



Schooled

by Gordon Korman

Recommended Ages:

9 and up

Summary: Since he was little, Capricorn “Cap” Anderson has lived on a farm commune and been homeschooled by his hippie grandmother, Rain. When Rain is injured in a fall, Cap is forced to attend the local middle school. Although he knows a lot about Zen Buddhism, nothing has prepared him for the politics of public school.

Discussion Questions: Spoiler alert! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don’t want to know what happens!

1. Explain the type of life Cap has been leading at Garland. How is his life about to change dramatically? Have you ever daydreamed about being homeschooled? What do you think it would be like?
2. What do you think would be the most difficult thing for an outsider to understand about middle school life?
3. How is Cap treated by Sophie, Zach, Hugh, and Naomi? How do people decide whether to be cruel or kind to someone who is new? Do you blame Sophie for her reaction to him? Would you want Cap to be living in your house?
4. Hugh realizes that if it weren’t for Cap, he would be low man on the totem pole. “Better him than me.” Do you think this is a theme of middle school? Do students put up with their peers being bullied because they’re afraid it might be them next?
5. What prank does Zach plan for Cap? Do you think this could happen at your own school? Why do people go along with it? In your opinion, who is worse: Zach or Naomi? Why?
6. Cap is full of hippie wisdom like, “When you’re unkind to others, it’s usually because you don’t believe that you, yourself, deserve kindness.” Do you agree with this statement? What about his other philosophical statements?
7. What is the turning point that changes how people perceive Cap at school? Have you ever known someone who acted heroically?
8. Why does Hugh think, “I was a worm, but at least I had the strength of character to be ashamed of it.” Does Zach realize that he’s being a worm too?
9. How does Cap make a connection with Sophie? What common interests do they share? How does he try to make up for her dad’s thoughtlessness? Does it work? Have you ever acted anonymously on someone’s behalf?

10. Mr. Kasigi admits, "I had long suspected how the kids went about picking their eighth grade president. And when I chose to look the other way, I was sort of putting a stamp of approval on it." How does this decision blow up in his face? Can adults sometimes be responsible for the bullying that happens in schools? Do you think Mr. Kasigi deserved what he got? Why?
11. What happens at the pep rally? Would this happen at your own school? Have you ever experienced other examples of group mentality? What do the students at school ultimately believe happened to Cap? How is it resolved?
12. Despite his experiences in middle school and his longing to return to Garland, once he is home, Cap suddenly misses his classmates and the chaos he has come to understand. How can some experiences change who you are? In the end, what do Rain and Cap decide to do? Do you think it is the right decision for Cap's future? Why?

Activities:

- Write ten rules of survival for middle school. What should every student know before entering the doors of school? After you've written the rules, journal about your experience coming to understand the rules.
- Try your hand at tie-dye! Experiment with this fun art form by trying out a variety of techniques. Wear your art proudly!
- Explore the music of the '60s and '70s. Which songs have lasted through the decades to become classics? Explore Rain's playlist of songs from the period.

Rain's Playlist

1. "The Times They Are A-Changin'" by Bob Dylan
2. "The Weight" by the Band
3. "You Can't Always Get What You Want" by the Rolling Stones
4. "A Whiter Shade of Pale" by Procol Harum
5. "Big Yellow Taxi" by Joni Mitchell
6. "Truckin'" by the Grateful Dead
7. "The Kids Are Alright" by the Who
8. "California Dreamin'" by the Mamas & the Papas
9. "Ohio" by Neil Young
10. "Aquarius" from the musical *Hair*
11. "Wild Thing" by the Troggs
12. "For What It's Worth" by Buffalo Springfield
13. "Break on Through (To the Other Side)" by the Doors
14. "All You Need Is Love" by the Beatles