

Swim Team



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary

SYNOPSIS

Bree can't wait for her first day at her new middle school, Enith Brigitha, home to the Mighty Manatees—until she's stuck with the only elective that fits her schedule, the dreaded Swim 101. The thought of swimming makes Bree more than a little queasy, yet she's forced to dive headfirst into one of her greatest fears. Lucky for her, Etta, an elderly occupant of her apartment building and former swim team captain, is willing to help.

With Etta's training and a lot of hard work, Bree suddenly finds her swim-crazed community counting on her to turn the school's failing team around. But that's easier said than done, especially when their rival, the prestigious Holyoke Prep, has everything they need to leave the Mighty Manatees in their wake.

Can Bree defy the odds and guide her team to a state championship, or have the Manatees swum their last lap—for good?

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Johnnie Christmas is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling graphic novelist. Writer of the Image Comics sci-fi series *Tartarus* and *Crema*, a haunted romance published by Comixology Originals. His book *Firebug*, received a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly* and earned him a Joe Shuster Outstanding Cartoonist nomination.

He's perhaps best known for co-creating the series *Angel Catbird* with celebrated writer Margaret Atwood and adapting William Gibson's lost screenplay for *Alien 3* into a critically acclaimed graphic novel of the same name. His credits also include co-creating the pre-apocalyptic thriller *Sheltered*.

A graduate of the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY, earning a BFA in Communication Design/Illustration.

Johnnie currently live in Vancouver.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think is happening in the cover artwork?
 - Who do you think the main character might be?
 - What can you guess about the main character from the cover art?

- Where do you think the story might be set? Why do you think this?
 - What do you hypothesise might be some of the events that could occur in this novel?
 - At the very start of the story, Bree's father talks of the Butterfly Effect, where something very small can have large and unintended (or at the least unexpected) consequences, often far removed from the original action. What is an example of the Butterfly Effect in action in Bree's own life? Can you think of an example in your own life? As a class, talk about all the different examples of the Butterfly Effect in action in your own lives. Individually, write a short story in comic strip form with at least eight panels, where a small action on the part of one character, causes a large change in the long run.
 - Look at the menu on p 6. What do you think all the different menu items might be? Have you ever seen or heard of any of them before? What is the common theme amongst them all, and why do you think the diner might have chosen to use this theme? Can you identify all the different puns that Bree's father is talking about?
 - What are Bree's favourite things? Are any of them things that you also like, or are similar to things that you like? Create an illustrated guide to five or more of your favourite things.
 - Bree says that sometimes negative thoughts take over. Can you think of any examples of this type of thought, either from the book, or from your own life? As a class, discuss what it feels like when negative thoughts take over, and what we can do to help ourselves when they start to control our thoughts and feelings.
 - In small groups, discuss the different kinds of positive self-talk that we can use to help ourselves change our inner narrative, and create a poster featuring at least three different examples of using positive self-talk to help us change our thinking. Some examples of these statement pairs could be:
 - When I am feeling nervous, I say to myself 'I can do this, just keep moving forwards'.
 - When I am feeling inadequate, I tell myself 'It doesn't have to be perfect, I just have to try my best'.
 - When I am scared, I should always remember to say 'At least there are no zombies'.
- Be as positive and inventive as you can, you never know when something you have thought of might make a real difference in someone else's life. Illustrate and decorate your posters, and include a paragraph on them explaining what you are doing and why. Place your posters around the school for everyone to benefit from.
- Bree's favourite subject at school is Maths. What is your favourite subject, and why? Write an ad for your favourite subject, trying to convince others that they should give it a go too.
 - When Bree finds herself in Swimming as an elective, instead of telling the teacher she doesn't know how to swim, she runs away from the problem, and doesn't go to class. As a class, discuss whether running away from something you can't do or are scared of, is a good way of solving the problem. In small groups or pairs, think of at least one situation where running away is a very good idea, and one situation where it is a very bad idea.
 - Re-read the scene on pp 42 and 43. Why do you think Tinsley is being so rude and mean to the kids from Enith Brigitha Middle School? Having read the whole book, recount this scene from her point of view, sharing her inner thoughts and feelings, and especially her fears at the time.
 - Clara and Bree's school is named after Enith Brigitha. Who is Enith Brigitha, and why is she famous? In pairs, research Enith Brigitha, and write a short biography for her.
 - Re-read pp 79–84. As a class, discuss the story of Black Swimming that Mrs Etta tells Bree.
 - On p 102 Bree uses positive self-talk to help herself overcome her fear of the water, and to put the skills Mrs Etta has taught her into action. As a class, compare this to her fear of swimming when she was first assigned to Swimming 101, and the way her negative thoughts prevented her from trying. What is different about the situation, that has allowed her to succeed where once she failed? Why do you think positive self-talk can be so powerful? Where in your life do you think you might like to try using positive self-talk to try and change the way you react to a situation?
 - Mrs Etta helps the swim team train, and starts by trying to build their endurance, strength and speed. Do you think that this three-part program would hold true across all sports? Why/why not? What about across non-sporting endeavours? Can you think of an area in your life where you can work at building your endurance, strength, and speed, to help make you more successful at something? Write a three-part program for yourself, and put it in to action. After two weeks, write a report sharing how well you have succeeded, and if it has made any difference to you. You might be trying to run faster or further, to succeed in a team sport, increasing your typing speed, or even just aiming to get your homework completed on time and to your best ability!

- Bree has never raced using a diving block before. Have you ever tried to dive from a diving block? Visit a pool with diving blocks, and practise diving into the pool as if you were about to then swim in a race. When you return to school, write about your experience on the diving blocks, and share what the best part of the experience was, what you found the most difficult or challenging, and what advice you would like to give to someone who has never tried diving in from a diving block before.
- Why do you think Mari left her friends outside the pool, and went in without them? On p 209 she says she turned her back on the team and on doing the right thing. Do you agree that this is what she did? What could or should she have done differently? Why do you think she didn't do the right thing all those years ago?
- In small groups compare the way the Enith Brigitha Middle School's coaches treat their students with the way the Holyoke Prep coach treats her students. Re-read pp 136–139, and 239–241. Which way do you think is the better one? Which way do you think would be the most effective at encouraging athletes to succeed? Why do you think this? Individually write a one or two paragraph opinion piece sharing your thoughts on each of the different coaches, and the ways in which they treat the girls they are coaching.
- Do you like the way the book ended? What do you think is likely to happen next? In small groups talk about the ending of the story, and write a dot-point summary of what you would like to see in the next chapter of Bree's life at Enith Brigitha Middle School.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE