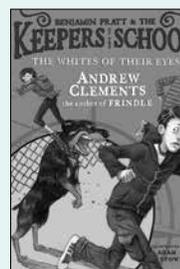
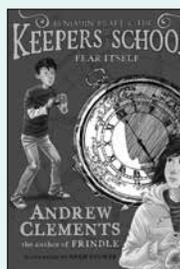
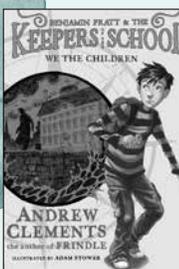
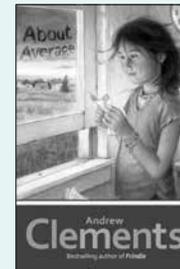
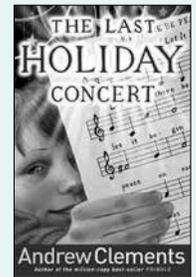
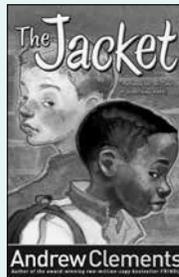


SCHOOL DAYS

A Guide to Books by Andrew Clements



About the Author

ANDREW CLEMENTS is the author of more than eighty books for young readers, including the two million-copy bestseller *Frindle*, which was nominated for thirty-eight state and regional awards, and went on to win nineteen of them, including the Christopher Award. *Lunch Money* was a *New York Times* bestseller, and Clements received an Edgar Award for Best Juvenile Mystery for his middle grade novel, *Room One: A Mystery or Two*. Mr. Clements taught in the public schools near Chicago for seven years before moving east to begin a career in publishing and writing. He has four grown children and lives with his wife in Western Massachusetts. Visit his website at AndrewClements.com.



Photo credit: Bill Crofton

About the Books

Nora wants to prove that test scores—even high ones—can be misleading. Nick wants to push his teacher’s language lesson to its ridiculous extreme. Cara wants everyone to know what’s really going on in her classroom. Jack doesn’t want any of his classmates to know what his father does for a living. Greg is on his way to being a millionaire—with a little help from his fellow students. Dave and Lynsey have engaged their entire fifth-grade class in a no-talking contest.

Andrew Clements’s stories are set firmly in the most essential of childhood settings, school, but the reason they strike such a chord with middle grade readers goes deeper than this straightforward platform. Clements takes the everyday reality of grade school life and turns it into an exceptional laboratory for observing the development of a person’s character. The works of Andrew Clements give readers insights and strategies for rising to the challenges of their classrooms.

The students who populate Clements’s tales are both highly interesting and appealingly imperfect. They have grand ideas or astonishing talents, yet they make mistakes or fail to turn in their homework. The parents and teachers who surround these students are carefully depicted with an empathetic eye to the adults’ points of view. The results are grade school worlds pulsing with energy, style, and a light touch of humor: worlds that are profoundly, identifiably real.

And, in Clements’s realistic schoolyards, his young characters begin to discover the people they hope to someday become. Whether exploring the validity of test scores as measures of human worth, confronting prejudice, or observing how individuals come to terms with their own special talents, Clements’s honesty is uncompromising, his eye unflinching. Best of all, no matter how difficult a situation he presents to them, Clements is always optimistic that his characters can learn, change, and grow. They are testaments to the good that can come from imperfect situations and the potential that can be realized in the most surprising moments.

Frindle



ABOUT THE BOOK

“If there is any justice in the world,” *Kirkus Reviews* wrote in its rave review of *Frindle*, “Clements may have something of a classic on his hands. By turns amusing and adroit, this first novel is also utterly satisfying.” Nick Allen, a fifth grader with a gift for creative ideas and a taste for troublemaking, coins a new word for pen—frindle. All he wanted to do was play a little trick on Mrs. Granger, a legendary language arts teacher with a passion for proper vocabulary. After all, she told him that ordinary people determine which words end up in the dictionary. But when his new word sweeps the nation, Nick fears that he might have created a monster. “Readers,” *School Library Journal* predicted, “will chuckle from beginning to end. . . Outstanding and witty.”

