



Book club

SUMMER OF READING
FEATURED PICK

Haru, Zombie Dog Hero

By Ellen Oh
(Harper)

With just a few weeks of summer break left, Luke and his friends are hanging out in the woods near his house. When a raccoon tries to attack them, Haru, Luke's beloved dog, scares it away. Haru is hurt and has to stay overnight at the vet. Other animals at the vet's office tell Haru that humans will always let him down, but Haru doesn't believe them. Soon after Luke and Haru are reunited, a fire breaks out at a nearby factory and they can't go outside because the air is unhealthy to breathe. They nurse Penny, a stray cat who is covered in debris from the fire, back to health. Penny warns that the factory is doing something mysterious to dogs. Once it's safe to go back outside, a mean landlord falsely accuses Haru of attacking her. Luke's family allows animal rescue to take Haru to a shelter for the night until they can sort things out with a judge. But Haru is brought to the factory instead. Will Haru be able to escape before being experimented on? The last few chapters are fast-paced and tense, but the ending is upbeat. This book is the first of a new series. Read chapter two, starting on the next page!



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

Haru, Zombie Dog Hero is a feel-good story about the close relationship between a boy and his dog that turns into a sci-fi adventure. Use these questions to get the conversation started with family and friends who have also enjoyed the book.

Did humans let Haru down? And if so, how?

What adjective do you think best describes Haru?

How are Haru and Luke loyal to each other?

Does the landlord in the story remind you of a character from another book? If so, who?

Why do you think Penny left the safety of Luke's house?

Did you like that the story was told from the third-person perspective? Why or why not?

How does the tone of the story change from the beginning of the book to the end?



Ask the Author Ambassador

Ellen Oh writes and edits fantasy and horror books, and she is a founding member of We Need Diverse Books, a nonprofit group. *The Week Junior* spoke to her about *Haru, Zombie Dog Hero*, her book that is the first in a new series.



Do you have a dog?

I have two dogs, Tokki and Kiko. Tokki is a grouchy 9-year-old Cotton de Tulear, which is a fancy term for a cottonball dog. Kiko, age 6, is a Golden Doodle, and she loves everybody. Tokki tolerates her.



Were your dogs your inspiration for this book?

I got the idea when I was eating popcorn on the sofa and my dogs were on my lap. They love popcorn and wanted me to share it. I looked into their eyes and thought if they turned into zombies, they would never hurt me as long as I had popcorn.



What's your writing style?

I'm a visual writer—I get an idea and it will play like a movie in my head. I also know my conclusion before I start writing.

Whose books did you enjoy reading in middle school?

Judy Blume, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Lois Duncan were my favorite authors. I also really liked *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas.

Where do you like to read?

Either in bed or in a comfy lounge chair. I get absorbed in a book quickly and won't put it down for hours.



What's your favorite thing to do in the summer?

I love the feeling of going to an air-conditioned movie theater and then coming out into the warmth.

Our list of "The 50 Books Kids Love Most," details about entering our Summer of Reading sweepstakes, and more can be found at kids.theweekjunior.com/summerofreading.





EXCLUSIVE
EXCERPT

In chapter two, Haru is in an animal hospital talking to other pets. He ended up there because he got hurt after protecting his human, Luke, and Luke's friends from a raccoon. Haru misses Luke—Luke is his whole world. But the other pets whisper that humans can't always be trusted. Will Luke come back for Haru?

Haru, Zombie Dog Hero

By Ellen Oh

CHAPTER TWO

THE SMALL TOWN of Painted Lake, Virginia, was in Manatee County and 195 miles southwest of Washington, DC. It had a population of 8,500 people per the last census and was situated just west of US Route 1, a major highway that traveled up and down the East Coast.

Main Street, the biggest thoroughfare, started northeast of town from Route 1 and wound through the picturesque town center until it sharply veered west, past Lake Manatee.

Painted Lake Animal Hospital was south of town, right off Main Street near the lake. Inside, Haru sat in a large cage howling softly to himself.

"Aroo, aroo!" The mournful crooning conveyed the depth of his sadness.

Haru didn't understand why he was here in his least favorite place in the whole world. The VETS. A place where he always got poked with sharp painful things they called the SHOTS. Today's was particularly brutal. It had hurt more than the bite from that sick raccoon.

Haru was sad and confused. He thought he'd done a good thing. He'd smelled the sickness in the creature and knew it was bad for his humans. It was his job to protect them. His human Luke and a whole lot of adult humans had showered him with praise and affection because he'd saved them from danger. Haru had been happy because he was a Good Boy. The highest of praises. Haru always wanted to be a Good Boy. But then his human parents had left Haru at the VETS instead of taking him home. He hated being in a cage. It was the worst feeling in the whole world. Being trapped and kept away from your family. The VETS were nice to him except when they gave him the SHOTS. Today's had hurt a lot, even after they soothed

him and called him a Good Boy and gave him treats that were yummy. Haru was very unhappy.

