

# Home Truths

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*Teacher's Guide created by Cassandra Reigel Whetstone*

## Story Summary

Fourteen-year-old Brick is a bully. When he isn't at the library or taking care of his four-year-old sister, Cassie, Brick bullies kids who are weaker than he is. When Brick is home, he gets the same treatment from his father. Brick wants to escape his home situation but realizes that he can't leave Cassie alone. Since he cannot leave he has to overcome his own behavior as well as stand up to his father. [Dancing Cat Books, 2010]

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## Pre-Reading

Pass out a sheet of paper. Ask students to write a response to this prompt: *What is a bully?* Ask students to describe the behaviour and characteristics of bullies rather than identify people who might be considered to be bullies. Give students 2-3 minutes to write their responses. Invite students to share their writings with the class.

## Discussion Questions

- Show the cover of the book and read the title. *What can you predict about the story from the cover?*
- *Why do you think the author chose the title Home Truths?*
- *Brick says, "I decided long ago to keep my nose clean at the library." What does that tell you about the importance of the library to him? Are there places that you visit where you are extra-careful to stay out of trouble? Page 3*
- *How did you feel about Brick before he runs into Glenn and Igor? Did your feelings towards Brick change after this chapter? Why or why not? Pages 13-15*
- *Why does Brick need to stack the wood into a pile? What might be some of the advantages of a Shaker Round? Explain that a Shaker Round is a compact method of stacking wood. Show students pictures of several different woodpiles, including the Shaker round here: <http://www.popularmechanics.com/home/improvement/outdoor-projects/how-to-stack-firewood> Is it reasonable for Brick's dad to ask him to do the Shaker round? Why or why not? Pages 20- 23*
- *Brick points out that, "Tully is one of the few kids in school who isn't scared of me." Why do you think Tully isn't afraid of Brick? Does Brick think that is a good thing or a bad thing? Page 37*
- *Brick has a stash of money that he says he has stolen because Opal refuses to pay him for babysitting Cassie. He states, "Who says two wrongs don't make a right?" What do you think of this statement? Do you think Brick really believes stealing from Opal is the proper response? Is it fair for Opal to depend on him to watch Cassie without paying him? Page 45*

- *Brick describes the scene where Cassie watches Floyd punch Brick. How do you think that experience may have impacted Cassie? Why is it important for Brick to protect Cassie from seeing things like that? Pages 60-61*
- *What is ironic about the chapter title, [all the comforts of home]? Brick asks how Opal can “treat her only son like he’s a hole in the landscape?” How might Opal answer that question? Pages 76-77*
- *Glenn feels safe because he knows his dad is inside the store and Brick reflects, “How weird that must be.” How could his observation of Glenn’s relationship with his dad affect how Brick acts towards Glenn? Page 93*
- *What does Anxiety Quotient mean? What does anxiety feel like? Pages 100-101*
- *Why does Docker want to teach Brick karate? Do you think Brick wants to go to the dojo? Do you think he will go back for another lesson? Why or why not? What does Brick mean when he says on page 108, “Like I said, persistent.” How is Docker being persistent at that moment? Pages 103-108*
- *When Brick is being bullied by Snyder and his gang, he pulls Cassie into his chest and says, “Too soon after the last beating...” What does that mean? How do you feel about Brick being bullied after you’ve seen him bully other kids? What do you think Glenn or Lorne might think or do if they witnessed this scene? Pages 109-110*
- *Why do you think Floyd gets away with being abusive to Brick? Is there anything else that Brick could do to protect himself? What are the potential consequences of the different possible ways that Brick could handle the situation with his dad? Pages 114-115*
- *What do you think about Brick’s behaviour in the scene with Cassie and Caramel? Pages 122-127*
- *Why does Brick think he is wasting his time with Docker? Do you agree or disagree? Page 129*
- *Why did Brick think he would feel better if he could make Glenn cry? Pages 132-133*
- *How would you describe Brick’s relationship with Kendra? Why does he have such a strong reaction to seeing her again? When Brick gets home he feels rage because he sees that Floyd is mean. Could it be empowering on some level to recognize that Floyd is mean and that his abuse has nothing to do with Brick or what Brick says or does? Could this be a turning point in the story? Why or why not? Pages 143-144*
- *Were you surprised that Brick saved Igor? Why or why not? Does his remembering of what happened with Wilbur add depth to his character? How do you feel about Brick? How do you think the author feels about Brick? Pages 146- 149*
- *What do you think of Rolf and Marigold’s decision not to tell Brick that he is no longer welcome in their home? Is it a fair response? Was it intended to help Brick or punish him? Why did Tully finally tell her parents that Brick was acting like a bully? Why doesn’t Brick tell them the truth? Pages 193-196*
- *Why is does the Langille family feel so strongly about bullying? Do you think things will be better for Brick and Cassie now that he has told the truth to Tully? What is the best possible outcome? What is the worst possible outcome? Pages 225-230*
- *Discuss Floyd’s abuse of his children. How long will he be able to be violent towards Brick? What do you think is going to happen to Cassie? What do you think she will be like as she grows older if she stays in this situation with Floyd? Pages 235-236*
- *What do you think about how the book is resolved? Do you think Brick’s problems with Floyd are over? What has changed? What would you expect to see if you were to visit the MacAvoy*

