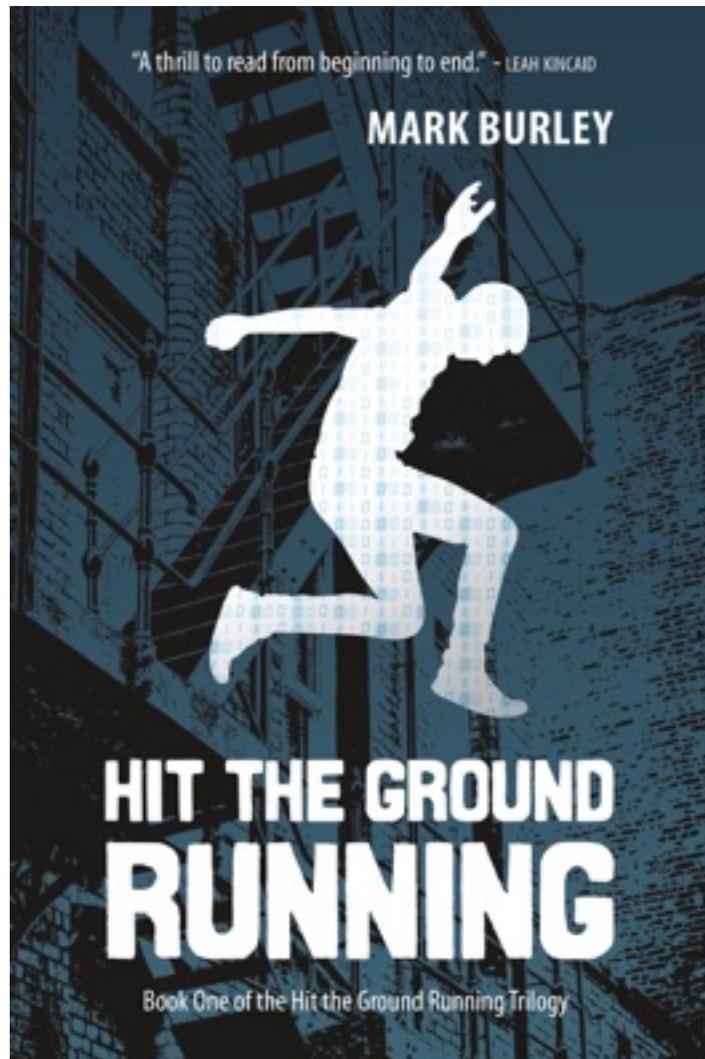


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# Hit the Ground Running Series Teaching Resource

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Audience: Teen / Young Adult

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# The Hit the Ground Running Series Book Descriptions

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## **The Hit the Ground Running Series, Book 1: *Hit the Ground Running***

“Eric—Mom and Dad are gone. I don’t know what happened, but I’m going to find out.”

Eric might not be getting along with his family—or anyone else, for that matter—but he’s pretty sure a boarding school in another country isn’t the answer. Skilled in parkour, running helps him deal. So be it, he decides. Do the time and get out. Flow like water. But when he gets a cryptic message from his brother telling him their parents have been abducted, and then his brother disappears, he realizes they weren’t punishing him, they were hiding him. To find them, Eric has to discover the secrets of his parents’ research, but the conspiracy he uncovers threatens more than just his family. With help from unlikely new friends, a hack-first-ask-questions-later approach to computers, and a dangerous plan, he soon learns that some secrets don’t want to be found, and others have a way of revealing themselves at all the wrong times.

## **The Hit the Ground Running Series, Book 2: *Flow Like Water***

“Run, Eric—go as far as you can as fast as you can. I will find you.”

Eric Bakker’s search isn’t over. The conspiracy revealed by his parents’ research goes deeper than he could have imagined, into a place and an organization with as much history—and secrecy—as any in the world. Getting in won’t be easy, and he’ll need help from his friends more than ever. But when one of them commits a personal sacrifice so Eric can escape from the killers known as the Vidi, the fallout threatens to split the group apart.

For Eric, overcoming physical and mental obstacles is built into his parkour training philosophy, but the farther he goes in his search, the bigger the obstacles become. Ultimately, his path leads to a violent encounter in Sicily, this time with no plan and no idea what he’s up against. Eric knows that whatever he encounters, he will have to adapt and react. As the saying goes, he will have to be like water. And like water, he will flow or he will crash.

