



The Big Snapper

Katherine Holubitsky

Interest level: ages 8–11

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AR Quiz # 110023

Consider the following question as you read *The Big Snapper*:

What does Eddie learn from Granddad's tall tales?

Story

Ten-year-old Eddie loves going fishing with Granddad. They're always on the lookout for the big snapper, the subject of many of Granddad's tall tales. Eddie believes if they catch such a fish, it might change his family's fortune.

Eddie lives with his mom and grandparents in a small cabin on Haida Gwaii. A year earlier, Eddie's dad took the ferry to the mainland and never returned.

This summer, Mom has a plan to turn their cabin into a bed-and-breakfast. Eddie moves into Granddad's room to make room for the guests. Some of the visitors are kind and appreciative of their efforts, but others bring attitudes Eddie has never run into before. When Granddad falls ill and must go away for treatment, Eddie worries that he, too, may not come back.

Already hurt and confused by his father's disappearance, upset by the bed-and-breakfast guests, and now missing his beloved grandfather, Eddie goes fishing alone in Granddad's skiff. Soon he is struggling with more than the need to stay afloat.

Author

Katherine Holubitsky's first novel, *Alone at Ninety Foot* (Orca), won the CLA Book of the Year for Young Adults and the IODE Violet Downey Book Award. Since then, she has written *Last Summer in Agatha* (which won the R. Ross Annett Alberta Book Award), *The Hippie House*, *The Mountain that Walked* and *Tweaked*, all published by Orca. *The Hippie House* was also nominated for the CLA Book of the Year Award and the Arthur Ellis Crime Writers Award. Katherine lives in Edmonton, Alberta.

Connecting to the Curriculum*Language Arts*

- The vocabulary of fishing includes the following: skiff, gaff, trolling, rod, reel, bait, leader, line, hook, casts and net. Have students create a visual dictionary for these words and any other fishing words they come across.
- Eddie's granddad must go into the hospital on the mainland for treatment. Have students write about how Eddie might be feeling about this and what he could do to cope with his feelings.
- Tall tales are humorous stories that contain exaggerations of events and/or characters. They are often based on historical facts. Some famous tall-tale characters include: Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, Pecos Bill, Stormalong, Calamity Jane, John Henry and Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind. Have students choose one of these characters (or others) to see what makes them memorable.
- Eddie's granddad tells him a tall tale about a snapper that pulls him to Alcatraz, the former island prison in San Francisco Bay. Have students write a short "tall tale" about this incident from the point of view of the snapper.
- Jake and Eddie find an old wagon when they go to the dump. They plan on attaching it to a bike so they can ride around together. Have students write a newspaper article about building a new method of transportation. Illustrate the story.
- Create a class newspaper entitled *The Big Snapper News*. Divide the class into sections to cover sports, the editorial page, comics, local events and the classifieds. Drawing on events in the book, challenge students to create articles and pictures in a newspaper format. This may be done by hand or on the computer.
- Using one of the tall tales in *The Big Snapper*, ask students to write a poem that captures the main idea or most interesting part of the tale.
- Eddie tells his grandfather that he caught the giant snapper, then, in a change of heart, returned it to the sea. Have students write about why they think Eddie tells his grandfather this tall tale.
- Have students write about whether they agree or disagree with Eddie's letting the Big Snapper go, giving convincing reasons for their choice.

Social Studies

- Fishing is an important part of many world cultures. In North America, there are two major fisheries, one on each coast. Divide students into groups. Using the jigsaw learning strategy, assign one group member to find out about what kinds of fish are caught on each coast. Another member will research environmental issues regarding the fisheries. A third group member will research current threats to the respective fisheries. A fourth group member will research future growth of the fisheries. Once all the research is complete, bring the groups together to share their new knowledge.
- Eddie's grandmother weaves baskets from spruce roots. As a class, do some research into basketweaving techniques on the West Coast. What are some other materials used for making storage containers? Have students research the uses of baskets in coastal First Nation cultures.
- Have students find out about First Nations fishing practices on the West Coast before European settlers came. How important was/is fishing to First Nations people on the West Coast? How did they fish, preserve the fish and celebrate their success as fishermen?

