a winged horse, Tovi's troubles multiply.

As she struggles to return the horse to the magical land where he belongs, Tovi must make a courageous decision – and accept what that decision will cost her.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Legends are plentiful in Honeysuckle Hollow, where the story takes place. Gramma repeats the legends as if they are true, while Mom says legends are meant to be enjoyed, not believed. Do you think many legends start out as true stories? Whether you believe they are true or not, do you think legends can teach important lessons? Why do some stories become legends, while others are forgotten?
2. Tovi moves to the small town of Honeysuckle Hollow from the city. Many things are different from what she's used to, and some of them are scary. If you had to move somewhere completely different from anywhere you lived before, what would you do to fit in? How would you make friends?
3. Several events in the book happen when someone makes a wish that comes true. If you had the chance to make a butterfly wish, for what would you wish? Would you be happy if the wish came true in a different way than you were expecting?

4. Sometimes Tovi calls herself names and thinks mean things about herself. Is this something a lot of people do? Is what Tovi thinks about herself accurate? Do her thoughts make it hard for her to do what she needs to do to help Zephyr?
5. Tovi doesn't like being tall, and she puts herself on a special diet to keep from growing taller. Is this a good idea? What advice would you give her about how to accept her height? Should she be bothered because she is taller than everyone else? Can you relate to her feelings about being different from other kids?
6. The kids in *The SkyHorse* play a dangerous game - one they don't let Tovi play. Do you think she would have played if they had asked her? Would you? Should Tovi have told someone about the Choking Game?
7. Tovi thinks Gramma shares a mental communication link with Mr. Bibbs, her calico cat. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be able to talk to animals? What questions would you ask?
8. Tovi likes Chase, and she's hurt when he tells a lie about her. Should she have tried to convince everyone else it was a lie? How would you handle a false rumor?
9. Tovi's mom has a favorite expression - *Look before you leap*. Does someone in your family have a saying they use all the time? Do you? What is it, and why do you think it's important?
10. On the very last page, Tovi makes a quick decision about a very important question. Should she have thought about her answer more? Did she make the right choice? What do you think happened to her on Monday?

### **Enhancing Your Book Club**

1. Pick a scene from the book and read it aloud, with each book club member playing a different character. Then switch characters. Do some roles make you uncomfortable? Why?
2. Come up with ideas for a You Tube video to get people interested in the book. What setting would you use in the video? What characters would you feature? How would you keep from giving away the ending? Film the book club members acting out your video script.
3. Tovi is surprised to learn something she didn't know about her grandmother. Have each book club member share a story about something a parent or grandparent did when they were teenagers. Make a list of questions to ask other family members, and write a collection of family stories featuring events from their lives.

4. Are there any new kids in your school or homeschooling group? Discuss ways you can help them feel welcome and whether book club members should become mentors, or join an organization such as Girl Talk.

### **A Conversation with HL Carpenter**

1. Tell us the story behind *The SkyHorse*. What inspired you to write it? How does the book relate to your life?

Many little things added up to the final idea. We love horses, and we've always been intrigued by the idea of Pegasus, a magical winged white horse, and how it would feel to be on his back as he flew through the sky. We combined that image with our love for horses who shared our lives over the years and came up with a story we both wish could have happened to us.

2. What was your favorite chapter to write and why?

Chapter 10, where Tovi first meets Zephyr. This is our favorite because we fell in love with Zephyr right along with Tovi. He's adorable, and that moment is magical, humorous, and very, very sweet.

3. You're a mother/daughter writing team, and there are several mother/daughter relationships in *The SkyHorse*. Are any of them based on you?

All of the characters have some of our traits (you'll have to guess which ones!), and some of the conversations sound like things we might say to each other. Still, we work hard to make sure none of the people in *The SkyHorse* is too much like either of us. As in real life, a fictional world filled with just one type of person would be pretty boring!

4. In addition to Zephyr, Mr. Bibbs the cat plays an important role in the book. Have you ever considered writing a book from an animal's point of view?

Yes, we have, and we'd love to do that. We've written short stories that feature an animal instead of a person as the main character, though so far nothing book length.

5. Did writing this book teach you anything and what was it?

We learned there's a lot involved in creating another world. Even though *The SkyHorse* takes place in present-day Florida, we still had to know all about Sor in order to understand Aire and Zephyr, and the life they lead in their world.

6. Aire, the giant from the land of Sor, uses words from her world. How did you create the language?

We're very interested in the etymology of words, that is, where they come from. We based the words Aire uses on words with Indo-European roots because those suited the time and place of her heritage and background. Dictionaries are a very good tool for finding out the source of a word. Next time you look up a word in a dictionary, check for the word's history. It's usually in parenthesis at the beginning or the end of the definition.

7. Did you have to do much research for *The SkyHorse*, or did you make everything up?

We did tons of research. Some of the things we researched, such as how sinkholes form, were big parts of the story. Others, such as school procedures, were important, but were only mentioned in a line or two.

8. How were you able to understand what Tovi was going through?

Think of life as a map. Instead of countries or states, picture each area labeled with a different time of life. We once lived in the place we call Tovi's Experience. To understand her feelings, we looked at that section of our map and remembered the things we did while living there, and how they made us feel.

9. *The SkyHorse* ends with Tovi making a decision that may cause more problems for her, and leaves the reader wondering what will happen to her when she goes back to school. Why did you end it there?

We had several reasons. First, Tovi now has friends that will be with her forever, and that will help her deal with whatever happens with Jen, Terri, and M.J. Second, we think the reader understands Tovi well enough to know what she'll do. And third, we like the idea of imagining what happens to people in books when the story they have to tell ends. It's kind of like Tovi's experience - these people are now our friends, and they'll always be with us.

10. What can we expect next from you? Are you working on anything new right now?

This year we spent a lot of time preparing *The SkyHorse* for publication and then getting the word out to readers that the book was available, so we're looking forward to returning to writing. We have four YA stories in varying stages of completion, and an adult mystery we're presently revising.