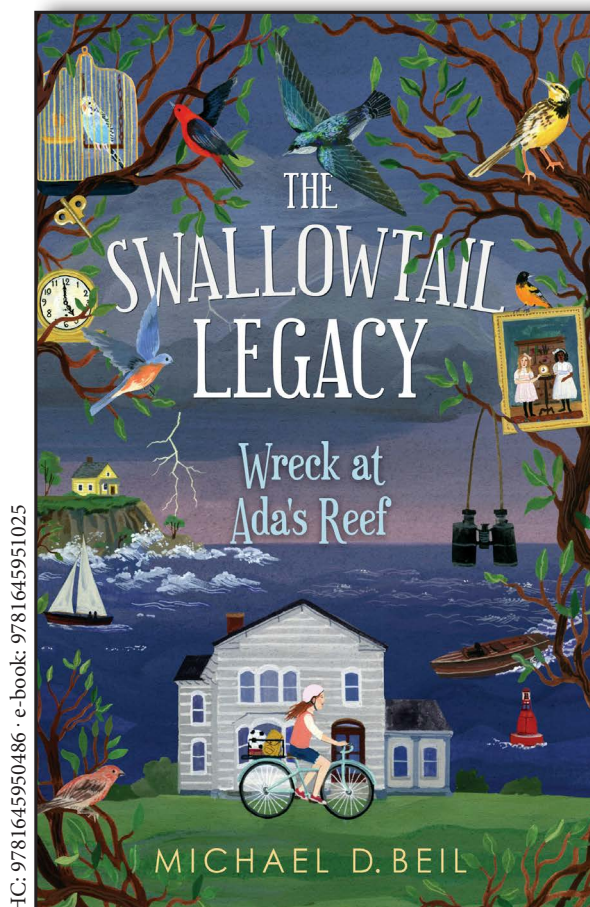


# PIXEL INK

## READING GROUP GUIDE



## *The Swallowtail Legacy*

### *Wreck at Ada's Reef*

by Michael D. Beil

#### ABOUT THE BOOK

A vibrant, moody contemporary mystery with a classic feel exploring righting past wrongs, redefining family, and finding yourself.

Twelve-year-old Lark Heron-Finch is steeling herself to spend the summer on Swallowtail Island off the shores of Lake Erie. When Nadine, a close family friend, tells Lark about a tragic boat accident that happened off the coast many years before, Lark's enthralled with the story. Nadine's working on a book about Dinah Purdy,

Swallowtails's oldest resident who had a connection to the crash, and she's sure that the accident was not as it appeared. Impressed by Lark's keen eye, Nadine hires her as her research assistant for the summer. And then Lark discovers something that could change Dinah's life. Something linked to the crash and even to her own family's history with Swallowtail. But there are others on the island who would do anything to keep the truth buried in the watery depths of the past.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Contrast Lark and Pip. Explain the following simile: "Its two piers are like long arms reaching out into the harbor to greet us (Pip's interpretation), or to push us away (mine)" (p. 1). What does the simile reveal about the two girls' personalities? How do they interact with the people on the island?
- How is Lark still grieving the loss of her mother when they go to Swallowtail Island to spend the summer in a house that her mother left the two girls? How do the Audubon guide that Lark keeps in her duffel and the silver swallow she finds in her bedroom remind Lark of her mother?
- Why does she keep the silver swallow to herself? At the end of the novel, Lark shows the bird to Pip. What is significant about this scene?
- Define family from Lark's point of view. Thomas photographs the "family" on different occasions. What is Lark's attitude toward the photographic sessions? Why does Lark say that Thomas and his sons don't "feel like family" to her?

- At the end of the novel, she says, “*Today, here on Swallowtail Island, posing for a picture with my crazy, mixed-up, complicated, maddening, and beautiful family, I am happy*” (p. 304). Describe the complications of her family. She spends much of the novel fighting the idea of family. What events help her realize that her family is “beautiful”?
- At the beginning of the novel, Thomas suggests that Lark keep a journal. Why does he think this might help her deal with her “issues”? What are her “issues”? Lark fights Owen Cheever after he harasses Blake on the soccer field. How does this incident improve Lark’s relationship with Blake, and with Thomas?
- When does Lark realize that Owen likes her? What is Owen’s relationship with his father, Reginald Cheever?
- Trace the relationship that develops between Lark and Nadine Pritchard, a writer and one of her mother’s oldest friends. Explain why Nadine wrote the following article for the local newspaper: “Tragedy Strikes Swallowtail 75 Years Ago.” Why does Thomas think that Lark would be the perfect assistant to Nadine?
- Discuss the assignment that Nadine gives Lark. How does unraveling information about the “accident” give Lark purpose?
- Captain Cheever was a good man, and very devoted to Elias Purdy, Dinah’s father. What was the Captain’s relationship with his brother, Gilbert? How does Nadine suspect that Gilbert caused the boat accident that killed her grandfather 75 years ago?
- When does Lark start to suspect that there was no accident, but instead a murder? Why is it important to solve the murder by July 28? What obstacles do Nadine and Lark encounter as they do their work? How does Lark follow her instincts when she is piecing together clues?
- Discuss Dinah Purdy’s role in the novel. Why do Thomas and Nadine think that Dinah can help Lark with her anger issues? Describe their therapy sessions. What else does Lark learn from Dinah?
- How does Dinah know about the Captain’s second will? Explain the provisions of the first will. Why is finding the second a key to solving the murder?
- What is Simon Stanford’s role in the matter? Discuss what Simon, a gay man, means by “A man literally got away with murder because I was afraid to stand up—to have to admit to who I really was” (p. 121).
- What does “in the closet” mean? Discuss why Simon felt he had to remain in the closet. How does Reginald Cheever try to blackmail Simon? Explain Simon’s sudden willingness to tell the truth about what he witnessed the night of the boat accident.
- What are the clues to the location of the second will? Describe Lark’s quest to uncover the will. Lark delivers the will just hours before the July 28 deadline. Thomas quotes Aristotle to her: “There is no great genius without some touch of madness” (p. 288). How does she act out of sheer madness when she finds the will and escapes the museum?
- Dinah Purdy and Lark and Pip find out they own quite a track of land. How are the residents of the island also winners?
- At the end of the novel, the kids learn that Thomas has made arrangements for the family to remain on Swallowtail Island the next school year. The title of the book suggests that there will be another book about Swallowtail Island. What is a possible conflict for the second novel?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Photo Credit: Laura Grimmer



**Michael D. Beil** came of age on the shores of Pymatuning Lake, where the ducks walk on the fish. (Look it up. Seriously.) He is the author of the Red Blazer Girls series, *Summer at Forsaken Lake*, *Lantern Sam and the Blue Streak Bandits*, *Agents of the Glass: A New Recruit*, and *The Swallowtail Legacy series*. For reasons that can’t be disclosed until September 28, 2041, he now lives somewhere in Portugal with his wife and their two white cats, Bruno and Maisie. He still gets carsick if he has to ride in the back seat for long and feels a little guilty that he doesn’t keep a journal. For more on the author and his books, visit him online at [www.MichaelDBeil.com](http://www.MichaelDBeil.com).