

**NIAGARA FALLS, OR DOES IT? (HANK ZIPZER, THE WORLD'S GREATEST UNDERACHIEVER)
BY HENRY WINKLER AND LIN OLIVER**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 3-5**

Submitted by Mary Jo Kelly, School Librarian
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Title: Niagara Falls, or Does It? (Hank Zipzer, The World's Greatest Underachiever)

Author: Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver

Illustrator: Carol Heyer

Publisher: Grosset and Dunlop, 2003

Pages: 144

Summary

Hank Zipzer is a hero everyone can love, and children with learning difficulties will most likely relate to Hank's problems. For Hank, school is not a place where he has achieved much success. He hopes that everything will be different in fourth grade. The year does not start out very well for Hank Zipzer. He gets called to the principal's office on the very first day of school. Then Hank's teacher assigns a five-paragraph essay, "What I did on my summer vacation." Hank labors strenuously to write a sentence. A five paragraph paper is impossible for him. Then Hank has a brilliant idea! He'll tell the class about his vacation in a "hands-on" way by bringing Niagara Falls to school – water and all. He and his friends build a working model, complete with water pump, Saran-wrapped tubing, and a papier-mâché mountain. During his "living essay," a leak becomes a real river cataclysm in the classroom. Hank gets two-weeks of detention at school, and he is grounded at home.

Hank's friends need him to perform his magic tricks for a "paying" job they have booked, so something drastic must be done so that he can be there. The new music teacher who has custody of Hank in detention, suspects that the boy has "learning differences" and suggests to his parents that he be tested. Eventually, the hapless hero convinces his parents to let him perform in the show, which is a big hit, largely thanks to Hank's special magic.

Quality of the Text and Illustrations

According to Barbara Auerbach, in her review for *School Library Journal*, "Humor, magic, a school bully, a pet dachshund named Cheerio, and a pet iguana that slurps soup at dinner add up to a fun novel with something for everyone." Winkler, already an award-winning actor and a director, becomes another in the growing list of celebrities writing children's books with this funny

tale, co-authored by Oliver. Students in grades 4-8, especially boys, will enjoy this humorous book.

Specific Features

The paperback book cover looks like a sheet from a yellow legal pad. When it is lifted, a full color picture depicting the scene of Hank's ill-fated "essay" is revealed.

Authors' Biographies

Henry Winkler

The Hank Zipzer series is about the funny adventures of a high-spirited boy with learning differences. After decades of receiving accolades for acting, directing and producing, Henry Winkler has collaborated with Lin Oliver to write a series of books for middle readers. Winkler writes about the problems of an underachieving youngster with great empathy because the stories are inspired by his own life experiences. Winkler's undiagnosed dyslexia made him a classic childhood underachiever.

Lin Oliver

Throughout her career Oliver has produced films for the family audience. After nine years at MCA/Universal and three years at Tri Star, Oliver started an independent production company, producing feature films, movies for television, series television and direct to video for clients like Hallmark Entertainment. Most of her productions are based on children's books. Oliver is co-founder and Executive Director of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. As consultant to Learning Curve International, she has created a media and publishing imprint. As an author, she has published numerous books for children with Harcourt Brace, Warner Books, Harper Collins and LCI.

Source: <http://www.linoliverproductions.com/pages/575258/index.htm>

Other Titles in the Hank Zipzer Series

I Got a "D" in Salami

Day of the Iguana

The Night I Flunked My Field Trip

Zippety Zinger

Holy Enchilada!

Help! Somebody Get Me Out of Fourth Grade!

Other Titles by Lin Oliver

The Torpedo Run
The Daylight Limited
The President Express
The Mighty Mogul

Related Titles

Attack of the Mutant Underwear by Tom Birdseye (LYRC 2006)
Grover G. Graham and Me by Mary Quattlebaum
Jack Henry series by Jack Gantos
Joey Pigsza series by Jack Gantos
Just Annoying; Just Wacky; Just Stupid; Just Joking! (series) by Andy Griffiths
Guy series by Sarah Weeks
A Piece of Heaven by Sharon Dennis Wyeth
Seldovia Sam and the Very Large Clam by Susan Woodward Springer

Classroom Connections

- This would be the perfect book to read to students before assigning them their Science/Social Studies projects. Discuss how Hank conducted his presentation: his adherence to scientific methodology; alternate strategies of creating the model; solutions that would prevent the catastrophe described in the book.
- The book would be a good discussion starter in upper grade guidance classes to focus students' attention to differences in learning styles and the idea of differentiated assignments to help students achieve success with learning tasks.
- A thematic unit on dealing with handicaps might use this book as one example of a student who learns to cope with challenges.
- Students could use web sites to view the real Niagara Falls and do research on the historic significance of the landform.
- After reading the book, students could investigate the backgrounds and accomplishments of the authors, both of whom have backgrounds in media and production.
- Since both of the authors originally worked with visual media, classes could rewrite scenes from the book and videotape them, much as Winkler and Oliver have done with other books.

Web Sites

Nancy Keane's Booktalks
www.nancykeane.com/booktalks
Booktalk of *Niagara Falls, or Does It?*

The Early Show - Books

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/05/14/earlyshow/leisure/books/main553950.shtml>

This article is about Henry Winkler from a CBS appearance on television. It also includes an excerpt from the book and video footage of his interview.

The History Channel – Niagara: A History of the Falls

<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/niagara/>

Site includes historical information on Niagara Falls including snapshots of the falls with factual information, a timeline and a quiz about the history of the falls.

LD Online: Hank Zipzer, aka, Henry Winkler

http://www.ldonline.org/article.php?max=20&special_grouping=&id=655&loc=11

Site has an interview with Henry Winkler about writing.

Teacher Time Savers

<http://members.cox.net/ayra/NiagaraFalls1.pdf>

Sample pages of lesson plans and discussion ideas for using the novel. The full booklet must be purchased at <http://www.teachertimesavers.com/>

TV Land: Happy Days

<http://www.tvland.com/shows/happydays/actor8.jhtml>

Contains information about Henry Winkler, the actor.

Kid's and Teen's Health

<http://www.kidshealth.org>

This site is designed for children and teens. It includes basic information about health related issues.

http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/dyslexia.html

Facts and personal stories about dyslexia.