About the Book

Owen Jester wishes his family hadn’t moved to his grandfather’s house in Carter, Georgia, after his dad lost his job at the hardware store. For one thing, his grandfather’s live-in nurse, Earlene, sure knows how to ruin anyone’s idea of a good time. And then there’s Viola, the bossy, know-it-all girl next door, who can’t ever keep her nose in her own business. She even thinks Owen should put his freshly captured bullfrog, Tooley, back into Graham Pond. Who would go to all the trouble of catching the biggest, greenest, slimiest, most beautiful bullfrog in the whole world just to let it go? Owen vows to stay as far away from Viola as possible. Then late one night, he hears unusual noises coming from the train track in the woods below his grandfather’s house. Something mysterious and wonderful has fallen off the train. But when Owen finally discovers what it is, he realizes he just might need a know-it-all after all . . . . Can Viola keep the most fantastic secret to ever tumble into Carter, Georgia?

About the Author

Barbara O’Connor is the author of fourteen novels and biographies for children. Drawing on her South Carolina roots, Barbara’s novels have a distinctly Southern voice. Her books have received many awards, including the Massachusetts Book Award and Parents’ Choice Award, and have been nominated for young readers’ awards in thirty-eight states.
PREDICTION

Have you ever kept a really great secret? How hard is it to keep a secret when you’re excited about something? Who would you trust to keep your secret? Who would you definitely not want to share it with?

CHAPTER 1
Vocabulary
hunkered, miserable, colander, tumbleweed
Comprehension
Describe Owen Jester’s life in Carter, Georgia.
Prediction
What did Owen hear?

CHAPTER 2
Vocabulary
pudgy, hedge
Comprehension
Explain who Tooley is and why Owen is worried about him.
Prediction
Will things get better or worse with Viola?

CHAPTER 3
Vocabulary
trampling, examine, muttered, unusual, lurking
Comprehension
Describe how Owen’s life has recently changed. Why is it harder for him now than it used to be? What’s the worst part?
Prediction
Will Owen find what fell off the train?

CHAPTER 4
Vocabulary
rickety, gauge, clenched, luau, tiki, canteen, enormous
Comprehension
Why does Owen say the word “rocket” suddenly? Why does he want to do this?
Prediction
Will Travis and Stumpy help Owen look? How do you know?

CHAPTER 5
Vocabulary
tromped, gloomy, clatter
Comprehension
What things did they find? What did they not?
Prediction
Will Tooley be fine or will he get sicker?

CHAPTER 6
Vocabulary
hammered, trudged, baling wire, huddled
Comprehension
Explain why Tooley needs a new cage.
Prediction
Will Viola tell on them for being mean? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 7
Vocabulary
admired, liable, mangy
Comprehension
List the steps Owen and the boys took to make Tooley happy.
Prediction
Argue for or against the idea that Owen and Viola could ever be friends.

CHAPTER 8
Vocabulary
deserving, lunged, evade, persistent, infested
Comprehension
Explain who Earlene is and why she makes Owen’s life more difficult.
Prediction
Will the cage make Tooley happy and healthy? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 9
Vocabulary
nudged, niggle, tangle, gape
Comprehension
Why do Travis and Stumpy quit looking? How is Owen rewarded for his persistence?
Prediction
What do you think it is?

CHAPTER 10
Vocabulary
scraggly, scattered, ravine, leeches, solemnly
Comprehension
What did Owen find? What clues best help lead him to it?
Prediction
What will they do with it?

CHAPTER 11
Vocabulary
flourish, gnarly, appetite, signaling
Comprehension
What is keeping Owen from showing his friends the sub?
Prediction
How long will Owen have a secret? Why? Why is it so hard to keep a secret?

CHAPTER 12
Vocabulary
chattered, instrument, gesturing
Comprehension
Would you be as excited as the boys to find it? What would you want to do? Who would you tell?
Prediction
What will Viola do? What will she say?
CHAPTER 13
Vocabulary
indignant, glumly
Comprehension
Why does Owen have a niggle about Tooley? Have you ever felt a niggle about something? What did you decide?
Prediction
What will Owen do about the sub? The frog?

CHAPTER 14
Vocabulary
disbelief, fiddle, hayloft
Comprehension
What's the plan?
Prediction
Will their plan be ruined? How?

CHAPTER 15
Vocabulary
submersible, gestured, aggravation, ambient
Comprehension
Does Viola know everything or not? Should she brag about it?
Prediction
Will Viola tell? How will they keep her quiet?

CHAPTER 16
Vocabulary
convincing, scanning, scampered
Comprehension
Explain how the boys will get the sub to the pond. Will it work?
Prediction
What will Owen decide to do with Tooley? What makes you think this?

CHAPTER 17
Vocabulary
stormed, smug, gamble, relieved
Comprehension
Why did Owen ask Viola if she wanted to be involved?
Prediction
Will adults find out before they can get it into the pond? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 18
Vocabulary
linen
Comprehension
Who does Owen tell everything to at the end of the day? Who do you?
Prediction
What steps do they need to take for both the plan and the sub to work?

CHAPTER 19
Vocabulary
hacking
Comprehension
Why was Owen “sick of talking about getting the sub into the pond”?
Prediction
If Owen frees Tooley, how will Travis and Stumpy react?

CHAPTER 20
Vocabulary
annoyed, surface, peeping
Comprehension
Why do you think Owen finally decided to do what he did with Tooley? Do you agree with his decision? Why or why not?
Prediction
What will happen next? What makes you think this?

CHAPTER 21
Vocabulary
glared, glimpse, chomping, accusing
Comprehension
How did Travis and Stumpy take the news about Tooley?
Prediction
What is Viola's plan? Why does she know so much?

CHAPTER 22
Vocabulary
irritated, warped
Comprehension
Make a list of Owen's problems and put a star next to the one you think is most difficult.
Prediction
Will he figure out how to operate it? What clues do you have?

CHAPTER 23
Vocabulary
buoyancy, dramatic, rhythmic
Comprehension
Explain why Owen needs Travis and Stumpy to help move the sub. How does he convince them to return?
Prediction
If they get the sub to the pond, who do you think should get to drive it first? Why?

CHAPTER 24
Vocabulary
breaker, valves, struggled, patient, perched, scrambling
Comprehension
List the steps it took to move the sub to the pond.
Prediction
Will they be caught before they can try it? What makes you think this?
PROJECTS

READING COMPREHENSION
Good readers make connections to what they are reading. This means they think about how the story relates to something from their own life or someone they know. It could also remind the reader of another book, movie, or television show in some way. Making these connections helps readers stay tuned in to the story instead of letting their mind drift away. As you read the book, make at least two connections in each chapter. Write them on a sticky note and leave them on the pages where you connected. Then share the memories, connections, and ideas with a reading buddy.

WRITING
In Chapter One, Owen writes about three good things and three bad things about moving in with his grandpa. Write your own list of three good things, three bad things about something in your own life. Examples: playing soccer, being in the sixth grade, or learning to play an instrument.

HISTORY
It was the ancient Egyptians who finally inspired the answer of how to move the sub. Learn more about the Egyptians and how they influenced the future with all the techniques they used to build the pyramids. Draw a picture and explain what you learned.

ART
Create some type of three-dimensional art inspired by the story. It can be any shape (realistic in form or from your imagination) and color. For full credit you need to write a paragraph about your art piece and why you made the choices that you did.

SCIENCE
Graham Pond is an example of a freshwater biome. Research the food chain in an ecosystem as small as a pond and then draw a food web that shows how each organism helps the other to survive.

Research exactly what it is that Tooley needed to survive. Would he have continued to survive if kept in captivity?