*family in one year? Do you think Brick will break the cycle of abuse if he becomes a father one day? Pages 272-278*

## **Stop the Bullying Group Project (Writing, Research, Speaking and Presentation Skills)**

**Materials:** Internet access for research, poster board or butcher paper, markers, paper and pencils

**Preparation:** Divide students into small groups or pairs and make one copy of the directions for each group. (Activity can also be done as an individual assignment.)

### **Directions:**

1. Assign each group a character.
  - Brick MacAvoy
  - Cassie MacAvoy
  - Floyd MacAvoy
  - Opal MacAvoy
  - Tully Langille
  - Glenn Semple (and Igor)
  - Rolf Langille
  - Marigold Langille
  - Docker Lonergan
2. Distribute copies of the assignment to each group.

**Character:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Task #1:** Write a 1-2 page response to the following prompt from the first-person perspective of your character:

*What is a bully? Describe how you are like a bully and/or how you are bullied. How can someone stop a bully? How would you like your life to be different?*

**Task #2:** Use the internet or other resources to find at least one hotline or website that your character might use in response to the bullying that he or she experiences, creates, or witnesses.

**Task #3:** Write a one-paragraph summary of advice that you would give to this character.

**Task #5:** Present written responses and poster to class.

**Hot Seat Extension (Drama):** Invite students to play “Hot Seat.” Give students a few minutes to jot down questions that they might ask different characters from the story. Ask for a volunteer to pretend to be a character and have them sit or stand in the chair in the front of the class. This is the “Hot Seat.” Allow students to ask the character questions. Volunteers respond to questions as if they are the character. Repeat with other students taking turns becoming different characters as they answer questions in the Hot Seat.

### **Brick’s Playlist (Character Analysis, Writing, Music)**

**Materials:** Music catalogue such as iTunes, paper and pencils; audio sample of Metallica and AC/DC

**Preparation:** Prepare 30-60 second samples of Metallica and AC/DC (available on iTunes or YouTube)

**Directions:**

1. Reread page three of *HOME TRUTHS* to students.
2. Listen to music samples. Have students discuss the music. “*What does it sound like? What type of music is it? How you feel when you listen to it?*” Explain to students that these bands are considered to be “Heavy Metal” or sometimes just called “Metal.” There are many subgenres of Heavy Metal, but the style typically showcases loud, amplified, distorted sounds, long electric guitar solos, and includes lyrics that may be intense and aggressive. Ask, “*Why does this music appeal to Brick?*”
3. Say, “*We know that Brick listens to CDs on his portable stereo. Imagine that you are giving Brick an MP3 player with a playlist of fifteen songs. Be sure to include the song title and artist. Write down the playlist and write him a letter explaining why you have selected each song. The playlist can include a variety of types of music that you would want to give him.*”
4. Invite students to share one or two of their song choices and explain why they selected it for Brick.

### **Cassie’s Library List (Character Analysis, Writing)**

(This activity can be done alone or as an extension of **Brick’s Playlist**, above.)

**Materials:** Library with picture books or catalogue with picture books and descriptions, paper and pencils

**Preparation:** None

**Directions:**

1. Read the Author’s Note on page 279. Tell students that *THAT STRIPY CAT* is a book about a cat that is waiting to be adopted at an animal shelter. The cat is considered to be a wild and loud troublemaker who is determined to stick with the caretaker, Mrs. Cosy. Ask, “*Why would this story appeal to Cassie?*”
2. Brainstorm the themes and topics that Cassie might like to see in picture books. Record ideas on chart. Themes and topics might include: *safety, hope, humor, animals, sibling relationships, escape, hiding.*
3. Visit library or provide access to book catalogue or online bookstores that include descriptions of picture books. Say, “*Imagine that you are going to babysit Cassie for the afternoon and want to bring a stack of books to read with her.*” Have students create a list of five books that they would checkout for Cassie. Tell them to include the title, author and illustrator, and why they selected that book.

4. Invite students to share one of their book choices and explain why it would be something that they would like to read with Cassie.
5. Discuss similarities and differences between books selected by class. Ask, “*What do the books have in common? Are there any picture book subjects that you would want to avoid reading about with Cassie?*”