

## Commissioner's Book Club

# Beatrice and Croc Harry

By Lawrence Hill

Discussion guide

## Introduction

B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner's Book Club offers monthly book selections that use stories to help readers connect with human rights issues and build connection with the characters they encounter. We hope to bring together a province-wide community of readers and deepen their understanding of human rights and those who are most affected by human rights issues. This guide has been prepared to assist parents, teachers, librarians and other trusted adults explore themes in Lawrence Hill's book, *Beatrice and Croc Harry*.

In Hill's middle-grade debut novel, an independent and courageous young girl named Beatrice awakens to find herself alone in a large forest with no memories of who she is or how she came to be in the forest. She is quite surprised to learn that she can understand what the animals of the forest are saying, and that she has food, books and a tree house. As Beatrice begins a quest to find her way home, she embarks on a series of adventures that explore complex topics like social justice, identity, anti-black racism, discrimination and segregation. Throughout these adventures, Beatrice models true allyship and advocacy for readers. As she says, "As soon as you become aware of the world's problems, you have to help deal with them." *Beatrice and Croc Harry* is an imaginative and exciting story in which readers learn about injustice and how we might confront it in ways that promote healing and respect.

## Discussion questions

1. What did you think of the story? Do you have a favourite moment or part of the book?
2. There are many wonderful (and not-so wonderful) characters in the book. Which character did you like best? What was it about them that you liked?
3. In the book, we learn many new and creative words, like bumfuzzle or palaver. Some of these words are real and some are not. What did you think of the author's use of words in this way? Which was your favourite new word? Which was the strangest or funniest word? Do you, your friends or family ever make up new words? What are they?
4. Beatrice and Croc Harry is a fantasy adventure story about a girl trying to solve the mystery of who she is. It also makes many connections between the injustices that occur in and beyond the forest of Argilia and the injustices that happen in the real world that we, as readers, live in. What connections did you notice? Can you identify some real-world examples that parallel the injustices in the book?
5. Fantasy and adventure stories are often a great way to learn about social justice, human rights and activism. Do you think it is easier to learn about difficult topics like discrimination and racism from fantasy worlds and stories or do you think it is easier to learn from real world events? Why or why not?
6. The characters in Beatrice and Croc Harry often have names that reflect a part of their identity or personality. Does your name have a meaning or a story? If so, do you feel that the meaning or story reflects part of your identity or personality?
7. Beatrice often steps in to help her friends and to address injustice. For example, she helps save Horace from being eaten by Croc Harry and she stands up to the discrimination and segregation of the speckled rabbits at the Academy. On page 200, she says, "As soon as you become aware of the world's problems, you have to help deal with them." Do you think that is true? Do we have a responsibility to act when we see an injustice? Why or why not?
8. Have you ever been an advocate for change in your school or community? What did you do?
9. Is there an issue that you think is important that you would like to help change? What is the issue and why do you think it is important?



10. When we first meet Beatrice in the story, she doesn't remember anything about who she is, but she does know that she has brown skin and very curly hair. It isn't until later in the book, when she is speaking with Killjoy, that she learns that she is Black. Killjoy explains to her that, "Black isn't just a colour. It's a people. A shared history. A sense of belonging." How did her skin and hair colour affect how she was treated in the story? Why do you think that it is important for Beatrice to know about her identity and be proud of who she is?
11. In the book, we follow Beatrice and Croc Harry as they become friends, even though Beatrice is a human child and Harry is a 700-pound turquoise crocodile. They become friends, in part, because they talk to each other—or 'palaver' as Harry likes to call it—and because they don't remember much of their lives before they arrived in Argilia. Later in the story, we learn that Croc Harry was sent to Argilia with Beatrice because he attacked her community and almost killed her.
12. What was Beatrice's response to learning about what Croc Harry had done to her and her family?
13. What role did their journey and friendship play in her response?
14. What do you think the author is trying to tell us about forgiveness and friendship?
15. At one point in the story, Croc Harry asks Beatrice, "If you do a lot of good things .... does it erase all the bad that you did before?" Beatrice responds that she isn't sure but that doing good things can make you a better person.
  - a. What do you think? Can we ever 'erase' something we have done that have hurt others? If not, is there anything we can do?
  - b. Can you think of some things that Croc Harry did or could do to make amends to Beatrice, her family and her community?

## Activity prompts

1. All the characters in Beatrice and Croc Harry are delightfully unique—in the way they speak, look and act and in their experiences and viewpoints. Choose a character from Beatrice and Croc Harry and create a mood board that explores their unique character, identity and experiences in the book. Be sure to use your imagination and incorporate things like colour, texture, images and text.



2. Author Lawrence Hill has said that the story of Beatrice and Croc Harry began as bedtime stories that he told his youngest daughter who is also named Beatrice. Imagine that you are writing a bedtime story. Try to think of a real-world issue that you think is important and then write a short, bed-time story for a young child about that issue.
3. Many of the real-world issues explored in Beatrice and Croc Harry, like racism, discrimination, and violence are covered by [The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). This document is an agreement made by countries, including Canada, who have pledged to protect children's rights. The UNCRC includes many rights such as the right to be free from discrimination, the right to access education, the right to food and a safe home, the right to be protected from abuse and harm and the right to protection in times of war, amongst many others. Using the resource suggestions below, review articles of the UNCRC and explore the following questions:
  - a. Can you identify the rights included in the UNCRC that are part of the storyline in Beatrice and Croc Harry?
  - b. When looking through the articles of the UNCRC, is there anything that surprises you? Are any rights that should be added or changed? What are they and why do you think they are important?
  - c. Choose one of the articles in the UNCRC and create a poster or a social media post about it that helps to explain it to other young people.
  - d. Fantasy and adventure stories are often a great way to learn about social justice, human rights and activism. Create a short fantasy story that explores one of the articles of the UNCRC and shows a main character advocating for change!

## UNCRC Resource

[UNICEF](#), the United Nations agency for children, has a child-friendly version of the UNCRC. It is available here: [Children's version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child | UNICEF](#)

