

A Curriculum Guide to

Benjamin Pratt and the Keepers of the School #5: *We Hold These Truths*

By Andrew Clements

About the Book

Time is almost out for the Keepers of the School in this fifth Keepers adventure from Andrew Clements, the master of the school story.

The Keepers of the School—known to their friends as Ben, Jill, and Robert—have one last chance to save their school before it’s torn down to make room for a seaside amusement park. But their nemeses, Janitors Lyman and Wally, are just as determined to keep the kids out of the way and the demolition on schedule.

One way or the other, this battle is about to come to a head. When all is said and done, will the school still be standing? Or will everything the Keepers have fought for be destroyed?

Prereading Activities

The following activities contained in this section address the following Common Core State Standards: (L.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (W.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (RL.5–6. 5, 6) (SL.4–6.4, 5, 6) (WHST.6. 6) (W.6.2) (RL.6.2)

1. The Duncan Oakes School was built in 1783 by Captain Duncan Oakes. When was your school built? Who was responsible for building it, and what historical artifacts or legacies are at your school? As a class, make a chart that shows this information. Compare and contrast your school with the Duncan Oakes School as you read the story. Does the location of your school play any role in the type of artifacts or legacies that are in your school?

2. Have you ever been so passionate about something that you would break rules and get in trouble for it? Brainstorm ideas and dreams that you personally, or as a class, could be passionate about. What would this passion require from you? Keep a journal about your ideas and what you could do. How could you make your passion or dreams come true?

3. Every person has quirks and flaws. As a class, discuss what quirks and flaws are. What are some quirks and flaws that you notice about yourself, your family, and your classmates? Are quirks and flaws good or bad? Why or why not? As you begin reading this story, keep notes on the different characters and their quirks and flaws. How do these help the children solve the mystery?

4. The main premise of this series is that Duncan Oakes students need to save their school from being torn down and replaced by a seaside amusement park. As you read this fifth book in the series, make a chart that shows the reasons that students should save the school, and the reasons

that it should be torn down. Find evidence in the story to support your reasons. Try to find at least five examples for each side of the argument.

5. The illustrator of this story has included lots of visual clues—maps, letters, coins, drawings, etc. He has also chosen to use only two colors. Why do you think this is? Scan through the drawings and note the kinds of elements (line, shape, form, space, texture, value, and color) the illustrator is using. How do you think this helps the story? Does the choice of two colors help or not? Discuss as a class how pictures might help a story in a way that words can't.

Discussion Questions

The following discussion questions contained in this section address the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (W.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (L.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (SL.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (RH.6. 6) (WHST.6.6) (CCRA.R.1)

1. In this fifth book in the Benjamin Pratt and the Keepers of the School series, Ben, Jill, and Robert are looking for the last safeguards. What is a safeguard and why is it important for saving the Duncan Oakes School? (If you have read the other books in the series, share with your class what the other safeguards are).

2. Ben, Jill, and Robert live in a town that is filled with maritime history and attend a school filled with nautical artifacts. What is maritime history? Use a dictionary to look up the root and origin of the words *maritime* and *nautical*, how these words are related, and why they are important for the Duncan Oakes School. Cite examples from the story that show maritime history and artifacts.

3. Captain Oakes says of the final safeguard, “*Seek the final safeguard ONLY IF YOU MUST—for once it is found, our school will change forever.*” What do you think this means? Is this a good warning or an omen? Why or why not? How do the Keepers (Ben, Jill, and Robert) react to this warning?

4. Mr. Lyman and Wally replaced Mr. Keane at the school as janitors. They are really employed by the Glennley Group to be spies and to keep an eye on the Keepers. What evidence do you see in the story that supports this? Cite examples for each character and show the cause and effect of their actions. Are Mr. Lyman and Wally the same at the end of the story? Why or why not? How do events in the story change them?