Science

- Ocean and wind currents affect how sea creatures migrate. Assign students to find out more about these currents and how they affect the fish on the West Coast of North America.
- Different types of sea creatures are mentioned in *The Big Snapper*. For example: razor clams, flounder, blue whale, salmon, snapper, rock cod, halibut, jellyfish, oysters and sawfish. Have students research to find out more about these sea creatures and how they interact or live with snapper.
- All creatures have a scientific name. For example, the name for the Australian snapper is *pagrus auratus*. Find out the scientific names for other species of snapper and learn about their similarities and differences.
- Eddie knows that many North American lakes were formed by receding glaciers. Have students research glaciation patterns from the last ice age. Learn about your geographic region. What kinds of landforms were left behind after the ice melted?
- Many living things in the world that are in danger of becoming extinct are classified as threatened or endangered. Certain species of snapper are a threatened group. Have students find out more about each of the categories and the plants and animals affected. Find out why the snapper is in danger of extinction.
- Assign students to draw and label a fish diagram. Include the following: eye, mouth, gills, scales, fins (dorsal, pectoral, pelvic, anal, caudal). Research what each part does.

- Eddie's grandfather became concerned when logging began in the territory of Trotter, a black bear. Discuss with students the impacts of clear-cut logging. Break them into groups and assign each group to research one of the following aspects of clear-cut logging online: technologies and techniques; transporting the logs; impact of clear-cut logging on animals and ecosystems; reforestation practices; use of the wood after logging. After half an hour of research, have groups present what they have learned.

Math

- Fish and other sea creatures have very long lifespans. Red snapper can live up to 115 years. Research and find out about at least six sea creatures that live longer than fifty years. Create a bar or line graph to show your findings.
- When Eddie and Jake catch a bunch of rock cod, they can't decide which is the biggest because they all kind of look the same. Invite students to decide which unit of measurement would be the most reasonable to help the boys rank the fish.

Art

- Have students illustrate Eddie's father's tall tale.
- Have students look at pictures of snapper to use as models for a large portrait of one. Use pastels or watercolor paint.
- Research artists who have painted fish and create a snapper picture in their style. For example: *Red Fish* by Henri Matisse; *The Golden Fish* and *Fish Magic* by Paul Klee; *Children of the Sea* and *Miracle Ocean* by Martin Allen; and *Snapper and Mussels* by Georgie MacBrayne.
- Draw portraits of the main characters of *The Big Snapper*.
- Draw a comic strip of one of the tall tales.
- Create a fish sculpture from recycled materials (see the Resources section to find an online lesson plan).

Drama

- In groups, have students create a short skit from one of the tall tales in the book or have them select a character and create short skits using different stories about the character.
- Eddie and his granddad spend a lot of their time together fishing in Granddad's boat. Have students recreate the fishing scenes, using their own dialogue.

- Eddie goes out alone in his granddad's skiff because he is angry at his father and upset about his grandfather's illness. In groups, have students create monologues describing how Eddie is feeling, what he might say to his father or what he could say to his mother to help her stop feeling so sad.
- In pairs or groups, have students select and act out one of the tall tales Eddie's granddad tells in *The Big Snapper*.

