

A Curriculum Guide to

In Harm's Way

Benjamin Pratt & the Keepers of the School, Book 4

By Andrew Clements

Illustrated by Adam Stower

About the Book

In this lively series, Benjamin Pratt and his friends, Jill and Robert, fight to save Oakes School from destruction by the Glennley company. If Glennley's spies, Mr. Lyman and his sidekick Wally, have their way, the school will be torn down and the kids' town will become home to a giant new theme park. But Ben and his friends know there is much more to Oakes School than classrooms and hallways. The building, filled with artifacts from America's past, was a stop on the historic Underground Railroad! And its builder, Captain Oakes, left clues and treasures to help preserve it. To destroy the school would be to destroy both history and a maritime New England way of life. In Book Four, Ben, Jill, and Robert find another treasure hidden behind the art classroom wall. But for their discovery to help save the school, the Keepers may not be able to protect their secrets much longer.

Developing Reading Literature Skills

The questions and activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.2–5.2, 3, 5, 6)

Character: Point-of-View

1. What words would you use to describe the character of Benjamin Pratt, from whose viewpoint readers follow the Keepers of the School adventures?
2. Does Ben always know whether to share his discoveries with his fellow Keepers, Jill and Robert? What makes these decisions difficult for Ben?
3. Describe a scene from the story in which Ben struggles with the question of whether or not to tell Jill and Robert what he has found. How does this struggle affect the kids' greater efforts to protect Oakes School?
4. How do you think *In Harm's Way* would be different if it were narrated by Robert or by Jill? What would the story be like if it were narrated by Mr. Lyman?

Character: Relationships

1. How would you describe the relationship between Ben and Robert? How would you describe the relationship between Ben and Jill?
2. How do Ben, Jill, and Robert relate to their family members and other adults in their lives? How do these relationships affect the kids' ability to achieve their goal?

3. Create a character map, showing the connections between Ben, Jill, Robert, their families, teachers, community members, and their enemies from Glennley. Include brief descriptions of characters and explanations of the ways their paths cross.

Theme: Courage

1. How would you define the word “courage”? How does your definition compare to a dictionary definition of “courage”?
2. Describe a moment in the story where Ben, Jill, or Robert shows courage. Does this moment relate to an effort to protect the school or is the character courageous in another aspect of his or her life? Why did you choose this moment as an example of courage?
3. Can you think of a moment in your own life when you had to be courageous? Describe this moment. How do you think this experience affects your understanding of the example of courage you selected from *In Harm’s Way*?
4. Does courage always mean putting yourself “in harm’s way”? Why or why not?

Setting: Seaside

1. The Keepers stories take place in a seaside town. Why is this important in terms of the history that Ben and his friends are trying to protect? How does it relate to Glennley’s development plans?
2. What images and ideas from the book enhance the book’s maritime feel? Where does Ben’s dad live? What type of racing do Ben and Robert enjoy? Can you think of scenes in the story that are made more dramatic because of the seaside setting?
3. Go to the library or online to find images that remind you of settings from the book. Use these pictures to create a photo collage inspired by the novel.

Developing Discussion Skills

The questions and activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (SL.2–5.1, 2, 3)

Comprehension: Trust & Friendship

1. At the start of the novel, Ben, Jill, and Robert are in trouble. How do they handle the accusations of Principal Telmer? How does this scene help readers understand the relationships between the three friends?
2. How is the new assistant janitor, Wally, a game changer in the Keepers’ efforts to protect Oakes School? What do the friends learn about Lyman’s relationship with Wally?
3. In Chapter 6, Ben worries about what role he plays in helping the Keepers. What roles does he see Jill and Robert playing? How might his concern help Ben better understand

his enemies, Lyman and Wally? What reassurance would you offer Ben if he told you about his concern?

4. Describe some moments in the story when Ben and Jill tolerate Robert's annoying behavior. Why do they allow him to act the way he does? Do you think that, generally, if you know someone well, you can be more understanding of their moods and attitudes? Why or why not?
5. How does Ben sneak into the art room? Why are Jill and Robert not with him? What does he discover in the art room? Why does Ben ultimately have to contact Jill and what does she do?
6. By the end of the story, Ben and Jill have told their parents that they are "Keepers" of Oakes School. Describe the four different reasons why the parents were let in on the secret.
7. With classmates or friends, create a brainstorm list of quotes, phrases, book and movie titles, and images that relate to the word "friendship." Using the list as a starting point, discuss how reading *In Harm's Way* relates to your understanding of the challenges and values of friendship.
8. Why do you think Andrew Clements names the last chapter of the book, "Like Family, Like Enemies"? Why does Ben salute Lyman? How does this final scene challenge your understanding of the words "friendship" and "trust"?

Collaboration: Evidence & Plans

1. With friends or classmates, create a list of the technical equipment and computer programs the Keepers use as they work to protect the school—and themselves—from Lyman and Wally.
2. What strategies do Ben, Jill, and Robert employ themselves as they work to save Oakes School? What plans require the help of adults and what adults do the young Keepers contact?
3. Describe the objects Ben finds inside the art room wall. In what way do you think this discovery should change the battle with Lyman and Glennley?
4. Take a class vote to see how many students think the Keepers should or should not have told their parents or another adult about Lyman and Wally at the start of the novel. Invite individual students to explain their votes.
5. Imagine you are Oakes School classmates of Ben, Robert, and Jill. Discuss what plans you would recommend they follow to help their mission to save the school.

Developing Writing Skills

The activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (W.2–5.1, 2, 3, 7)

Text Type: Opinion Piece

1. Ben’s Optimist boat doesn't have a name. What would you name a racing sailboat if you had one of your own?

Text Type: Informative/Explanatory

2. At the end of the book, Ben realizes that Lyman and Wally plan to flood the school; by sharing his discovery, he is able to limit the damage and save the building for the moment. Jill writes a newspaper-style article that she plans to release to the local paper. Imagine you are the editor of the local paper. Write a memo to your staff explaining the importance of the article, whether you think it should be headline news, and what kinds of pictures you’d like a photographer to take to go with the text.

Text Types: Narrative

3. Imagine you are a classmate of Ben, Jill, and Robert, and they have invited you to join the Keepers. Write a journal entry describing that moment, your feelings, and whether or not you will accept their invitation.
4. In the character of one of the adults from the novel, imagine you are going to have a discussion with Ben, Jill, and Robert about the seriousness of their Keeper responsibilities and the risks involved in their anti-Lyman activities. Make an outline of the things you want to say as you plan for your discussion.

Research & Present: Freemasons

5. Divide into small groups to research famous freemasons from American history, such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, Daniel Boone, or Lewis & Clark.
6. Work with your group to create a PowerPoint or other multimedia style presentation about your famous freemason to share with friends or classmates.

Research & Create: Famous Quotation

7. Ben quotes famous American Ralph Waldo Emerson when he says, “Shallow men believe in luck . . . Strong men believe in cause and effect.” Use colored pencils, paints, or other craft materials to create a sign or other art object featuring this quotation.
8. Go to the library or online to learn more about Ralph Waldo Emerson. Create an informative poster about his life and work.
9. Write a one- to three-paragraph essay explaining why you think Andrew Clements chose to quote Ralph Waldo Emerson in this Keepers novel.

Guide written by Stasia Ward Kehoe. Stasia holds a BA in English from Georgetown University and an MA in Performance Studies from New York University/Tisch School of the Arts. She has taught dance and writing classes to elementary through high school students on both the east and west coasts. Her novels are published by Viking/Penguin. She lives in western Washington.

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