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Describing his novel, Andrew Clements writes that *Frindle* “is about discovering the true nature of words, language, thought, community, learning.” Take each of these ideas one at a time. How is each explored in *Frindle*? What do you think is the true nature of each?
- The frindle is just one of Nick’s great ideas. Brainstorm about ways you could improve your own school. How can you turn your ideas into action?
- “Every good story,” Mrs. Granger writes to Nick, “needs a bad guy, don’t you think?” Do you agree? Does every good story have a villain? Can you think of any that don’t?
- Brian Selznick’s illustrations add their own sly humor to *Frindle*. Discuss a few of your favorites in detail. For example, how does his first illustration, opposite the title page, help set up the novel? How do you know from his full-page portrait of Mrs. Granger that she can’t be pushed around?
- Although Nick didn’t know it until he turned twenty-one, his new word earned him a huge amount of money. Do you think his parents were right in setting up a trust fund for him? What do you think he might have done with the money if he could have spent it earlier? What would you do if you suddenly had a lot of money of your own?
- “School,” the author writes in *Frindle*, “was the perfect place to launch a new word.” Why? What makes schools such good breeding grounds for fads? Do companies or community organizations ever use your school for promoting products or services? How?
- Years after he leaves Mrs. Granger’s class, Nick finds a perfect way to show her how important she was to him. What’s your teacher’s idea of a perfect gift from a former student? Has he or she received it yet?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Create and define your own new word. Think of an object, a situation, or behavior that you think needs a single new word all its own.
- When Nick decides to call a pen a frindle, he creates a new synonym for a word that has few. But many words, such as friend or attractive, already have several common synonyms. On your own or with a group, make a list of words with many synonyms. What’s the largest number of synonyms you can come up with for one single word?
- New inventions and ideas or changing cultural influences continually add new words to our language. With the help of your parents or another adult, assemble a list of new words or new meanings for old words that have entered common usage within the last generation. Ask them as well about common words from their own childhood that are now seldom used.

- Nick makes his mark on the world even though he’s just a fifth grader. Research and report to your class on other individuals who made significant contributions to literature, science, music, or other fields while still very young. If possible, bring in examples of their work.
- Interview a parent or a close adult friend about the teacher who meant the most to them when they were young. Did they always admire that teacher or did they grow to respect him or her more over time? What did they learn from that teacher? How did they learn it? Have they kept up with the teacher since leaving school?
- Mrs. Granger is a firm believer in improving vocabulary by studying word lists, but there are also playful ways to boost your word power. Look for board games based on words, crossword puzzles, or any books that feature word games. And, of course, reading more good books is another sure way to increase your vocabulary.
- News about Nick’s new word spreads fast. First within his class, then in his hometown newspaper, later on television news shows and entertainment talk shows. Track a current news story through the media. Where did you first learn about the story? Keep a record of all the media outlets—newspapers, magazines, the Internet, radio and television newscasts, or entertainment shows—that also feature the same story.

THE LANDRY NEWS



ABOUT THE BOOK

New to Denton Elementary, Cara Landry is stuck in a class where no one wants to be. The teacher reads the newspaper all day while the children occupy themselves, often with mischief. But Cara, a budding journalist, has an important story to tell about what’s really going on in Mr. Larson’s class. Her newspaper, called *The Landry News*, is just a handwritten sheet at first. It soon grows in size and in circulation, transforming Cara and re-energizing a teacher who had long ago forgotten just how much he loved his profession. “A thought-provoking novel by the author of *Frindle*,” observes *School Library Journal* in its starred review. “Sure to stimulate classroom discussion,” *Booklist* adds.

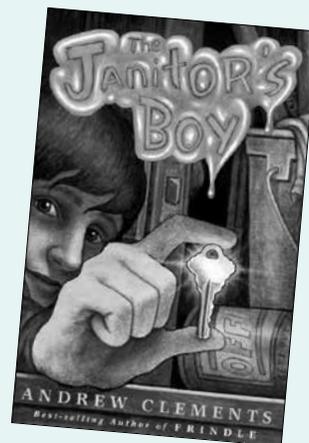
DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Before Cara came to Denton Elementary School, she wrote a newspaper in her old school. What motivated her to start that newspaper? What was its tone?
- “Truth is good,” Cara’s mother says. “But when you are publishing all that truth, just be sure there’s some mercy, too.” What does she mean by that? Do you agree that mercy is as important as truth?
- Over the years, Mr. Larson became a lazy and sloppy teacher, and students became bored and restless in his classroom. How was the class’s atmosphere good for Cara? Would it be good for you?
- Mr. Larson was stung by Cara’s first editorial, but *The Landry News* ended up reviving his love of teaching. How?
- *The Landry News* starts small, but soon the whole school is reading it. How did Cara’s duties change as the newspaper grew? What were the advantages of having a larger readership? What were the risks?
- Mr. Larson’s students know very little about his life outside of school. How much do you know about your teachers? What do you imagine they do on their own time? Do you believe they have different in-school and out-of-school personalities?

