

# Ollie's Odyssey

By William Joyce

## Reading Group Guide

A Reading Group Guide to

### ***Ollie's Odyssey***

By William Joyce

#### **About the Book**

From the creator of *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* and the *Guardians of Childhood* comes a grand adventure of valor, friendship, and a look into the mysterious world of favorite toys.

In the secret realm of toys, there are many mysteries. There is the Code of the Toys, which is as ancient as childhood. There's also the magic of becoming a child's favorite, the highest honor in the Toy World.

Made by hand by Billy's mother, Ollie is a special toy, "a toy who will matter." He becomes Billy's best friend, confidant, pal, and yes, Billy's "favorite."

But there are villains in the Toy World, and Zozo, the clown king, is the most feared. He and his toy henchman, the Creeps, have sworn to steal and imprison favorite toys until they forget their children and become forever lost.

When Ollie is toy-napped, Billy must rescue his beloved favorite from Zozo's subterranean lair in the old Carnival Place, past the park, through the woods, and into the night.

Never has a journey of ten blocks been more epic.

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What defines an odyssey?
2. What does it mean to be afraid? After Billy was born, Billy's parents became afraid. What caused Billy's mother and father to be afraid? How do grown-ups cope with their emotions?
3. As Billy's mother made a toy for Billy, what special materials did she use? Was this toy a miraculous toy? How did this toy get its name?
4. As Billy's mother stitched the last stitch in Ollie, her mind was filled with a thousand memories of Nina. Have you ever seen, smelled or heard something that brought back strong memories? Share this experience.
5. Compare Ollie's life beginnings to Billy's. How did this change as Billy started going through phases?
6. Every night Billy's mother instructed Ollie to keep Billy safe. What did she mean by that?
7. What was a Bonk-a-Zozo? What was the purpose of Bonk-a-Zozo? Describe the inventor of Zozo. How did he treat Zozo? How did he treat the children who came to his booth? How did Zozo feel when a child missed bonking him?
8. Did you have a favorite toy at one time? What made this toy special to you? Was there any special way that you carried this toy with you? What kinds of adventures did you have?
9. One day the inventor brought a new toy to Bonk-a-Zozo. What was the toy? How was she different from the other toys? As time passes, what was Zozo's feelings toward this toy? What reason did Zozo have for not making friends with the other toys? With whom did Zozo make a connection?
10. Zozo was unable to forget his memory of a little girl walking away with the toy dancer, and saying, "You will be my favorite." How did this memory affect Zozo?
11. When hard times descended upon Bonk-a-Zozo, and the toys became distraught, who said, "All will be well, Zozo will find a way"? What effect did this have on Zozo? What effect did it have on the toys? As time passed and nothing happened, how did Zozo feel? What happened inside Zozo that rarely happens to toys?
12. Time passes and a new owner takes over the Bonk-a-Zozo. Discuss the differences between the original owner and the new owner. Who would you prefer to run Bonk-a-Zozo? Why did the clientele for the Bonk-a-Zozo change? How did Zozo react to this change?
13. One little girl was able to knock Zozo down. When she hit Zozo, the hard ball hit Zozo directly over his heart. What emotional change happened to Zozo? What was broken?
14. Discuss the rules your parents insist you obey. Are they similar to the rules Billy and Ollie must obey? What are the consequences for disobeying?
15. Discuss the many reasons for the decline and fall of Zozo. How did he go from being a favorite game at the carnival to the toy seeking revenge on favorite toys?
16. As Billy and Ollie discussed not taking Ollie to a wedding, Billy mentioned that grown-ups do not have toys. Discuss if this is a true statement. Where do parents' toys go? Billy's mother points to her chest when asked where her favorite toy is. What does this mean?