5. In this story, Ben, Jill, and Robert decide to enlist more allies in their quest to save the school. Why do they decide to do this? How do they choose whom to trust? What forms of communication are they using? What role does technology play in helping them with their cause, and what would Captain Oakes think of this technology? With a partner, role-play conversations Ben, Jill, or Robert might have when recruiting students and adults for their cause, and conversations about today's technology with Captain Oakes.

6. Sometimes schools or towns will put important documents and artifacts into a time capsule to be opened many years in the future. If you were to put artifacts into a time capsule about your

school and the era we live in, what would you include? Write a letter to be opened two hundred years in the future. Tell about your artifacts, what they represent, how they are used, and why they are important. Collect artifacts to place into a time capsule (shoe box, Pringles can, etc.), decorate it, and include your letter in a display. Include a chart or create a PowerPoint that compares the artifacts that Captain Oakes left in the school, and the artifacts you put into your time capsule. How are they alike and how are they different? Do they represent the same kinds of things, or are they completely unrelated?

7. Big corporations like the Glennley Group in this story have lots of money and influence over small towns and communities. How did the Keepers stop them from building a seaside theme park? Write an article for the Edgeport newspaper stating the facts about how the Keepers (and their allies) saved the school.

8. Chapter 11 is titled, “Indiana Pratt.” What can you infer from this chapter title about Ben?

9. There are some big ideas in *We Hold These Truths*. They include:

- “The law wins, Wally. You should know that by now—the law *always* wins!”
- “I’m not the scared little kid I was back then.”
- “The past was crushing him and the future felt even heavier.”

What do these big ideas refer to? How do they help us understand the characters and their growth from the beginning of the story to the end? Find other examples of “big ideas” and how they are important to the characters and the story.

10. Robert and Ben have several conflicts during this story. How do you deal with conflicts with your friends and family? Role-play with your classmates some of the conflicts Ben and Robert had and how you would solve them. What kind of life lessons can you learn from conflicts? Write in your journal a conflict you have had, how you resolved it, and what you learned from it.

11. As the Keepers are searching for the final safeguard, Ben draws maps to help him understand the layout of the school and the hidden rooms and passages. Draw a map of your school. If you were to include hidden rooms and passages, where would they be? Be sure to include a key that has a compass rose and symbols that represent doors, steps, windows, restrooms, drinking fountains, etc.

12. Several illustrations in the book are of structures that are no longer in use today.

- Tide mill (draw a picture of this based on the description)
- Weight and pulley system
- Octopus furnace

Use your school library and the Internet to research how these items were used during Captain Oakes time—1783—and what is the modern equivalent that we have today? Draw pictures that contrast the old and the new.

13. In Book One of *Keepers of the School*, the school janitor, Mr. Keane, gave Ben a coin before he died. The coin had been passed down from many school janitors before him. What role do

school janitors play in the keeping of the school? Are Wally and Mr. Lyman the same as the others? How are they different? Compare and contrast their roles as janitors. What do you think are the qualities that a school janitor should have in being a “keeper” and working with students to save their school?

14. Ben was given a clue by Mr. Keane before he died that said:

“After five bells sound, time to sit down.
After four times four, tread up one more.
After three hooks pass, one will be brass.
After two tides spin a man walks in.
After one still star, horizons afar.”

Ben, Jill, and Robert are now on the last part of the clue—“After one still star, horizons afar.” What do you think this last clue means? Find examples in the story to support your answer.

15. In the book there is a signature of John Hancock. Who is John Hancock, and why is he important? Today we have an expression: “Sign your John Hancock.” What does this mean, where did it come from, and when would it be used?