- Why was the principal so upset by the “Lost and Found” article in *The Landry News*? Would you be?
- “Some people are newsmakers,” observes Cara, “and some aren’t.” Who are the newsmakers in your school or neighborhood? What makes them so interesting to others?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Produce your own classroom or neighborhood newspaper inspired by *The Landry News*.
- Newspaper stories begin with a headline and so does each chapter in *The Landry News*. Choose several of your favorite chapters and write an alternate headline for each. Come up with headlines to describe specific days in your own life.
- The First Amendment to the United States Constitution is very short, and yet its meaning has long been the subject of heated debate. Read it for yourself. Research recent controversies over the freedom of the press. Perhaps your local newspaper or television station has been involved in First Amendment disputes.
- Invite a local journalist to come speak about the profession. What are the satisfactions of the job? What are the frustrations? What skills does the job require? How do you learn them?
- Cara discovers that there can be a big difference in the way newspapers and television cover the same story. Make your own comparisons. Track a single story through several news media. Which medium do you think is the most informative? Which is the most interesting?
- Attend a meeting of your local school board. Who are the members? How are they selected? What are the important educational issues in your community?
- Read the editorials in your local newspaper. Are they as well written and as clear as Cara’s? Do you agree with them?



ABOUT THE BOOK

Who wants to be the school janitor’s son? Fifth-grader Jack Rankin certainly doesn’t. Not only is Jack embarrassed by his dad’s job, he’s angry. So he hatches a plan to get back at him by slathering a music room desk in sticky, smelly watermelon bubble gum. Unfortunately, Jack gets caught. Not realizing who Jack’s father is, the punishment the school principal doles out is to have Jack help clean gum off school property. As he scrapes messes from the bottoms of desks and tables, Jack fumes. He is nothing like his father, despite what everyone says. He is never going to be a janitor. He is going to college! One afternoon, while collecting gum-cleaning supplies, Jack finds two curious unmarked keys in the janitor’s closet. As he discovers the doors that the keys unlock and unravels the mysteries behind them, Jack also finds a way to open something much more important: a line of communication between himself and his father. He begins to understand the elements of his dad’s past that have led him to his job and his life, and to appreciate his quiet, unheralded acts of generosity and kindness. With his anger and confusion scraped away like a gob of sticky gum, Jack is finally glad to be the loving, caring, hardworking janitor’s boy.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Jack makes a careful plan to deface a music room desk. Explain Jack's plan. Do you think most kids put gum under desks or do other damage to school property in similar ways, or for similar reasons? What does Jack hope to achieve with his gum plan?
- In chapter two, Andrew Clements writes: "...laughter from kids is more powerful than words from teachers." What does this mean? In what ways is this statement correct? In what ways is this statement incorrect?
- What do Luke and Kirk do to Jack after his dad cleans up their classroom in chapter three? What other encounters does Jack have with Luke and Kirk? How does he handle them? Do you think Jack uses a good strategy to handle these boys? Explain your answer. Have you ever teased another kid about something he or she could not change? Why did you do this? How did you feel about it afterwards?
- Chapter six begins with a discussion of ways in which Jack is like his dad. Are you ever told you are like your father, mother, or another family member? How does this comparison make you feel? How does the comparison make Jack feel? What is the real reason he feels this way?
- Describe Jack's mother and sister. Do you think Jack has a good home life? How might this story have been different had Jack explained his feelings to one of his parents? Do you think he understood his feelings well enough to explain them?
- How does Jack's father react to Jack's bad behavior and punishment? What does Jack think about this reaction?
- What is the thing that Helen calls "Boy Territory"? Do you think there is a comparable place that could be called "Girl Territory"? What is the author really describing when he speaks of "Boy Territory"?
- What does Jack learn about gum from his three-week punishment? What does he learn about the old school building? What does he learn about his father's job?
- What happens when Jack discovers that one of the mystery keys leads him to the tower? Late in the story, another character admits to spending time up in the tower. Who admits this? Did this admission surprise you? What does the tower section of the story show readers about this character? What does it teach readers about Jack?
- What does Jack's father tell him about his grandfather? Why do you think he tells him this story? Do you think Jack's grandfather was a good person? Was he a good father? In what ways is Jack's dad similar to or different from Jack's grandfather? Do you think Jack's dad would have reacted the same way to the totaled car? Explain your answer.
- Explain what John means when he says, "My life is my life, and yours is yours. I'm just glad that we get to run side by side for a few years, that's all."
- Can you think of a moment in time when you felt you really understood a parent's point of view? Describe this moment and how it affected your relationship with this adult.

