



## **Hit Squad**

James Heneghan

Reading level: 3.8

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AR Quiz # 73795

### **Book Summary**

After Birgit is brutally attacked in the art closet, she decides to clean up her school by forming a hit squad. She calls together three classmates, and together they conspire to seek revenge on the students who bully others. The group's first targets are the three girls who attacked Birgit. The group kidnaps them, cuts off their hair, paints their heads yellow and leaves them tied to trees in the park. The group considers their hit a success. However, the next hit takes a bad turn and leads to the death of an innocent young man.

### **Prereading Idea**

Ask students to define the following words: *vengeance*, *revenge*, *retaliation* and *reprisal*. Write the definitions on the board and discuss the meaning of each word. Ask students to consider the usual result of revenge and retaliation. Who is hurt more by the act of revenge? Ask students to name sayings they have heard that relate to these words. For example, "Revenge is sweet," "What goes around, comes around," "Watch your back," "Turn the other cheek," and any others that come to mind. Ask students to share an experience they have had and relate the experiences back to the sayings.

**Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas**

- Due to the increase in school shootings, bullying has become a major concern in schools across the country. In groups of three, ask students to research bullying at their school, the programs in place to increase student awareness and the preventive measures designed to stop it. Ask students to organize a campaign in their school to help stop bullying. Each group should make up a slogan and make a poster to place in the hallways.
- Mickey faces internal conflict throughout this novel. In pairs, have one student be his “good” conscience and one student be his “bad” conscience. Ask them to imagine and write the self-talk of Mickey’s two consciences during each of his conflicts: his participation in the Hit Squad, his feelings for Candy and Birgit, his role in Heck’s death, and his decision to change schools. Ask students to perform the “conversations” they wrote.

**Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel*****Theme***

Man’s inhumanity to man is one of the universal themes of literature. Ask students to write a short paper justifying why this should or should not be considered the dominant theme of *Hit Squad*, using examples from the book to support their answer. Have the students participate in a panel discussion to discuss this and any other suggested themes.

***Conflict***

The cover illustrates the age-old battle between good and evil, which is the major conflict in *Hit Squad*. Much of this conflict occurs when major characters face choices that put them squarely on one side or the other. In groups of three, have students create a good/evil chart for one of the major characters and chart their actions along the horizontal axis, indicating where the actions fall on the good/evil scale. Have groups exchange charts and discuss and record the resolutions of the various conflicts.

***Setting***

The setting for *Hit Squad* is an upscale high school with a diverse socio-economic student body. In what other type of setting could this story have taken place—an office, a church, a retail store? In groups, ask students to choose an alternate setting and outline what conflicts might take place, how the characters would act and react to the conflict, and how the problems would be resolved. Have each group use their outline to prepare a “coming attractions” movie poster for the scenario described. Display posters and have the class choose the best scenario based on the believability of the alternate setting and details.

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. Can doing evil for a good cause ever be justified? Use examples from the book and from real life to validate your opinion.
2. The tension between the “have” and the “have-nots” motivated most of the attacks at Grandview High School. How could this problem have been addressed by the administration of the school? Why was the principal so ineffective in dealing with the situation?
3. What do you think truly motivated Birgit to start the Hit Squad? Was it personal revenge or cleaning up the school? Support your answer with examples from the book.
4. Do you think Peter, Mickey and Whisper would have helped Bridget if she had not been so popular and pretty? Why or why not?
5. Do you think the authorities should have pressed charges against the members of the Hit Squad for Heck's death? If so, with what do you think they should have been charged? How would you have defended them?
6. After the accident that killed Heck, Candy was angry at Mickey. Was her anger justified? Is there any evidence to show she forgave him? Did Mickey forgive himself for the role he played in Heck's death?

**Writer's Craft*****Connotation***

Connotation refers to the attitudes and feelings associated with a word, and they can either be positive or negative. When the group was trying to determine a name for their secret group, Birgit suggested “Grandview Cleanup Committee” and Whisper suggested “Hit Squad.” Ask students to make a list of both the negative and positive connotations surrounding both names.

**Author Biography**

**James Heneghan's** past careers as a high-school teacher, a fingerprint specialist with the Vancouver Police Department, and a policeman in Liverpool has given him the background and experience to write novels about teenagers struggling to overcome personal difficulties. As a full-time writer, he takes the time to enjoy his interests in reading, jogging, camping, hiking and traveling. James has four children and two grandchildren and lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.