

This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children's author. Visit her Web site at [www.tracievaughnzimmer.com](http://www.tracievaughnzimmer.com) to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.

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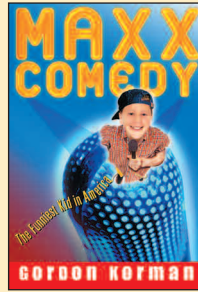
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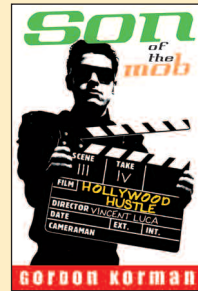
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**HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**

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**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**HYPERION BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Capricorn (Cap) Anderson has never watched television. He's never tasted a pizza. Never even heard of a wedge. Since he was little, his only experience has been living on a farm commune and being homeschooled by his hippie grandmother, Rain.

But when Rain falls out of a tree while picking plums one day and has to stay in the hospital, Cap is forced to move in with a guidance counselor and her cranky teen daughter and attend the local middle school. While Cap knows a lot about tie-dyeing and Zen Buddhism, no education could prepare him for the politics of public school.

Right from the beginning Cap's weirdness makes him a moving target at Claverage Middle School (dubbed C Average by the students). He has long, ungroomed hair; wears hemp clothes; and practices tai chi out on the lawn. Once Zach Powers, big man on campus, spots Cap, he can't wait to introduce him to an age-old tradition at C Average: the biggest nerd is nominated for class president . . . and wins. Will Cap turn out to be the greatest president in the history of C Average? Or the biggest punch line?

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide includes discussion questions intended to provoke thought and insight into the themes of the book which include school life, bullying, friendship, and acceptance.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 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 Where does Cap land while his grandmother, Rain, recovers? 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." (page 32) 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." (page 48) Do you agree with this statement? What about his other philosophical statements?
- 7 What is the turning-point event for Cap that changes how people perceive him 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." (page 77) 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." (page 156) How does this decision blow up in his face? Can adults sometimes be complicit in the bullying that happens in schools? Do you think Mr. Kasigi deserved what he got? Why?
- 11** What happens at the pep-rally assembly? 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?



## PROJECTS

### LANGUAGE ARTS

Write ten rules of survival for middle school. What should every student know before entering the doors of your school? After you've written the rules, write a brief journal about your experience coming to understand the rules.

### ART

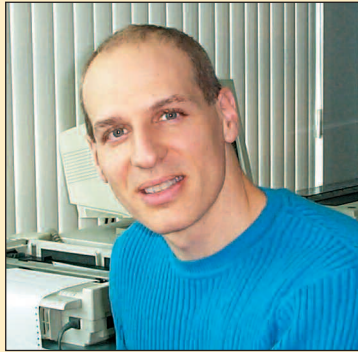
Tie-dye, of course. Experiment with this fun art form by trying out a variety of techniques. Wear your art proudly!

### MUSIC

Explore the music of the '60s and '70s. What artists were your parent's (or grandparent's!) favorites? Which songs have lasted through the decades to become classics or anthems of the period? Explore Rain's playlist of songs of the period below.

#### Rain's Playlist

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



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**GORDON KORMAN** is the author of more than sixty books for kids and young adults, including *Born to Rock*; *Son of the Mob*; *Hollywood Hustle*; *No More Dead Dogs*; *Jake, Reinvented*; *The 6th Grade Nickname Game*; and *Maxx Comedy: The Funniest Kid in America*.

His writing career began at the age of twelve when his seventh grade English assignment became his first published novel. Now, more than thirty years later, he is a full-time writer and speaker, with over twelve million copies of his novels in print. His books have been translated into French, Swedish, Danish, Spanish, Norwegian, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Greek, and Thai. Each year he travels extensively, visiting schools and libraries, bringing his trademark humor and adventure styles to readers everywhere. A native of Ontario, Canada, he lives with this family on Long Island, New York.

You can visit his Web site at [www.gordonkorman.com](http://www.gordonkorman.com).



## AUTHOR INTERVIEW

### 1 You visit many schools during the year. How do you find time to write?

It's true that traveling and speaking takes up a lot of time, but I think it would be even harder to write if I didn't do it. Meeting my readers is a great way to keep in touch with my audience, to hear what gets the big laugh, what gets the introspective chuckle, and what gets: "You think *that's* funny? That makes *one* of us." Remember, when I wrote my first book, I was very close to the age of my readers. That's not true anymore, so school visits are my way to stay connected.

### 2 How do you know you've got an idea worth turning into a book? Are you ever wrong?

You sort of develop an instinct when you've been writing for a while. Sometimes the idea comes in stages. *Schooled* started as a book about a homeschooled kid, and the sixties/hippie angle only occurred to me later. As for being wrong, that happens all the time. Luckily, I have a fantastic editor who stops me before I waste too much time on a bad idea. And, of course, the kids at my school visits are the ultimate sounding board.

### 3 What's your favorite part of the writing process? What can your fans look forward to next?

I'm a big-time planner, so my favorite part of the process is when all the plotting starts to come together. Generally, that happens about two-thirds of the way through the book, when the developing story begins to hook up with the ending, which has been growing backward in my mind. As for the future, my next novel is *Swindle*, about a group of kids who plan an elaborate robbery to steal back a valuable baseball card an unscrupulous collector has taken from them. After that comes *Halfway There*, about three teenagers in a halfway house in New York City, who suddenly find themselves on their own.