

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR **BUSTED**

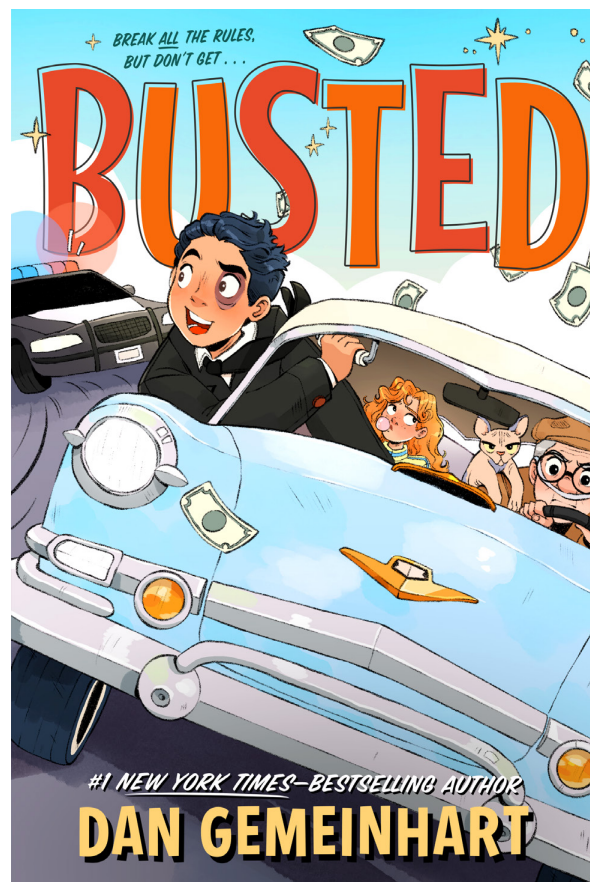
ABOUT THE BOOK

“A humdinger doozy of a read filled with humor, heart, and incredible characters you won’t soon forget!” —CHRIS GRABENSTEIN,
#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Lemoncello* series

Oscar is a bit of an oddball. He’s an ace at playing bridge, loves Frank Sinatra, and attends a whole lot of funerals. He’s also the youngest resident of Sunny Days retirement home by more than half a century—and he wouldn’t have it any other way. So when his grandpa is suddenly served an eviction notice that threatens their place at Sunny Days, he needs to find some cash. Fast.

Enter Jimmy Deluca, a shady elderly man with a reputation for being bad news, who makes Oscar an offer he can’t refuse. He’s got the drop on riches hidden away on the “outside” and he’ll share the loot with Oscar on one condition: that Oscar busts him out of Sunny Days.

In this humdinger of an adventure, the ultimate odd couple, along with an uninvited stowaway, go from high-stakes escape to rollicking escapade as they search for the secret stash—and forge an unlikely friendship along the way. Will Oscar succeed in saving the only home he’s ever known? Or will he have to *fuggedaboutit* and return a failure?



