

I. Introduction

As the students might know the meaning of “hit” as well as “squad” (“Squad car”), they can make an intelligent guess on what the title could mean and what kind of “hit squad” the text might be dealing with.

- police chasing gangsters
- gang fights
- professional killers who do hit jobs on demand
- ...

II. Chapter 1-3

Read out the first three chapters in class. Some bits of information on Vancouver, Canada, help to set time and place.

In these chapters the reader gets to know the bullies. Students should understand the difference between the two high schools: Grandview High School is in an affluent residential area whereas Creekside Junior High is in a poorer district of Vancouver.

All three chapters are well-suited to be acted out or to be represented in “freeze frames”. Students can easily empathize with the victims, understand Michael’s infatuation with Birgit, and his subsequent readiness to join the group.

Summaries

Chapter 1

Ninth-graders Mona, Jessie and Shelley, all three of them from Creekside lure their victim, beautiful and well-off Birgit Neilson, who treats them disparagingly and is therefore called “Miss Superior”, into the stockroom during art class. They put paper towels into her mouth and drool chewed chocolate into her face.

Chapter 2

Michael Cord, or Mickey, witnesses how another kid is being bullied. Two bullies take away his lunch and kick him. Mickey, quick-wittedly, opens his locker door and pushes it hard into one of the bullies’ face. However, his lunch is gone too. Neither on-duty teachers nor classmates seem to have taken notice of their ordeal. The next day Michael receives a letter from Birgit asking him to come to the meeting of a “Special Secret Society”.

Michael had transferred from Creekside Junior High to Grandview to get a better education. At Creekside, he himself had been a member of a comparatively harmless gang, “The “Cougars”, but now the gang has broken up and Michael wants to get a fresh start at Grandview High. He wonders why a rich Grandview girl would invite a poor kid from Creekside to join her “Secret Society”.

Chapter 3

When a black eighth-grader, and also a former member of “The Cougars”, Joey Washington, is beaten up so badly in the school washroom that he has to be taken to the hospital with broken bones, Michael decides to go to Birgit’s meeting. Now he remembers having seen her before when, as a 12-year-old, she stood up to his former gang, which had been trying to break into a store. He immediately falls for her.

Chapter 4

Birgit has invited her boyfriend Peter and Whisper, both tough members of the school football team, and Michael because she had heard about his facing up to one of the bullies. Birgit tells them that the school has to be turned into a good place again and that good people have to win over bad people.

Chapter 5

Birgit convinces the three boys that the bullies must be punished and that they need to build a “clean-up committee”.

Chapter 6

Michael likes Birgit but he knows that she is not for him. He is just a poor boy living in a foster family with five other foster kids. His foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs, are nice people and have even taken in Heck (or Hulk) again, when he returned from prison. There he had served some time for being in "The Cougars" gang. He is already grown-up, very strong, but a bit on the dumb side.

Chapter 7

When the "clean-up committee" meets again, the kids decide to call it "Hit Squad" and to start their punishments with the three girls that had bullied Birgit.

Chapter 8

When Mona, Shelley and Jessie return home from a party, they are kidnapped and tied to a tree. The four kidnapers cut off their hair and paint it yellow. The three bullies seem to recognize their kidnapers, but come to the conclusion that they will not be able to prove anything.

Chapter 9

Birgit has enjoyed the punishment, whereas Michael is not so sure. Nevertheless, when they plan their next attack on the two bullies who had attacked Joey, Michael volunteers to provide some "muscle" because now they will have to face two tough tenth-graders.

Chapter 10

Candy, one of his foster siblings, is mad at Michael, because he asked Heck, to help them. She makes him tell her something about his plans. She is convinced that these plans are just as bad as bullying.

Chapter 11

Gordie Tweed and Gino Bibby, who had attacked and seriously hurt Joey Washington, are giving a kid who is working in the cafeteria and not on the bright side a hard time. Mickey, who had qualms of conscience about their attack on the three girls, gets angry and is now reinsured that taking revenge will be the right thing to do.

Chapter 12

The "Hit Squad" steals a van and, armed with baseball bats and masks, follows the two bullies to the waterfront.

Chapter 13

Gordie and Gino leave the car and run into the old underground city of Vancouver, followed by Birgit and her gang. They ignore a barrier and a danger sign, the two bullies try to avoid the baseball bats and run onto a derelict catwalk. Birgit orders her group not to follow them because it is too dangerous. Slow-thinking Heck, however, keeps running. When Mickey wants to stop Heck, Birgit tells him that Heck is not worth risking his own life. The catwalk and the walls collapse, and the three boys are buried in the rubble. Gordie and Gino survive, but Heck is dead.

Chapter 14

There is an investigation and Michael hopes for a punishment. The atmosphere at home is sad and silent. Larry, one of his foster sibling, tries to console him by telling him that Heck died doing what he liked to do, playing good guys and bad guys. Michael realizes that what they did was against the law. He is devastated by Candy's dismissive reaction.

Chapter 15

At the funeral Michael learns more about Heck and realizes he had never really known him. Looking at stylish Birgit he knows that his silly infatuation with her is gone. He has to acknowledge that she is selfish and arrogant and that she had recklessly embraced the possibility of losing Heck.

As Grandview High is no better than Creekside, he goes back to his old school. Even Candy might finally forgive him.