16. While Jill and Ben are in the library, they discover a navigation instrument called a sextant used by Captain Oakes. Why are they no longer in use? Create a time line from 1783 – 2014 that includes the navigational instruments used by sailors. Include in your time line, historical events that were happening to give context, the development of technology, and other significant developments. Use an encyclopedia and an online time line maker to create your time line. Try using: http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline_2/

Activities

The following activities contained in this section address the following Common Core State Standards: (WHST.6. 6) (RL.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (RI.4–6. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9) (W.4–6. 4, 5, 6) (L.4–6.4, 5, 6) (CCRA.R.1)

1. In the prereading activities you were asked to make a chart that shows the reasons that the Keepers should save their school, and the reasons that it should be torn down for an amusement park. Find evidence in the story to support your reasons. Try to find at least five examples for each side of the argument. Expanding on what you have found, do further research in your school library and on the Internet for more information on your argument. (Hint: look for information about the environmental impact of amusement parks and/or the National Register of Historic Places.) Write a persuasive essay that states your position. Be sure to use trustworthy sources, include an introduction and a conclusion, state your claim clearly and use a variety of evidence to support your claim, restate your main points in the conclusion, and offer a lingering thought or new insight for your classmates to consider.

2. The titles of the books in this series are based on parts of historical quotes and documents. Read each title, scan the QR Code with your smart phone, or use the URL provided and answer each question using the document from the QR Code scan or URL:

Book title	QR Code	URL
<i>We the Children</i>		http://constitutionus.com/
<i>We the children</i> is a twist on the first words of the preamble to America's Constitution. What rights does the preamble guarantee the citizens of the United States? (Hint: there are at least five.) How do these rights apply to the Keepers of the School?		
<i>Fear Itself</i>		http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5057/
<i>Fear Itself</i> is part of a quote from an address by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. What is the full quote? During the time that Roosevelt gave this speech, the country had experienced some challenges. What are some challenges that we have faced today that are similar? What are some challenges that the Keepers faced as they tried to save their school? What do they have to fear and is this fear something they have any control over?		
<i>The Whites of Their Eyes</i>		http://teachinghistory.org/history-content/ask-a-historian/25687
<i>The Whites of their Eyes</i> is from a quote most likely from The Battle of Bunker Hill. What is the full quote, and what is the context for this quote? How does this apply to the Keepers and their understanding of history and the role it plays in saving their school?		
<i>In Harm's Way</i>		http://www.history.navy.mil/trivia/trivia02.htm
<i>In Harm's Way</i> is from a famous navy quote. What is the full quote and what does it mean? What is the importance of having a navy quote for the title of one of the books in this series? What could harm the Keeper's plans to save their school and cause them physical harm as well?		
<i>We Hold These Truths</i>		http://goo.gl/eZmJFG

We Hold These Truths is the first line in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. What is the Declaration of Independence, why is it significant in our history, and why is it important to the Keepers of the Duncan Oakes School?

Click here for more QR code information and to download a free QR reader for your smart phone. QR Code readers can also be found in the Google Play store and iTunes.
<https://www.the-qrcode-generator.com/whats-a-qr-code>

3. In your own words, write an essay using the documents from the QR Codes or URLs, the answers to the questions, and your knowledge of social studies to understand how the five titles in the Keepers of the School series work together and the history that inspired them. How does each of the pieces create a whole? How do you think the author, Andrew Clements, came up with this idea? Address your essay to Mr. Clements and give him suggestions for the next adventure(s) that Ben, Jill, and Robert might have.

***We Hold These Truths* Word Bank: Tier 2 Vocabulary**

Safeguard	Legacy	Artifacts	Maritime	Nautical
Commotion	Sextant	Instrumentally	Scuttled	Contraption
Tarnish	Grimace	Cupola	Parasitic	Analytical
Empirical	Assertion	Tangible	Transplant	Flustered
Sheathed	Culvert	Leverage	Trebuchet	Codicil
Inscription	Oxidation	Embedded	Quarterdeck	Chronometers
Revolution	Fret	Navigation	Flustered	Destructive

This curriculum guide was written in 2014 by Sharon Haupt, District Librarian, San Luis Coastal Unified School District, San Luis Obispo, CA.

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