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

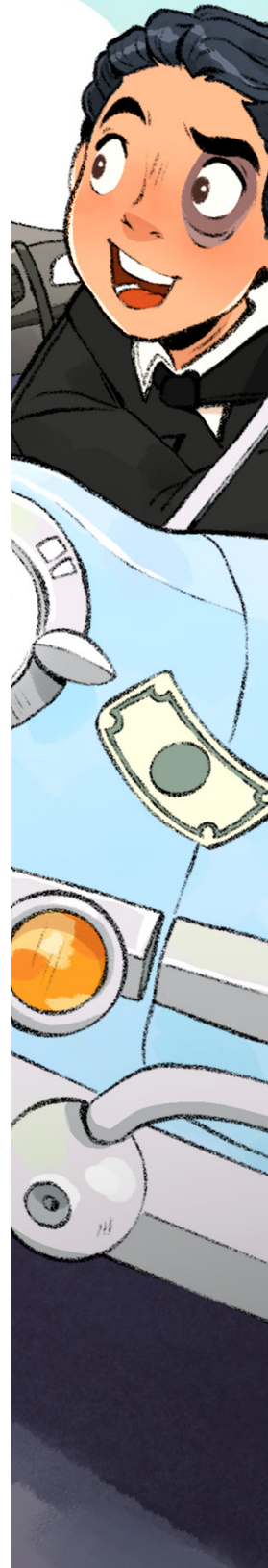
DAN GEMEINHART is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the middle-grade novels *The Midnight Children*, *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*, *The Honest Truth*, *Some Kind of Courage*, *Scar Island*, and *Good Dog*, as well as the picture books *Once Upon a Friend* and *The Gingerbread Monster*. A former elementary teacher and librarian, and a lifelong reader, he lives with his wife and three daughters in a small town in Washington state.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What would you do to save your home if it looked like you were going to lose it? What would you risk?
2. Has anyone you've known surprised you by changing? How have you changed so far in your life in terms of trying new things or seeing yourself in new ways?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Oscar Aberdeen and his living situation when the book opens. What are some of his strengths? What makes him different from many other twelve-year-olds? In what ways does he seem older than he is? What role does Pops play in his life?
2. Discuss the novel's first line: "I'm twelve years old, and this is the forty-ninth funeral I've been to." What came to your mind when you read that? What are some of Oscar's experiences with death?
3. How much does the setting matter to the story? Why is the Sunny Days Retirement Community so important to Oscar? How has it shaped his life? What does he like about living there? What are some things he has learned from the residents? Why is he so upset to think that he and Pops might have to leave?
4. Why is Natasha at Sunny Days? What is her father doing there? What is Oscar's first impression of Natasha? What does he learn about her background in the course of their adventures? What does he come to like about her? Why do you think they become friends?
5. Who is Jimmy Deluca? Why does he need Oscar's help? Explain what Oscar learns about Jimmy's background. What happened to Jimmy's daughter? How do Jimmy's feelings about his daughter change Oscar's view of him? How is her tree house important to the story?
6. Who is Mr. Buttercup? How does he reveal a softer side of Jimmy and of Natasha? Give specific examples. What else shows that Natasha isn't as uncaring as she first appears?
7. Why does Oscar help Jimmy break out of Sunny Days? How is Oscar's knowledge of the retirement community important in getting Jimmy out of the building? Why does Natasha join them? Discuss Jimmy's promises to Oscar and why Oscar doesn't trust him for most of the novel.
8. Why does Jimmy want to see Thumbs at the prison? What has happened to them in the past? Why does Jimmy feel bad about it? Why do Oscar and Natasha urge Jimmy to express his feelings to Thumbs?
9. What does Oscar initially say happened to his parents? When do you learn the truth? Oscar says, "I was terrified of turning out like my dad." (p. 294) How has that fear affected Oscar's character and life choices? What did Oscar's father say to Jimmy that Jimmy passes on to Oscar? At the end of the story, why is Oscar planning to visit his father again?
10. Discuss why Jimmy tells Oscar, "Being good or being bad ain't just something ya *are*, like being tall, or ugly. Being good is something ya *quacking choose*." (p. 349) What choices does Jimmy regret making in his life?
11. Natasha says of herself, Jimmy, and Oscar, "We are all kinda damaged goods. A bunch of misfits." Oscar replies, "No . . . We're survivors. Each one of us." (p. 216) How is each of them a survivor? Do you agree? How is that different from "damaged goods" or "misfits"?
12. Talk about the final scene at the pier and how Oscar's experiences in the retirement community make him a good companion as Jimmy dies. Discuss Oscar's eulogy for Jimmy and what he highlights about him.

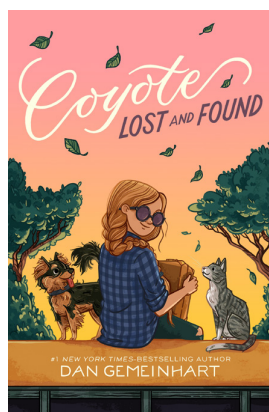


13. What makes the story funny? How do differences between Oscar and Natasha add to the humor? How about the differences between Oscar and Jimmy? Analyze the humor around the poker game, including Oscar's description of his day so far and his answer, "Middle school," to the question about why he isn't a softie. (p. 242) Find other lines or scenes in the novel that you think are funny and discuss why.
14. Nicknames like Jimmy the Wrench, Kid Ravioli, and Natasha No Nuts make the story more colorful and amusing. How did those three get their nicknames? Who else in the story has nicknames? What purpose do nicknames serve? In what ways does his nickname make Oscar act differently? Discuss his thoughts when he's playing poker and contrasts his usual self with Kid Ravioli, saying, "Kid Ravioli was a hustler." (p. 245)
15. What is the time frame of the novel? Discuss why the author labels the chapter headings with the day, time, and phrases like "Three Hours to Busted." What are some other ways the author builds suspense? When does Oscar become less concerned about getting busted, and why?

READING ACTIVITIES

1. Oscar has gleaned Pearls of Wisdom from people in his life. As a class, make a list of those observations and pieces of advice. Then choose one that you find interesting and write an essay about it, exploring what it means in general and in the novel, how it could apply to your life, and whether you consider it a Pearl of Wisdom.
2. Jimmy has never heard of a bucket list, which Natasha explains as, "It's just stuff you want to do before you, you know, *kick the bucket*." (p. 85) What's on Jimmy's list? Create your own bucket list of five to ten things you want to do in your lifetime, with a sentence about why each one is important to you. Meet in small groups and talk about your lists.
3. The author keeps readers hooked with chapter endings like Jimmy saying, "We're gonna rob the joint," (p. 116) and Oscar at the poker table saying, "We'll take the deal . . . But I'm the one playing." (p. 239) Find other examples and discuss what effect they have on readers and how they create curiosity and suspense.
4. Working in small groups, choose a lively scene with several characters and lots of dialogue, and turn the scene into a reader's theater script. Write lines for a narrator who gives background and setting. The rest of the script should be dialogue spoken by the characters. Assign roles, rehearse, and read the scene aloud to classmates as actors would, with or without costumes and props. (Find reader's theatre tips from Aaron Shepard: www.aaronsherp.com/rt/Tips1.html.)

ALSO BY DAN GEMEINHART



This guide was written by Kathleen Odean, a longtime school librarian and the chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee.