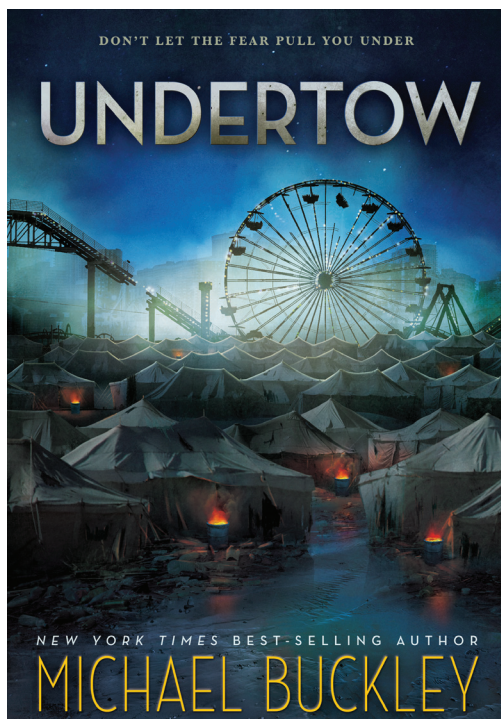


# UNDERTOW

by Michael Buckley



## About the Book

Lyric Walker feels helpless as she watches New York's Coney Island being invaded by more than 30,000 ocean-dwelling Alpha, a species of underwater creatures. The humans fear the Alpha's weird looks and abilities to alter the world around them. When the government orders the Alpha teens to attend school, paranoia and fear overtake common sense, and Coney Island becomes a military zone—humans vs. Alpha. Lyric is caught in the middle when her principal asks her to tutor one of the Alpha, and reporters take the story nationwide. Out in the streets, militant groups are intent on killing the Alpha and anyone who befriends them. The battle comes to a head when more Alpha are reported to be coming to shore, and Lyric discovers she has the power that can help both sides join forces.

The **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** are included with the discussions and activities. You can locate the standards at: [www.corestandards.org/the-standards](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards)

## Connect to the Curriculum

### Common Core State Standards

**ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3** Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of the text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

**ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

## Social Studies

Ask students to compare the unrest on Coney Island and the prejudice against the Alpha to the recent riots in the United States regarding prejudice against young African American teen boys. Ask students to write a thesis paper that presents an argument on how fiction imitates life. Students should cite specific events in *Undertow* and include similar events that have occurred in real life. Have students share their papers in small groups and share the groups' insights with the whole class.

## English

Ask students to write a newspaper article about an event that occurred as a result of the battle in Coney Island. Students should include quotes from participants, witnesses, and/or victims, and answer who, what, when, where, and why questions in their article. Combine the articles in a classroom newspaper to publish for other classes.

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## Science

Michael Buckley uses figurative language to paint pictures of his characters and the situations in which they find themselves. For example:

- Metaphor: "...this jittery deer ready to sprint for cover at the slightest sound" (page 2).
- Personification: "Her arms are strong. They whisper and soothe" (page 4).
- Personification: "...truths... They're the kind that stand on your neck..." (page 9).
- Simile: "...shimmering like heat on asphalt" (page 10).
- Metaphor: "He's a mountain" (page 11).
- Simile: "...hands like catcher's mitts...shoulders as broad as the Brooklyn Bridge" (page 11).

Ask students to find other examples and to write a short description of one of the characters using figurative language to create images. Ask students to share their writing in small groups and to discuss how the descriptions create strong images of each character.

## Art

Ask students to select a descriptive passage and draw an illustration for the passage. Ask students to copy the passage, explain why they selected it, and attach both to their art work. Display the art in the classroom.

## Writing Activities

### Common Core State Standards

**ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

## Loves Me, Loves Me Not

Lyric and Fathom are both confused about their feelings for each other. Ask students to choose one of the two and to assume the voice and persona of their chosen character. Students can write either a series of journal entries or a poem-for-two-voices expressing the internal conflict. Ask students to share their writing in small groups and post the writing in the classroom.

## Who and What Are Alpha?

With a partner, ask students to locate the names and descriptions of the types of Alpha, such as Selkie, Nix, Ceto, and Sirena. Each pair should create a mini-poster of the selected Alpha and include a description of the Alpha as a physical and emotional being, an illustration, and selected quotes from the book that support their descriptions. Have students share their mini-posters and then create a display in the classroom.

## Domestic Violence Hurts

Bex is abused by her stepfather, and her mother cannot protect her. Lyric and her father come to Bex's rescue, but they cannot always be there for her. What options does Bex have to stay safe? Ask students to research local options a child would have if they were being physically or sexually abused. With a partner, ask them to create a flyer with the information they discover, including an explanation and definition of domestic violence and domestic violence statistics for their community. Have student flyers posted through the school and the community.

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## Discussion Questions

### Common Core State Standards

**ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4** Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

**ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

1. Why were Lyric's mother and the other Alpha sent to the human world? How do the Alpha treat those who were sent to the human world?
2. What helps Lyric's headaches go away? Why does she have such severe headaches?
3. How does Mr. Ervin try to help the Alpha adjust to their new school?
4. What is the relationship between Luna and Ghost? Between Arcade and Fathom? How do Arcade and Luna help Ghost and Fathom?
5. When Doyle asks Lyric to help the Alpha, why does she say no? What is Lyric's real fear about becoming involved? How does Doyle finally convince Lyric to help?
6. What role do the Niners play in creating the unrest at the school and in the community? How does Doyle remove them from the school?
7. Why is Lyric so upset about the Alpha and her parents' involvement with the crisis? What is Lyric having to give up? What other options does she have?
8. What drives Lyric into Gabriel's arms? Why does she decide to go home instead of staying with him?
9. How does Lyric and Bex's relationship keep them grounded? Why is Lyric afraid to tell Bex the secret about her family? How does Bex react when she finally learns the truth?
10. How does Lyric show respect for Fathom's refusal of medical help for his wounds?
11. What role does Lyric's mother play in the decision to flee Coney Island or stay? Why does she want to stay? Why is Lyric's anger toward her mother justified?
12. When Svetlana bullies Bumper, Bumper retaliates in self-defense. Were Bumper's actions called for?
13. What does Lyric's mother learn from Terrance about the camp she will be sent to if she is captured?
14. When Lyric and her mother face the high accuser, how are they saved?
15. Who are the Rusalka and what do they want? How does Lyric help fight them?