The only other time he'd had to stay at the VETS was a long time ago, when he was still a young pup. He had gotten really sick after eating some human food that had been left outside the back of the store. He remembered seeing the mean woman that always came and harassed his human parents. He didn't like her, but the food had smelled delicious. He'd thrown up all he'd eaten and yet he had still kept retching, as if everything inside of his body was trying to get out. His humans had been so upset. Luke had cried a lot. Haru had felt guilty. He should have known not to eat the strange food with the small

pellets that looked like the color of a bright sunny sky. Such an odd color in his usually gray food. But Haru had recognized the scent of his favorite, chicken, and he couldn't resist. His humans had kept repeating the

word "poison" over and over again, so Haru now knew that "poison" was very bad. And now whenever the mean woman came to the store, Haru always growled at her, because she had tried to hurt him.

At least today Haru didn't feel that sick. The pain of his wound had subsided to a dull ache. He would have been perfectly fine at home.

"Aroo, arooooooooo," he whined.

"Calm down, dog, you're bothering me," a large gray cat said.

Haru nosed up against the bars of his cage and stared at the cat, who sat on the long table in the middle of the room, his tail swishing lazily from side to side.

"Why aren't you in a cage?" Haru asked.

"Because I am the boss here," he replied.

Haru was confused. "You are the boss? What is that?"

"The boss. Like my human, who commands this

**Haru always
wanted to be
a Good Boy.**





Summer of Reading

entire domain. All the other humans must listen to us and do what we want."

"I don't think that's how it works," a calico cat in a small cage on the other side of the room remarked.

"Nobody asked you," the gray cat retorted. He stretched luxuriously and stared at Haru. "Heard you got bit by the rabies."

"What's that?" Haru asked.

The gray cat blinked. "Dog, don't you know anything? The rabies is the dangerous thing that can kill us. It's why we get the SHOTS. Why do you think you're in that cage instead of at home?"

"My name is Haru, not Dog," Haru growled. He suddenly remembered hearing about the rabies being bad.

That was why he had to get the SHOTS for it three times. They'd hurt a lot. "Do I have the rabies now too?" he asked anxiously.

"They don't know," the gray cat replied. "That's why you have to stay in the cage for a little while. Sheesh, don't you listen when the humans are talking about you?"

Haru hung his head. Truth was, he didn't always understand what they were saying.

"If you got the rabies, you may never go home," the gray cat continued.

Haru whimpered loudly. That was the worst thing in the world that could happen. He had to go home to his human.

"Don't pay any attention to what that big hairball has to say. He doesn't know what he's talking about," the calico cat drawled.

"I do too!" the gray cat hissed angrily.

"You're just trying to scare him."

"He should be scared! It's his fault for not being careful!"

A sudden loud growl filled the room. "Be quiet, I'm trying to sleep here!"

Haru peered through the bars of his cage to see a large dark figure not too far away from him.

"Sorry to disturb you," the calico cat said politely. But the figure didn't respond.

"Oh, don't worry about Bruno," the gray cat said. "His family has been going on vacation without him often these days. That's why he's always in a bad mood when he gets dropped off here."

"But isn't vacation a good thing?" Haru asked. Whenever Luke said "vacation," it meant he didn't have to go to school and could stay and play with Haru all day.

"Not when the vacation is at a place that only humans can go," the calico cat chimed in. "My human had to go away for WORK. That's why she left me here."

"Hmph, my human takes me everywhere," the gray cat bragged. "I've even been on the bird machines that go in the sky. Although I really hated it."

"Nobody cares," the calico cat said.

"You're just jealous," the gray cat replied.

A noise at the door caught all their attention as a pretty human girl entered the room. She pushed a cart with bowls of food and a pitcher of water through the open doorway.

"Mitten! Time for din-din!" she caroled. "Mitten?"

The calico cat yowled with laughter. The gray cat narrowed his eyes.

"You don't get to make fun of my name!" he spat. "What kind of name is Gigi?"

The calico cat stopped laughing and sniffed. "A better name than Mitten."

"I think Gigi is pretty," Haru replied.

"No one asked you!" Mitten snapped angrily before turning away and stalking over to the girl. He began purring as she stroked him.

Haru was suddenly hungry and let out a plaintive woof.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Haru," the girl said, leaving Mitten to plop ungracefully onto his back. "You must be hungry after all you've gone through."

She opened the cage to give him his food and sat down to pet him. "You're such a brave dog, Haru. A real hero!"

Not really paying attention to what the human was saying, Haru wolfed down his dinner. The VETS food wasn't as tasty as the food his human mom would make him, but he was too hungry to care. When he was done, he noticed that the girl had left and that the others were quickly eating their food, except for Mitten. Mitten had taken one bite and then turned away.