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Interview an adult at your school who holds a job other than that of teacher, such as an administrator, cafeteria cook, or janitor. Include questions about their job responsibilities, how they came to have their job, their childhood, life outside of school, favorite books, and special interests. Videotape the interview, or use the information to write a newspaper-style article about your chosen person.
- Organize a school cleanup day. Ask your teacher, principal, or janitor what type of cleanup is most needed. Make posters announcing your cleanup day. Make a list of tasks and divide them among participating students or classes. Take pictures of the big cleanup and create a wall display recapping highlights of the day.
- Jack makes a list of ways he is not like his father. Make your own list of ways you are similar to and different from others in your family. What similarity makes you most proud? What difference do you find most interesting? Try turning your list into a poem.
- Make a map of your school. First, take a walk around the school, taking careful notes about what you observe. If necessary, use a separate sheet of graph paper for each floor of your school. Use a rule and colored pencils to create

your map, being sure to label halls, classrooms, the gym, the library, the office, and other important places. Highlight favorite locations or places of special interest. Mount your finished map on a sheet of colored paper to create a frame. If possible, compare your map to the maps of classmates or friends. What similarities and differences can you find? What can you learn about different kids' feelings about their school from looking at their maps?

- Like his father, John the janitor is willing to quietly help others without seeking any recognition for himself. Make a quiet offer of help to someone in your community. Rake an elderly neighbor's yard, help a busy parent by playing with his or her preschoolers for an afternoon, or give a teacher a hand straightening up his or her classroom after school. Don't wait until you're asked, and don't ask for anything in return. Afterwards, write a short journal entry explaining how your action made you feel. Will you do such a thing again?
- Go to your local library or online to learn more about American war veterans. Then create a patriotic poster honoring all of America's veterans, or an individual veteran you know. Invite some veterans from your community to a classroom or school assembly acknowledging their contributions. The assembly could include a short performance of patriotic music, tasty treats, and the presentation of your posters.
- Write a short essay describing the job held by one of your parents or guardians. What do you know about their job? How did they come to have this job? How do you feel about the position they hold? Would you like to have a similar job when you grow up? Why or why not?
- Why do kids sometimes find it difficult to tell their parents how they are really feeling? What might be some ways to make communication easier? Write lyrics for a song about a kid talking to an adult. Set your words to a favorite song. If desired, perform your song for family members or friends.

THE SCHOOL STORY



ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Natalie Nelson has written a powerful school story. It's a short novel called *The Cheater*, and her best friend Zoe Reisman is certain it should be published. All Natalie has to do is give the manuscript to her mom, an editor at a big publishing house. Natalie doesn't want any favors from her mom. Still, Zoe won't drop the idea.

Spurred into action, Natalie invents a pen name for herself, and Zoe becomes a self-styled literary agent. But if the girls are to succeed, they'll need support from their wary English teacher, legal advice from Zoe's tough-talking father, and some clever maneuvering to outwit the overbearing editor-in-chief of Shipley Junior Books.

This is the story of two irrepressible girls who use their talent, ingenuity, and a little cunning to try to make a young writer's dream come true.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- *The School Story* is a novel about the power of friendships, specifically the one between best friends Natalie Nelson and Zoe Reisman. But other friendships (obvious and not so obvious) are also explored in this story. Identify the different friendships included in the story and discuss them. What is your definition of a "friend"? Is it possible to have friendships with your parents, your relatives, your coworkers, and your teachers?