## Reading Levels

### Flesch Reading Ease score:

- 80.5
- easy to read

### Gunning Fog:

- 6.6
- fairly easy to read

### Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level:

- 5th Grade

### The Coleman-Liau Index:

- 8th Grade

### The SMOG Index:

- 5th Grade

### Automated Readability Index:

- 4-5
- 8–9 year olds (4th & 5th Graders)

### Linsear Write Formula:

- 5-3
- 5th Grade

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# Author Bio

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Mark is originally from Truro, Nova Scotia. His parents were teachers, which means he could have grown up around books, and he did, but mostly he marked biology tests for his dad and dissected whatever they had for dinner (true story). He attended Dalhousie University in Halifax to complete his science degrees and continued to cultivate the writer seed that was planted when he was a kid.

Mark has always been involved in high-level sport, as an athlete through university and as a coach afterward, and maintains that sport has given him the chance to succeed in art, something he's sure he couldn't have done otherwise. As a result, though, he eats the same breakfast every morning and he always puts his left shoe on first—bad things will happen if he doesn't.

Mark and his wife live outside Halifax with their two children. Books are big in their house; Mark's favourite thing is Bedtime with Ry (come on, Mom, who can sleep during the Quidditch World Cup?). As a reader, he's always been slow, preferring to savour, which drives his wife nuts—she's a devourer. He is often drawn to books that are beyond his ability to comprehend, which is only frustrating when the words aren't beautiful.

He also has an unnatural attraction to chai lattes. It's a problem. He's okay with it.

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# Major Themes

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- The search for the unknown; how unidentified needs affect our behaviour; the elusive desire for more than what we have.
- The connection between people; interdependency, what it makes us do, and what it reveals about our character.
- Physical activity for spiritual connectivity and mental well-being.
- Overcoming obstacles.
- Longevity, health, end of life, mortality.
- Coping with loss.
- Ethics in science, society reflected in research, technology.
- Disability.

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# Character Descriptions

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## Eric Bakker

Seventeen years old, six feet tall, sandy brown hair (messy), blue eyes. Lean and fit, strong hands calloused from parkour. He is courageous but not tested, doesn't make friends easily but is fiercely loyal. He is adjusting to a move to boarding school, which occurred without explanation or input, further straining an already testy relationship with his parents. He is withdrawn and a bit resentful, runs to cope and find clarity. Has a connection with Tess Edwards that he doesn't fully understand but also finds hard to explore under the circumstances. The task of finding his family helps him learn what he can actually do and how he truly feels.

## Tess Edwards

Seventeen years old, small and slim, auburn hair and dark brown eyes. Talented actor, at school on scholarship. Private but well-liked, friendships are important to her. Father died when she was twelve, mother shut down afterward, so she has been fending for herself. Honourable and loyal, has a mischievous streak; very insightful, values integrity and honesty. Can talk her way out of almost anything. Loves acting but wants real experiences, wants to see the world. Drawn to Eric, wants to understand why he is the way he is, sees helping him as the right thing to do but also as an opportunity.

## Seth and Lakey Sawatzky

Sixteen years old, twins, identical except for an errant Y chromosome. 5'6", wiry and quick. Very close, can almost hear each other's thoughts. "Joined at the brain." Thrill-seeking geeks, into extreme sports, fully engaged in life despite the surfing accident that resulted in a spinal cord injury for Seth. Brilliant and innovative, can build or fix anything, computer geniuses. Friends of Tess—they grew up together—get involved in helping Eric for the challenge and the fun of it.

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# Classroom Activities

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## **Suggestion 1: Parkour**

Parkour is a training discipline based on movement. It is the practice of independently getting from one point in an environment to another as efficiently as possible. Practitioners—traceurs (or tracers)—use whatever technique is appropriate for the situation to accomplish this.

Parkour is a way to approach, assess, and overcome obstacles naturally and instinctively, and it requires a certain mindset to work: clarity of thought, openness, assessment without judgement, calm, consistent energy, focus, automatic processing of information and instinctive reactions, being in the moment, etc. As a philosophy, its principles can be applied to different kinds of obstacles, physical and otherwise.

