

# The Underdogs #3: Unhappy Campers

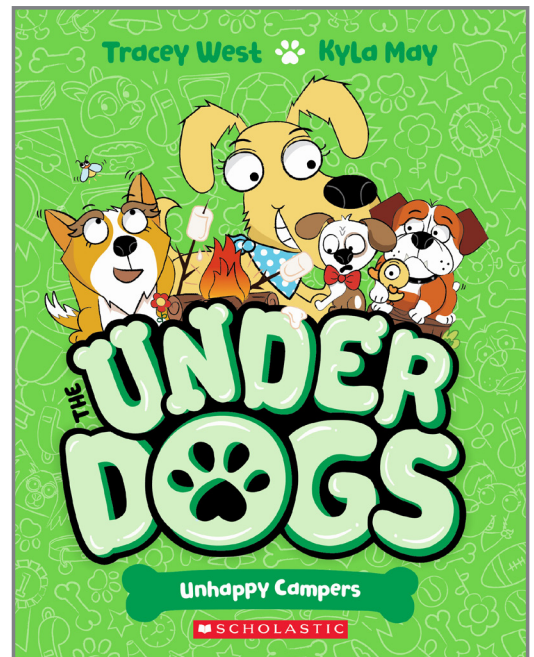
AUTHOR  
**TRACEY WEST**

ILLUSTRATOR  
**KYLA MAY**

SCIS: 5415570

ISBN: 9781761203428

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



## SYNOPSIS

The Underdogs and their classmates are taking a break from competing in the K-9 exams to go on a camping trip! The fourth years at Barksdale Academy are heading to Camp Ruffing It for a few days of hiking, swimming and roasting marshmallows by an open fire.

Or, that was the plan. But Harley keeps getting distracted by all the sounds and smells in the forest. Every time she runs after a chipmunk or a shiny fish, she accidentally messes things up for her friends. Can Harley stay focused long enough to save the rest of the camping trip? Or is it back to civilisation for the Underdogs?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tracey West has written more than two hundred books for children and young adults, including the series: *Pixie Tricks*, *Hiro's Quest* and *Dragon Masters*. She has appeared on the New York Times bestseller list as author of the *Pokémon* chapter book adaptations. Tracey currently lives with her family in New York State's Hudson Valley.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Kyla May is the creative director of a team of illustrators, writers, designers and producers under the banner Kyla May Productions. Kyla May Productions writes, develops and illustrates children's books including the original series *Kyla May Miss Behaves* which is currently being developed into a TV series. Kyla May has another original series due for release later this year and many more concepts in development. Kyla May has illustrated several other children's books including *Star Girl* and *The Dog Rules*.

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
  - Has anyone read either of the first two books in the series?
  - What is an 'underdog' and what does this hint about the characters in the story?
  - What can we learn about the characters from the cover illustrations?
  - What usually happens to 'underdogs' in stories, and why?
  - What is a 'happy camper'?
  - What do you think 'unhappy camper' might mean?

- Looking carefully at the lineart on the cover, what can you infer from it about what is likely to happen in the story?
- On the way to camp, the Underdogs are singing a variant of a well known children’s song. In pairs or small groups write a new verse of a travel song of your own. As a class, compile all the new and original verses into a lengthier song. The next time you go on an excursion as a class, sing your song to help pass the time!
- Harley is extremely good at noticing interesting (and even not-so-interesting) things wherever she goes. Go for a walk around your school grounds or local area, and see how many interesting and ordinary things you can spot. Make a list of every different thing you can see, and in pairs or small groups try to hit the 100 mark. When you return to class, create an artwork featuring as many of the items you spotted as you can, but arranged in new and interesting ways. Once completed, create a class wall display of everyone’s artwork, captioned ‘Making the Ordinary Interesting’.
- What is the joke in the name of the camp? In small groups brainstorm and try to think of funny names for school camps for other animals, such as cats, birds or wombats.
- Everyone has packed a small bag to take to camp—except for Peanut. If you were going on a camp, and could pack an entire huge suitcase full of all sorts of things, what useful but unnecessary items would you like to include? Draw a picture of a suitcase surrounded by possible items to take, and rank each item from most useful and necessary to least useful or necessary. Before finishing, compare your list to everyone else’s and see if there is anything really important that you have forgotten like shoes or your toothbrush.
- Harley and the Underdogs see chipmunks, squirrels and racoons when they go to camp. Do you think it would be likely for you to see these animals at a school camp? Why/why not? What animals would you be likely to see in the bush at a school camp not too far from your home? As a class discuss all the different animals native to your local area, and how common it is to see each of them.
  - Individually, or in pairs, create an illustrated list of the different creatures you might see, and note next to each illustration how likely it would be that you would spot one of these.
- Go on a hike through some bushland near your school or local area. While walking keep a close eye out for animals, insects, reptiles and birds. What else can you see of interest on your bushwalk? Remember to take plenty of water, wear a hat and sunblock, and tell someone where you are going and when you are due to return.
- Nurse Barkwell helps Harley by sharing a technique for gaining a bit of self-control when Harley is tempted to give in to impulsive behaviour. Harley is a dog, so a lot of her impulses have to do with chasing things. What are some sorts of impulsive behaviours that children who are not dogs can sometimes struggle with? How well do you think Nurse Barkwell’s technique of closing your eyes and counting to three would work for helping you and your friends control any sudden impulsive behaviour? What are some of the other techniques Harley tries at camp, and how well do they work for her? Everyone struggles with controlling impulsive behaviour some of the time—can you think of any other techniques that might help someone (who is not a dog) who might be prone to acting before they think?
- How well does having a Buddyguard help Harley? Why do you think Peanut’s technique of distracting her succeeds when the other techniques she has tried have failed? How does this make her feel about life, the world and herself?
- Harley and the others discover that her distractibility and love of critters can be a positive thing, as well as something that means she struggles to control her behaviour. What is something that you or someone you know struggles with, that can also be an asset given the right circumstances?
- Write a moral to the story. Think about what Harley and her friends learnt from their experiences at camp, and which lesson/s would be most useful for everyone to learn.