- Natalie and Zoe have a “push and pull friendship.” What does this mean? Do you think Natalie and Zoe’s friendship is stronger because they are so different from each other? Which girl would *you* most likely become friends with: Natalie or Zoe? Why?
- The topics of cheating and fairness are explored throughout this book. Natalie is initially dubious about adopting a pseudonym to submit *The Cheater* to Shipley Junior Books; she feels like she’s cheating by doing so. Do you agree? Do you think it’s fair that Natalie is able to use her contacts to get immediate attention for her book while numerous other manuscripts linger on the “slush pile” for months? Would you do the same if you were in her position?
- Ms. Clayton is initially wary about getting involved with Natalie and Zoe’s plan, but she decides to forge ahead anyway. Do you ever doubt that this is a good decision on Ms. Clayton’s part? How does helping the girls with their project help Ms. Clayton in the end?
- Why do you think Zoe works so hard to get Natalie’s book published? Do you think the book would have been published without Zoe’s resourcefulness and determination?
- Sometimes taking risks in life is necessary in order to grow as a human being. Other than Natalie and Zoe, identify the characters who take risks in *The School Story*. Why do they take these risks, and what is the outcome? How do these risks contribute to their self-discovery?
- The father/daughter bond is a prevalent theme in *The School Story*. Natalie writes *The Cheater* to feel closer to her late father. But how does she in reality become closer to her mother by writing the novel? How does Natalie’s relationship with her mother change over the course of the book? What other father/daughter bonds are explored?
- Andrew Clements writes in *The School Story* that “some people are talkers, and some people are writers.” Which are you, and why?

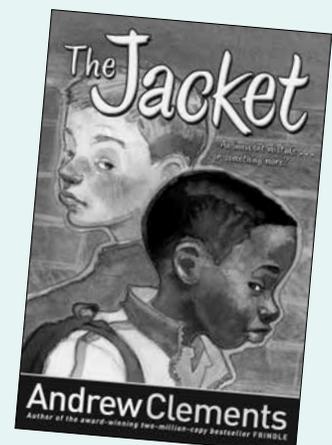
ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Research the children’s publishing industry. Read back issues of *Publishers Weekly* online (PublishersWeekly.com) or at the library. Log on to the Internet to do additional research about the various children’s publishers. The Children’s Book Council website (CBCBooks.org) is a good place to start. How many children’s publishers exist? What are the editorial guidelines for each company? Discuss what you learn from your research.
- Find out about authors who currently write under pseudonyms. Can you discover why they adopt pen names and do not use their real names? If you assumed a pseudonym, what would it be, and why?
- Based on the information provided in *The School Story*, make a chart that shows the different jobs people do in a publishing house. Did you realize that there were so many people involved with the creation of a single book? Which job discussed in *The School Story* intrigues you most?
- Invite a local children’s book author or illustrator to come to your school to talk about his or her experiences writing books for children. Attend a book signing by an author or illustrator at a local bookstore.

The Jacket

ABOUT THE BOOK

Phil is a sixth grader on a mission. His absentminded little brother forgot his lunch money. All kinds of thoughts are running through Phil’s mind as he searches for Jimmy in the throngs of fourth and fifth graders crowding the school hallway . . . if I’m late for math today, then



I might not be allowed to take the test—and then I could flunk math! I might even flunk sixth grade and get left back! Then, with a sigh of relief, Phil spots Jimmy’s one-of-a-kind jacket. Except the person wearing it isn’t his brother; it’s someone he’s never seen before, who happens to be black. Automatically Phil assumes that this boy, Daniel, has stolen the jacket. When Phil finds out the truth about why Daniel has his brother’s jacket, he is forced to examine his own racist thoughts and how they play out in his life.