"What's the matter with your food?" Haru asked. He was still hungry and stared wistfully at Mitten's bowl. "It's not my normal brand," he sniffed. "I prefer salmon to chicken."

Haru didn't know what salmon was, but he knew chicken was his favorite. His mouth watered, wishing he could eat more.

"Seriously?" Gigi asked. "You are way too spoiled." The gray cat hissed spitefully at the calico cat.

"Mitten should be grateful that his humans give him any food at all," Bruno growled suddenly. He'd risen quietly and was now glaring at the cat.



Haru couldn't imagine his life without Luke.





The two cats quieted down. Gigi gazed at Bruno in pity. "Are your humans forgetting to feed you?"

"Not forgetting, they're punishing me," Bruno responded. "All because I've been having more accidents lately."

"Oh boy, they really hate that," Gigi remarked. "It's the only time my human ever gets cross with me."

Bruno heaved a mournful sigh. "It's not like I do it on purpose. I'm just getting old, and I can't always control myself. Especially when they forget to let me out. I can't hold it in as long as I used to."

"That's why it's so much better to be a cat," Mitten responded. "I don't know how you dogs do it. We cats do our business indoors just like our humans. That's the difference between cats and dogs. Dogs serve humans, and humans serve cats because they love us more."

"Cut it out! You're not helping at all!" the calico cat snapped.

But it was too late. Bruno slunk to the back of his cage and curled up into a tight ball.

Haru didn't understand what was going on. He loved being a dog and would never want to be a cat. He had tried to make friends with a little white stray cat that had come into the store once, meowing for food. His human mom had sneezed nonstop and got really itchy all over her body, and his human dad had to shoo it out of the store. No, Haru was glad he wasn't a cat. Although he had seen his human dad secretly feeding the cat in the backyard. Afterward, whenever the cat came by, his human dad or Luke would feed it. But whenever Haru tried to talk to her, she wouldn't say much. The cat was more interested in eating and vanishing into the woods. She wasn't very friendly. Haru attributed it to living in the wild.

"Why do Bruno's humans punish him?" Haru asked quietly.

Mitten stalked over to his cage and began grooming himself. He then stopped and said, "I heard his family received a human baby and spend all their time with it now." Mitten shuddered. "Detestable things, human babies. Always causing problems."

"I quite like them," Gigi said. "They are cute and taste of milk."

"You wouldn't like them if they came into your family and took your place," Mitten warned. "I've heard so many stories like this. The human family brings home a baby and they spend all their time with the baby and forget about their pet. And the next thing you know, their dog is sent to a shelter. Believe me, I've seen it happen often."

The big dog began to whimper.

Gigi snarled at Mitten. "You have a habit of saying the worst possible things!"

Mitten blinked and then continued to groom himself. "Better that he is prepared for the worst."

Haru laid his head on his paws, thinking about Mitten's words. The stray cat that had come to his store had an old collar on, just like Mitten and Gigi and even Haru. The only animals that wore the collars were ones that lived with humans. Was the stray cat abandoned by its humans also? Could his family ever do that to him?

No, they'd never! Haru shook his head hard. Luke was his human and would never abandon him. He was Haru's whole world. He couldn't imagine life without Luke.

He spent a restless night and woke up when the pretty human girl came back to let them out of their cages. They followed her out into the large, gated yard with lots of grass and a few trees. After relieving himself, Haru wandered around the length of the fence, staring hopefully through the chain links. As he rounded the perimeter, he came across Bruno staring steadily at the gravel road outside their fence.

"How are you feeling today?" Haru asked.

Bruno didn't respond. He didn't even turn his head, continuing to gaze out onto

the roadway. In the sunlight, Haru could see that Bruno was a large black dog with sad droopy eyes. Haru waited next to Bruno for several minutes before getting bored and deciding to move on. At that moment, he heard the loud grumbling of an approaching car and the crunch of gravel.

"They're here!" Haru barked happily. He knew the sound of his humans' car. Running to the far end of the gate, he soon saw the large shiny vehicle turn onto the gravel roadway. Beside himself with excitement, Haru ran back and forth as the car parked and Luke came running to the fence.

"Haru! I missed you so much!" Luke grasped the links of the fence and pressed his face against it. Haru whined and licked at the parts of Luke's face he could reach.

"Let's go in and get him," Luke's dad said as he reached a finger between the chain links to stroke Haru's nose. Then he pushed Luke toward the building.

As Haru ran for the door into the VETS, Bruno finally spoke up.

"Listen, young one, know this—you can't trust humans," Bruno said, turning his sad gaze to Haru. "They will always let you down."

Expecting no answer, Bruno turned back and faced the roadway.

Shaking off Bruno's disturbing statement, Haru ran excitedly to the now-open building door and raced in to find Luke and his dad.

**"Haru!
I missed you
so much!"**