17. How did Billy manage to take Ollie to the wedding? How much planning was involved? How did this method of transportation help the Creeps capture Ollie?
18. Who are the Creeps? What were their names? Who was the boss of the Creeps? Each Creep had a specific task: What were the tasks? Discuss the necessity for the Creeps to work together, plan together, and cooperate together to capture children's favorite toys? What did they do with the favorite toys?
19. When Zozo got quiet it meant that he was remembering. The Creeps didn't like these quiet moods. What was Zozo like when he had the "quiets"? What would happen after one of Zozo's quiet moods? What memory was Zozo fixated on?
20. Discuss Zozo's comment: "IT IS NOT MY FAVORITE." What was Zozo's favorite? Why was Zozo so angry? What did Zozo mean when he called Ollie *just* a plush?
21. Was it a wise idea for Billy to head out in the dead of night to look for Ollie? How would your family react if you snuck out at night?
22. Billy prepared for his adventure by filling his backpack with what he thought he would need. Discuss the items Billy took with him and why he felt they were necessary. Can you think of anything else he needed? Of all the things he took, what do you think was the most important item and why?
23. What was Zozo's *Room of Darkness*? What does this room tell you about Zozo's personality? What special item does Zozo have in this room?
24. Discuss the memories of Zozo, the imprisoned toys, Billy and his parents, and Ollie. Why are these memories so important? Are all memories happy ones? How did remembering help Ollie escape from Zozo? How do memories contribute to one of the themes of the novel?
25. Ollie wondered if kids forget their toys, and this made him worry. Ollie wondered about the difference between pretend and real life. What are the differences between the two? Does pretending help one become more prepared for real life?
26. Describe in your own words the characteristics of Can Man. What did his actions tell you about his character? How did Can Man make Ollie feel?
27. How did Ollie react after he finally met up with Billy, and Billy just tossed him as far as he could? Who helped Ollie in his time of despair? What brings all the junkyard friends to Ollie's assistance?
28. While the Creeps dragged Billy in a burlap bag toward Zozo's workroom, what was Billy able to see and do?
29. Was Billy correct in thinking that leaving a trail of toys behind was safer than the crumbs that Hansel and Gretel used to help them find their way home?
30. Was Billy insightful when he thought that grown-ups sometimes pretend? He felt that when parents pretend, they are actually lying. Do you agree with him?
31. What did Super Creep tell Zozo was the reason for kidnapping Billy? How did he think Billy was going to be able to help Zozo?
32. As Ollie headed out to rescue Billy, he decided that being a real-life hero was stronger than a pretend hero. What did Ollie mean by that thought? He also felt that after this experience was over he would never be the same. How do you think Ollie will have changed? Do you think that Billy changed?
33. Ollie and his friends sang a song for the horses on the merry-go-round. This gave the horses more heart and strength than they thought they had. Ollie thought remembering was a powerful thing. What did he mean by this? What song did they sing to the horses?
34. Discuss the change in dynamics between Billy being the protector of Ollie to Ollie being the protector of Billy. Had Billy always been Ollie's protector?
35. Throughout the story, fireflies played an important role. What was the significance of the fireflies?
36. What did Zozo need to remember so he could dissolve his hate? When he was able to do that, what did he do for the ones in danger due to the destruction he caused?
37. When the fireflies made images of both Nina and Zozo, all the toys whispered Zozo's name. Billy did not. Discuss why Billy didn't, but Ollie did with his hand over his heart.
38. As this adventure came to an end, Ollie wondered about the different types of good-byes there are. Discuss why some goodbyes are harder to say than others.
39. Consider how Ollie would try to make Billy laugh so that he wouldn't feel scared or sad. On this occasion, saying goodbye to their new friends was a different kind of sadness and he didn't feel it would be appropriate to make a joke. How had this adventure changed both Billy and Ollie?
40. How did Billy and Ollie feel as they saw the police cars with flashing lights outside their home? How would you react if you came home to police cars outside your home? Was Billy in trouble for having an adventure? Discuss the different ways Billy could explain his leaving the house at night.
41. Is the innocence of childhood gone from Billy's life? Will his life be forever changed? If so, in what ways would his life be changed? Will the love between Billy and Ollie change?
42. What was the Code of the Toys? Did Ollie stick to the code or did he break it?
43. As people age, they tend to tell stories of their past. What is the purpose of these stories, especially if they've been told over and over again?

### **Extension Activities**

1. If you could own a game at a carnival, what would it be? Would it be easy to win a prize or a challenge for the most skillful player? Write a description of your game with instructions on how to play. Include an illustration to demonstrate the mechanics of the game.
2. Write a story concerning an adventure you had with your favorite toy. If you can't remember one, make one up!
3. If you could be a Creep, which kind would you like to be? Write a poem about your job as a Creep. Would you prefer to be a member of the Junkyard Gang? If so write a poem about the job of a Junkyard Gang member.

4. Have the students bring in pictures from their parents' youth. Are there toys in these pictures? If so, what type of toys did they have? Looking at their parents' pictures, do the students see resemblances between parents and student?

5. Write an interview between Billy and his parents or write an interview between Billy and the police. How will Billy explain to his parents the fight with the toys? Does he tell the truth, or lie so they believe him, or make a compromise and tell half-truths so he is believed?

6. Using found materials, make a Creep, a Tinny, or a member of the Junkyard Gang. Compare these toys with the rest of the class. How are they alike or different?

7. Make a shadow box of one of the scenes from the book, such as the playground, the carnival, the junkyard, or Tunnel of Love. Then, write a description of the scene you chose on a notecard, displaying it next to the shadowbox.

*Guide prepared by Lynn Dobson, librarian at East Brookfield Elementary School, East Brookfield, MA.*

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