

Educator Discussion Guide

Book Scavenger

By Jennifer Chambliss Bertman
Illustrations by Sarah Watts

Louisiana Young Readers Choice Award Nominee 2018
Grades 6-8

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Emily moves to San Francisco and makes friends with James. Around this time, Emily's favorite author, Garrison Griswold, is ambushed and left for dead. Emily learns he is in critical condition and in a coma. When Emily finds herself in the station where Griswold was attacked, she discovers a mysterious book, *The Gold-Bug*. Certain that *The Gold-Bug* is a clue in a game that Griswold created before his incident, Emily and James set out to find the other clues to the game. Unfortunately, they will need to find the clues before another, more nefarious, group does.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Chambliss Bertman holds a Masters in Fine Arts for Creative Writing. She was born and raised in southern California. She loved to read growing up and is also heavily influenced by the 1990s, as shown through her favorites: the *Clue* movie, *Gilmore Girls*, and Nintendo games.

Bibliographical information taken from the author's website at

<http://jenniferchamblissbertman.com/about/>

Accessed 15 June 2017

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Sarah Watts graduated with honors from the Ringling College of Art and Design. She worked for two years designing fabric for baby clothes and another year designing stationary, gift bags, and other objects. She is now an independent illustrator and does work as an independent fabric designer as well.

Bibliographical information taken from the author's website at <https://wattsalot.com/>

Accessed 15 June 2017

BOOK AWARDS

2016 Bank Street College Best Book of the Year

2015 Junior Library Guild Selection

2017-2018 Louisiana Young Readers Choice Award Nominee

OTHER TITLES IN SERIES

The Unbreakable Code (2017)

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Ciphers

Introduce your students to the concept of ciphers. Give students worksheets with different examples of ciphers, including substitution texts, Baconian ciphers, Morse Code, number letters, etc. Question students about what they think the odd example sentences on the paper are. See if the students can crack the codes. Work through some of the examples with students, but allow time for students to decipher once they catch on to the game. Discuss with students why people would want to make codes that others cannot understand.

Gold-Bug

Have students read aloud the short story “The Gold-Bug” by Edgar Allen Poe. As students go through the story, stop periodically to see if they can solve the cryptograms. Talk about why Poe wrote a story like this. Ask questions such as, “How do you think Poe came up with these ciphers?” Challenge students to come up with their own ciphers that the class must attempt to unravel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is Emily like the *Book Scavenger* game? Why do you think she is attracted to the game?
2. Compare Emily’s and James’s apartments. How do they differ and why? How does Emily feel about this difference when she notices it?
3. Why did Mr. Remora behave the way that he did? Were his beliefs - that the documents belonged to him - justified? Explain why or why not.
4. Where do you think Clyde came from? What do you think his story is and how did he get involved with Mr. Remora?
5. What do you think would have happened if Hollister stayed friends with Mr. Griswold? Do you think that he would be happy working for the large bookstore or is he happier working where he works now?
6. Do you think that Mr. Quisling was right to take Emily’s book? Explain.
7. Could Mr. Quisling have helped Emily more with her problems that she brought to him? How so?
8. How do Emily and James trick Maddie into showing the teacher that she cheated?
9. Does Mr. Quisling treat Maddie fairly when she is caught cheating? Why or why not?
10. Do you think Emily’s nomadic status has helped or hindered her overall? Why?
11. Did you think that Flush would recognize FiveSpade? How do you think Matthew felt when he met the members of Flush? How does that compare to when Emily met Mr. Griswold?
12. How does Matthew show that he cares about Emily by the end of the book? If Matthew had gone to the concert instead, what do you think would have happened to Emily and James at Mr. Remora’s house?
13. Why did Emily’s parents decide to stay in San Francisco? Do you think they want to stay in San Francisco or do you think they will travel again soon? Explain.
14. Why did Mr. Remora want “The Gold-Bug”? Do you think that he liked reading books, collecting them, or something else entirely? Explain why.
15. How does Matthew feel about Emily?

16. How does James feel about Emily when she will not help him with his cipher for class?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts:

Have students create their own “Raven” by developing clues to reveal their final hidden message. Have them make lists of pre-set responses that will encourage their peers to ask the right questions to get the answers, like Raven does in the book. Students can work individually or in a group, but they must come up with a coherent series of clues to achieve the end statement.

Technology:

Students can hide their own books (with their parents’ permission) around the school or a designated area. Using a GoogleDoc, the classmates can write riddles to one another and post when they have found and re-hidden books. This is a mini-version of the Book Scavenger game that can use a private document that only the people playing can see and the teacher can monitor the whole game.

Social Studies:

Explore the lives of the authors associated with *Book Scavenger*: Charles Babbage, Jack Kerouac, Dashiell Hammett, Robert Lewis Stevenson, Edgar Allan Poe, and Rufus Wilmot Griswold. Assign each student or a group of students an author to research. Have students explore author biographies as well as the literary works these authors created. Why did Bertram choose these authors for this book?

Math:

For a mathematical challenge, introduce the Caesar Cipher, or shift cipher, to the students. This involves having a number assigned to each letter of the alphabet. Then, the code is shifted by so many numbers so that adding or subtracting can give you the answers. For example, if ABC correlates to 123, shifted it can be 24 25 26, which would then be read XYZ. This sounds more complicated than it really is once the code is broken, but it will give middle school students a great challenge!

- <https://learncryptography.com/classical-encryption/caesar-cipher>
- http://www.math.stonybrook.edu/~scott/papers/MSTP/crypto/3Caesar_Cipher.html

Art:

Have students create their own book covers for “The Gold Bug”. Students can take one of their textbooks and cover it with a piece of butcher paper. This activity will not only be a cute reminder of the book they read, but it can also help protect their textbooks.

- <https://www.verywell.com/making-a-paper-bag-book-cover-3106756>

Physical Education:

Arrange a treasure hunt! Hide several items around your school’s playground or classroom and give the students clues to find them. To get the clues, the students must perform a required exercise, such as 20 jumping jacks or 10 squats. Whoever wins can get a special prize, such as a copy of the book.

Vocabulary:

binary
biography
cipher

decipher
logistical
scarab

scavenger
scornful
serpentine

surly
womba

SUGGESTED WEBSITES:

Arts and Avenues Discussion Guide: http://artsandvenuesdenver.com/images/files/DAV-2016-007_YOBOD_Activity_Book_Final_Online.pdf

This PDF has a lot of activities and resources to teach a unit on *Book Scavenger*.

Cryptology for Kids

https://www.cerias.purdue.edu/education/k-12/teaching_resources/lessons_presentations/cryptology.html

A site designed to introduce kids to cryptology and ciphers with plenty of links and examples.