**Night of the Spadefoot Toads**

**Summary**

Recently relocated to Massachusetts, fifth-grader Ben Moroney is homesick for the desert, lizard and best friend he left behind in Arizona. He feels more at home, however, when he finds a kindred spirit in his eccentric science teacher, Mrs. Tibbets. She shares with Ben a love of amphibians and reptiles and exploring the natural world. Mrs. Tibbets invites Ben to explore with her the natural habitats on her rural property, where she introduces him to the endangered spadefoot toads that inhabit a vernal pool. As they become friends, Ben learns that Mrs. Tibbets recently lost her husband, a well-regarded herpetologist, and that her sister-in-law who lives next door owns the property and plans to sell it to developers. After finding that there is not enough evidence to warrant state protection, Ben uses a school project to convince the sister-in-law to keep the property. Although the outcome is entirely predictable, Harley’s appealing story shows readers that adults and children can connect in meaningful friendships, and reminds them that conservation can begin in their own backyards.