

# Hank Zipzer: Niagara Falls, or Does It?

Recommended for Grades 3-5

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## **Book Summary: Hank Zipzer: Niagara Falls, or Does It?**

Hank Zipzer really wants to do well in school, but somehow things never seem to go his way. On his first day in fourth grade, and he's already headed to the principle's office for being tardy. Then his new teacher assigns a five paragraph essay on their summer vacation and Hank knows he's in trouble. He can barely write a sentence, much less paragraphs. Math and science are no easier. The best thing to say about Hank is that he tries and he is creative.

Hank has the brilliant idea to create Niagara Falls for his class assignment instead of writing about it. He works for a week, getting it just perfect. He is also hard at work with his friends, preparing for their magic show.

**[SPOILER]** On the day of the class presentation, he has a masterpiece of paper mâché which actually allows water to flow down the falls. Unfortunately, it springs a leak and Hank ends up drenching his teacher and the entire classroom. He gets in big trouble and is forbidden from doing the magic show. Fortunately, a music teacher is sympathetic and speaks to Hank's parents about the fact that he may have a learning disability, not a behavior problem. Hank is allowed to do the magic show and feels good about the fact that he may actually get help in learning.

## **Author Biographies: Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver**

Henry Winkler was born October 30, 1945 in Manhattan, New York. He is the son of two Jewish immigrants who managed to survive the Holocaust. He struggled in school. Although he didn't know it at the time, he had the learning disability known as dyslexia. He received a Bachelor's degree from Emerson College in 1967 and a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Yale School of Drama in 1970.

In 1974, Henry was cast on the television show 'Happy Days'. He played a leather jacket wearing character known as Fonzie. He became an icon of the 1970s. He played this role until the mid-1980s. After that, Henry worked as a producer and director. In 2003, he and his partner, Lin Oliver, published the first book in the Hank Zipzer series.

In 1978, he married his wife Stacey. They have three children together. Henry has a star on Hollywood Boulevard and was knighted by the government of France.

Lin Oliver is both a writer and producer. She has written over one hundred television episodes and produced four movies. She has her own production company which produces several children's films based on classic children's stories. She is the cofounder of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

She lives in Los Angeles with her husband Alan. They have three sons. Lin Oliver holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from U.C. Berkeley and a Masters in Educational Psychology from U.C.L.A.



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## Discussion Questions

1. Hank gets lectured by Principal Love on his first day of school. Is it fair for the principal to treat Hank a certain way based on what he did in previous years or should it be based on how he acts that year only? Why do you think so?
2. Do you think Hank really has a learning disability or is it just a matter of his needing to try harder? Why do you think so?
3. Do you know anyone like Hank? Do you think they are treated fairly in school and by classmates? Why or why not?
4. Hank struggles in school. How important do you think success in school is? How important do you think it should be? If you struggle in school, should you just look in other directions for things to succeed in or should you force yourself to overcome your difficulties? Why do you think so?
5. Hank admits that he tells stories (p. 25), but says it is completely different from the way Nick McKelty tells stories. Does it matter why you make up a story or is it lying either way? Why?
6. Do you think that Hank can't write the essay just because he thinks he can't or is this a real problem? Can what you think and how you feel effect what you are able to do? Can you think of any examples?
7. Should Hank have known that he would get into trouble for creating a living essay as opposed to writing an essay? Do you think he should have gotten into trouble for this or was his teacher right to insist he write an essay? Why?
8. When his 'living essay' nearly destroys the entire classroom, do you think Hank gets punished enough, or should he have been punished more severely? Is it fair that he is not allowed to defend himself? Why or why not?
9. Papa Pete says that being different is good (p. 132). How do you think this attitude will affect how Hank deals with the idea that he may have a learning disability? Do you think it would be better for Hank if he finds out he has a learning disability or better if the tests show he does not? Why?



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