

# Tales of a Seventh-Grade Lizard Boy

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR  
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Threatened with diminishing resources, Booger Lizk't and his family flee their lizard community deep below Earth's crust to survive above among humans. The Lizk't family of Elberon now passes as the Tomkins family of Eagle Valley. "Tommy Tomkins" wears a human face to school but can't seem to fit in no matter how he looks. The basketball team becomes a pipe dream when bullies label him a bug eater, and only Dung Tran, an immigrant from Vietnam and fellow outsider, sees Tommy for who he is inside, which is nothing like the outer-space lizard invaders on TV's hottest series. Can their friendship survive the truth?

## ABOUT THE CREATOR

Jonathan Hill is an award-winning cartoonist who lives in Portland, OR. His comics and illustrations have been featured in publications by Fantagraphics, Lion Forge, tor.com, Powell's City of Books, *The Believer Magazine*, and the Society of Illustrators. Jonathan also teaches comics at the Pacific Northwest College of Art and serves on the board of directors at Literary Arts. *Odessa* was the first book he has written and drawn himself.

## THEMES

- Immigration
- Belonging
- Culture
- Friendship

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:
  - The title
  - The author
  - The illustrator
  - The publisher
  - The blurb.
- Based on the cover and title, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer when you've completed the book. Was your answer correct?

- What are some of the themes in this book? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.
- Discuss the title of the book. Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not? If you were asked to choose an alternative title for the book, what would it be? Remember, a good title should capture the audience's attention and give them some idea of what the book is about.
- Read the 'Author's Note' at the end of the book. How does this change your interpretation of the story? What questions do you have for the creator, now that you have read this note? Which of the Vietnamese dishes he describes would you most like to try?
- In small groups, choose either Tommy or Dung and discuss how they experience the following feelings over the course of the story:
  - Uncertainty
  - Loneliness
  - Being left out
  - Belonging
  - Resilience.
- Have a class discussion about immigration and trying to fit in in unfamiliar places. What does Tommy struggle with while trying to adapt to life on the surface? How are his experiences similar or different to Dung's and Scarlett's?
  - Have a wider class discussion about immigration, including the various reasons that people move to a new country. Sometimes people must flee their home, like Tommy and his family. At other times, people might move for work purposes, like Dung and Scarlett's families. How do you think these experiences differ? What do they have in common? How is this expressed in the book?
- In most graphic novels and comics, there is usually a white space between the panels called the gutter. Consider the difference between large and small panels, square and irregular shapes and full-page illustrations. Copy a page of the book, cut out the frames and arrange them on a piece of paper with a smaller gutter between each frame and then with a larger gutter. What difference does this make to our reading?
- Visual storytelling is the art of using images to convey a narrative. Compare *Tales of a Seventh-Grade Lizard Boy* to another graphic novel. How does the visual storytelling differ in each? What techniques does the illustrator use to convey a particular mood?
- How has the panel arrangement, colour and space helped to create a particular feeling. Look at the panel shapes on pp 28, 66–67, 121–124 and 240. What effect do these have on your reading of the story?
- At the end of the book, Tommy discovers that he's not the only kid in school who's a little bit unusual and who might not entirely fit in. Have you had times when you feel like you don't fit in? If you were also a monster with interesting powers, what kind of monster would you like to be?
- Write a book review of *Tales of a Seventh-Grade Lizard Boy* stating what you liked and disliked about it, who you think would enjoy it the most and whether you think the information provided is credible. Use persuasive language to make the reader understand your opinion.
- See if you can find another graphic novel in your library about moving to a new place or not fitting in. How are they similar? How are they different? Do they use similar techniques to tell you their story? Why do you think that is?