Parkour and freerunning are different. Freerunning is about physical challenges, difficulty, and personal expression. Style counts, and performance can be judged in competition. Parkour is about flow and efficiency; it's about choosing the best path to reach a destination based on an individual's ability and getting there as efficiently as possible. Moves are made out of logical necessity rather than expression. Watch a video that includes both and differentiate between them.

Note the difference in philosophy between parkour and freerunning, and have a discussion or write about thoughts or experiences where the principles of parkour would be applicable. How does the parkour training philosophy help in dealing with obstacles? Encourage students to consider a wide range of situations. For example, how would the principles of parkour help when playing a video game? While driving? In a job interview? In a sporting event?

Consider having a certified coach from a local parkour club come to the class to teach the basics and talk about the principles.

### **Suggestion 2: The Mountain**

If everyone in your class were living inside a mountain, what would things be like in a thousand years? As individuals, you don't need to eat or sleep, and you don't need light to see. You don't age or otherwise change physically. You can leave the mountain, but this is very dangerous, so it doesn't happen often. Considering the personalities of the people in your class, what roles would evolve? Who would do what? What roles would you adopt, and what things would you pursue? What would be important, and what rules, if any, would you live by? How would it look as a society? Contributions could be made through open discussions, break-out sessions, or written submissions and presentations.

### **Suggestion 3: The Debate**

A group of scientists have discovered a way to extend the human lifespan indefinitely. It involves taking large quantities of special nutritional supplements and medication to stabilize DNA replication and enhance regeneration at the cellular level. Testing in animals with typically short lifespans has been very successful, and early stages of human trials have shown to have excellent results with no notable side effects. The treatment is extremely expensive and is not covered by government funding. Because of the length of time involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the treatment, there is no way to tell what the long-term physiological implications would be.

Divide the class into two groups; one group argues in favour of widespread distribution of the treatment to whoever can pay for it, and the other group argues against this.

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# Discussion Questions

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1. When Eric was younger, he frequently travelled with his parents on research expeditions. Now that he's older and no longer going on these trips, he's restless and lacks direction. How did these early experiences affect the type of person he became? Before his parents go missing, what is he looking for?
2. Eric's personality has been shaped by the people in his life as much as by his experiences. How did Eric's early relationships affect him, and how is he influenced by the characters in the book? Is he aware of their influences?
3. Parkour is a type of physical training that has an important mental component. What does parkour mean to Eric? What purpose does it serve him?
4. What is it about Tess's character or situation that would give her such a strong impulse to help Eric?
5. Friends, family, and even acquaintances are often connected in ways they don't realize. Sometimes the connection can make people do things they wouldn't have anticipated, especially in stressful situations. How are relationships in the book important in shaping the plot? What do the characters' responses to difficult situations reveal about what's important to them or about who they are?
6. A facility in Arizona run by the Alcor Life Extension Foundation is cryonically preserving the bodies of 149 people who died of various diseases with the hope that sometime in the future there will be a cure for what killed them. An organization in California called the SENS Research Foundation is using regenerative medicine to attempt to prolong life indefinitely by preventing the medical complications associated with aging. An organization in Russia called the 2045 Initiative intends to transfer a human personality to a machine, thereby creating an immortal cyborg, by 2045. Do you think any of these concepts are likely to work to extend the human lifespan? Should natural death be prevented? What are the societal

implications of succeeding? If Stockton had been successful in his plan to make his wife and himself immortal, what would have happened?

7. What would be the characteristics of someone who has been alive for thousands of years? How would they be different from other people?
8. Research and advancing technology tend to progress very quickly. Are the ethics that guide our decisions in developing and managing these capabilities progressing fast enough to keep up? Does the research team on the Millstone Project appear to try to balance these things? How does their approach differ from Stockton's and Riccardo Azzarà's?
9. Is Stockton a highly motivated genius pushing the fringes of scientific discovery (for his own gain), or is he just a high-functioning psychopath with a lot of money? Does this perception change your opinion of the character?
10. The event that starts the novel in motion is the abduction of Eric and Michael's parents. Who do you think took them and why?