Connecting to the Text

- Authors know they can create a sense of interest and excitement by using strong verbs. Briefly review verbs with your class. Introduce them to verbs that show action in a descriptive way. For example (when Eddie thinks of the tourists who visit the island in the summer season): "They clamber across the beaches and roar about in speedboats, startling the bald eagles that perch in the gnarled arbutus trees on shore." Discuss how the story is enriched by using strong verbs. Have students find a dozen other sentences in *The Big Snapper* where the author uses strong verbs. Then have them revisit a piece of their own writing, looking for places where they can strengthen it by using good verbs.
- Eddie's grandfather's stories are *parables*. That is, they are stories where the characters and situations impart a moral or teach a lesson. For example, Granddad tells Eddie that sometimes you have to eat the liver and onions to get the cream puffs for dessert. What does he mean by this? What is the significance of the story Eddie tells to his grandfather at the end of the book? Have students find two other parables in *The Big Snapper*. For each story, have them write a paragraph explaining the deeper meaning.
- Make an overhead of the following list. Discuss with students some of the things that make for a good story:
 - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
 - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
 - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading
 - ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems
 - ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there
 - ◆ a variety of settings
 - ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
 - ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
 - ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve

Using these criteria, have students write a critical review of *The Big Snapper*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment. Share these reviews with the class.

- In chapter 10, Holubitsky uses descriptive language to paint a picture of how Eddie catches the halibut. Discuss with students how her choice of words helps the reader visualize Eddie's struggle to bring the fish out of the water. Have students write a descriptive passage about an experience that they've had that challenged them in a similar way. Instruct students to think about using their five senses in their descriptions, and to write the scene as though it were being filmed for a movie. What would the viewer see?
- Have students create a timeline of the story arc to show the major events in the book.
- Invite students to choose a main character from the book and create a character web. Webs should include personality traits, physical characteristics, likes or dislikes, habits and whatever other information students can dig up about the character. Encourage students to make as detailed a web as possible for their chosen character.
- Direct students to find the mailing address of Orca Book Publishers inside the front cover of the book. Using proper letter-writing format, have students write a letter to Katherine Holubitsky c/o Orca Book Publishers. In their letters, students should include information about what they enjoyed most about reading *The Big Snapper*. They may also choose to ask some questions about the characters, or about the author herself.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Eddie's dad said he was tired of fishing and left to get a regular job on the mainland. That was the last Eddie and his mother heard from him (until later in the story). What do you think is the hardest part of this situation for Eddie? What would you do if this happened to you?
2. How would you react if your mother decided to rent out part of your house to tourists? What would be good about it? What would be not-so-good?
3. Becky Northorpe isn't used to being without her shopping malls and big-city entertainment. But Jake and Eddie are used to spending their free time in nature. Which would you prefer? Why?
4. If you were to move from your town to a remote community like Eddie's, what would change about your life? Make a list and share it with your class. What would change for the better?

5. Mrs. Greenshaw follows traditional recipes using natural ingredients to prepare remedies, poultices and medicines. What kinds of similar traditions do you have in your family? For example, does your family treat a common cold in a certain way? Do you use some traditional recipes to prepare special foods?
6. When Eddie was fishing by himself, he chose not to head for shore when the storm got worse. He wanted to prove that he could catch the halibut. Have you ever felt so determined to prove yourself? Explain.
7. Do you think having his father back will be a good thing for Eddie? Imagine that you are Eddie. What would you say to your dad if you could find the words?
8. What is the message in *The Big Snapper*?

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

The Big Snapper came about after a trip I took to Haida Gwaii a couple of years ago. My husband and I spent a few nights at a bed-and-breakfast in Masset, a fishing village on the northern tip of Graham Island. The room was one of a dozen in what was once a cannery next to the wharf. Our host, David, a wonderful cook, had planned a dinner party for all of his guests and we were each assigned a task. Mine was to peel the potatoes.

Late in the afternoon, as the fishermen were unloading their catch, David strolled down to the wharf to buy the main course. Everyone was gathered around one particular red snapper, exclaiming over the size of the fish. One seasoned fisherman guessed it to be more than fifty years old. David bought that fish along with a number of Dungeness crab.

When he returned, he placed the fish on a long bench in the garden in the backyard, which he used as a cutting table. It was seeing that beautiful fish—the one thought to be fifty years old—lying on the table, waiting to be cut and gutted that was the inspiration for the story.