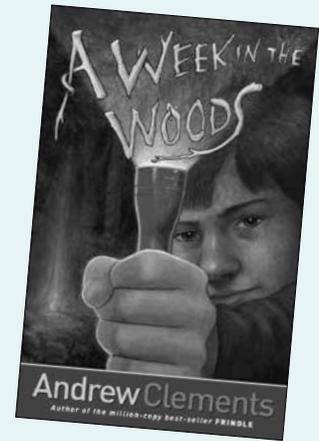
DISCUSSION TOPICS

- What’s your opinion of how the principal solved the problem between the boys? What would you have done if you’d been the principal? How are conflicts handled in your school? Do you agree with the rules and policies in your school? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Phil got so angry when he saw Daniel wearing his brother’s jacket? If you were Phil in this story, how would you have reacted when you saw someone wearing your brother’s jacket? What would you have done in Daniel’s shoes?
- Phil thinks “being friends with everyone and being someone’s friend are two different things.” Do you agree or disagree with him? Why? Describe someone who’s your friend. Describe someone who’s an acquaintance. What is the same/different about these two people? What makes someone a friend?
- Phil wonders how he would have treated Daniel had he been white. Do you think Phil is prejudiced? Why or why not? What does it mean to be prejudiced? Use specific events from the story to support your opinion. How does Phil grow and change as a character from his experiences in this story? What kinds of life lessons does he learn?
- Do you think Phil’s mom could be prejudiced? Why or why not? What’s your opinion about the way that Phil’s mom answered his questions about being prejudiced?
- Phil’s father has some strong feelings about black people in sports. Reread the conversation Phil has with his father about this. What is your opinion? Do you think, “it’s all about the black guys”? Why?
- Phil realizes that he never knew black kids could live in neighborhoods like his own. He’s not sure if he should feel good about this or not. Why? Before reading this story how did you think people of other races lived? What experiences have you had to give you this knowledge?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Research people who have fought for civil rights for African Americans in the United States. Make a list of these influential people in history. Pick one and write a biography describing the struggles and hardships he/she faced. Share your biography with the class.
- While riding the bus, Phil wonders what it would be like for Daniel to ride on his bus. What would it be like for someone of a different race to ride on your school bus? Research Rosa Parks. What experience did she have with riding a bus? If you had been in Rosa Parks’s shoes, do you think you could have been as courageous as she was?
- In *The Jacket*, Phil is dealing with some internal struggles regarding his own ideas about racism. Think of another book that you’ve read where the main character is also dealing with internal struggles. Compare and contrast these two characters and the issues they are facing.
- Continue this story and write the next chapter of *The Jacket*.
- Draw or find a picture of a jacket. Write on it, or attach to it, words that come to mind when you think of the story you’ve just read. Include words that show your opinion of the story and the message it sends to its readers. Display the jackets on a clothesline in your classroom.
- Pretend you are a reporter writing a news article about what has happened between Phil and Daniel and the jacket. Give your article a headline. Organize your facts as they would be in a news story with the most important facts listed first and then the supporting details.

A WEEK IN THE WOODS



ABOUT THE BOOK

Mark Chelmsley is not going to try anymore. He's not going to adjust to his new house in New Hampshire. He's not going to make friends at his new public school. And he is not going to get excited about the highlight of the fifth-grade year—a week-long trip to Gray's Notch State Park—even when his science teacher, Mr. Maxwell, offers him encouragement. Still, as Mark snowshoes through the woods, camps in a century-old barn, and watches the snowy winter melt into spring, he forges his own connection with this new place. He begins to feel happy and to make an effort in school. Mr. Maxwell, however, is not ready to forgive the kid he sees as a spoiled slacker. When he catches Mark with a knife on the first day of the trip, discipline is fast and furious. Mark, unwilling to admit he is taking the blame for a friend, stalks into the forest, where a few wrong turns get him dangerously lost. Mr. Maxwell realizes what has happened and rushes heedlessly after Mark, injuring his ankle. As night falls, the two find each other. With the benefit of Mark's supplies and his teacher's navigational skills, they return to camp. More importantly, they find a way to forgive each other. Safe once more, Mark realizes that his week in the woods has taught him the lesson of a lifetime.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Why do you think Mr. Maxwell enjoys preparing for the “Week in the Woods”? Why are most Whitson students looking forward to the trip? Is Mark looking forward to the trip? Do you think you would enjoy such a trip? Explain your answers.
- How does Mark feel about his parents? How does he feel about Anya and Leon? How does he feel about leaving Scarsdale to move to New Hampshire midway through the school year?
- What do the teachers and students at the elementary school in Whitson think of Mark at the beginning of the story? List some reasons for the impressions they have of him. Are their impressions correct?
- At the beginning of chapter six, Mr. Maxwell describes his strategies for dealing with students. What do you think of these rules? Do you think they are good rules? What suggestions might you give Mr. Maxwell for making his class exciting and keeping his students involved and disciplined?
- What things does Mark do to upset Mr. Maxwell? Is he trying to upset Mr. Maxwell? What is Mark trying to do? How does Mr. Maxwell try to reach out to him? Is Mr. Maxwell successful?
- During the first two weeks in New Hampshire, Mark had explored the grounds and barn on his family's property. He had also “. . . found his own sense of time—time present—and he had discovered how much this time was worth.” What does Andrew Clements mean by “time present”? Why is this discovery so important for Mark?
- What are some things Mark learns from his camping experiments around his home? As he watches winter change to spring, what changes does Mark make in his behavior at school?
- Why does Mark decide to take the blame for Jason's bringing a knife on the camping trip? Why does Mr. Maxwell react so strongly when he believes Mark has broken the rules?