Most of the dinner was superb; the crab was delicious, the salad—straight from David's garden—was delectable, and if I do say so, the potatoes were peeled to perfection. But I couldn't touch the fish soup, and I nibbled on very little snapper that night.

Yours,
Kathy Holubitsky

Resources**Books***Fiction*

- Carney, Margaret. *The Biggest Fish in the Lake*
 George, William T. *Fishing at Long Pond*
 Hanson, Warren. *Grandpa has a Big Face*
 Holubistky, Katherine. *Alone at Ninety Foot; Last Summer in Agatha; The Hippie House; The Mountain that Walked; Tweaked*
 Jukes, Mavis. *Blackberries in the Dark*
 Lapp, Eleanor. *In the Morning Mist*
 LeBox, Annette. *Salmon Creek*
 Luenn, Nancy. *Nessa's Story*
 MacLachlan, Patricia. *Journey; What You Know First*
 Makissack, Patricia. *A Million Fish...More or Less*
 McFarlane, Sheryl. *Waiting for the Whales*
 Mills, Claudia. *Gus and Grandpa go Fishing*
 Olsen, Sylvia. *Catching Spring*
 Paul, Esther. *A Railway Kid: Stories of a Prairie Childhood in the Great Depression*
 Peck, Richard. *A Year Down Yonder*
 Prosek, Joseph. *A Good Day's Fishing*
 Sherry, Garland. *My Father's Boat*
 Stolz, Mary. *Go Fish!*
 Taylor, Mildred. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*
 Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
 Waboose, Jan Bordeau. *Morning on the Lake*
 Wakeman, Daniel. *Ben's Big Dig*
 Waldron, Kathleen Cook. *Loon Lake Fishing Derby*
 Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Dance at Grandpa's*
 Woodbury, Mary. *Jess and the Runaway Grandpa*

Nonfiction

- Bailkey, John. *The Young Fishing Enthusiast: A Practical Guide for Kids* (799.1)
 Banting, Erinn. *The Great Lakes* (917.13)
 Dyer, Hadley. *Fishing in Action* (799.1)
 Gleeson, Brian. *Paul Bunyan* (398.2)
 Glimmerveen, Ulco. *Leaper: the Amazing Life of the Salmon* (597.55)
 Miller-Schroeder, Patricia. *Blue Whales* (599.5)
 San Souci, Robert D. *Larger Than life: The Adventures of American Legendary Heroes*. (398.22)
 Shepard, Aaron. *Master Man: A Tall Tale of Nigeria* (398.22)

Theodorou, Rod. *Blue Whale* (599.5)
Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *Reading is Seeing* (372.4)
Wiley, Margaret. *Clever Beatrice: An Upper Peninsula Conte* (398.2)

Online

Razor Clams

www.westportwa.com/activities/razorclams

Salmon Species in BC

www.sd91.bc.ca/webquests/salmon

Interactive Salmon Life Cycle

www.streamnet.org/SLC.html

Counting the Fish in the Sea

www.neaq.org/education_and_activities/games_and_activities/activities/counting_the_fish_in_the_sea.php

Threatened and Endangered Animals and Plants in the US

www.fws.gov/endangered

Species at Risk in Canada

www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?cid=4&id=232

Fishes: Australian Museum Fish Site

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Fishes>

The David Suzuki Foundation

www.davidsuzuki.org/Oceans

Paul Klee

www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/klee_paul.html

Georgie MacBrayne

www.fish-paintings.co.nz/index.htm

Henri Matisse

www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/matisse

Fish Sculptures (Lesson Plan)

www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/elem/Linda-fish.htm

World Wildlife Fund Endangered Species
www.worldwildlife.org/endangered

Thundering Tall Tales
www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=327

Born on a Mountaintop? Davy Crockett, Tall Tales and History
http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=288

Blue Whale
www.acsonline.org/factpack/bluewhl.htm

Clear Cut Logging
http://archives.cbc.ca/environment/environmental_protection/topics/679