- Why does Mark really head out into the woods? What does he think he will prove? Is he making a good decision?
- How does Mr. Maxwell feel about Mark's disappearance? What does he do? What mistakes does he make?
- How do Mr. Maxwell and Mark make it back to the campground? What have they learned about each other in the course of their ordeal?
- Why does Mark want his father to bring the penny from the radiator up to New Hampshire? What does this mean about the way he feels about his new home?
- In chapter two, the author notes that ". . .when it came to Mark Robert Chelmsley and his future, things weren't discussed. They were decided." What does he mean by this? Is this statement still true at the end of the story? Why or why not?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Has your family ever moved or have you had a good friend move away? Write a short story describing one of these experiences. Include details about the why, when, and where of the move as well as how you felt about it and something you learned. Illustrate your story with photographs or drawings. Share your story with a friend or classmate.
- In the course of the novel, Mark develops a new appreciation for the outdoors. Experience nature in a fresh, new way. Get up early to watch the sunrise, spend a quiet lunch period observing the plants and animals in a local park, or host a backyard sleepover during which you study the night sky. Afterward, make a list of five new things you noticed about nature in the course of your activity. If desired, create a display box filled with artifacts such as stones, leaves, pressed flowers, sketches, or photographs collected during your outdoor adventure.
- Go to your local library or online, or page through sporting goods catalogues, to find out more about hiking and camping staples. Then create a wish list of camping supplies. What would you buy if you had a budget of \$100, \$500, or another amount? Make a poster displaying images of your chosen camping supplies along with notes about why they are necessary and in what ways they might be used.
- Mark seems to do everything wrong when he arrives at the public elementary school in Whitson. Imagine that you are a student at Whitson. You have decided to befriend Mark. Write the script for a scene (or a few paragraphs of dialogue) in which you try to help Mark adjust to his new school and give him some pointers on making friends. Perform your scene, having a friend read Mark's lines while you read yours.
- Every year Mr. Maxwell looks forward to the "Week in the Woods." On your own, or with classmates, plan a daylong or weeklong outdoor adventure. Where would you go? Collect information about your destination from travel brochures, books, or websites. Find a map of the area on which to chart your trip. Make a schedule of activities, such as collecting nature specimens, stargazing, or telling ghost stories. Make a list of important items participants should pack and bring. Compile your research into a trip brochure. If possible, type your brochure on the computer, adding interesting fonts and graphics.
- Draw a picture of the place you feel most at home. It could be your bedroom or family room, a tree house or play area, or even a spot at a grandparent's or friend's place. Tape or glue your picture on a larger sheet of colored paper to create a frame. Fill the colored border with words that make you think of home.
- Imagine that you are Mark Chelmsley. In the character of Mark, write a journal entry describing how you feel arriving at your new house, sleeping alone in the old barn, getting caught with Jason's knife, or getting lost in the woods.
- Try using a compass and map to find your way through a park or playground. Then write directions from the entrance of the park or playground to a specific place such as a climbing structure or stand of trees. For example: "From the entrance gate, walk forty feet west, then turn east and continue on for ten feet." Have a friend try to follow your directions with their own compass and map. Go to the library or online to learn more about the sport and skill of orienteering.
- Create a welcome packet for new students coming to your school. Include such items as a school map, daily schedule, cafeteria menu, a sketch of your school mascot, and a list of available teams, clubs, and activities. Write a welcome letter. Decorate a folder with drawings, photographs, and stickers in your school colors, and then put your welcome letter and the other information inside.

THE REPORT CARD



ABOUT THE BOOK

Fifth-grader Nora Rose Rowley has been keeping an unusual secret for most of her life. The secret is that she is very, very smart. She does not want her family, friends, or teachers to know that she is highly intelligent because she does not want to be singled out as different. She does not want to leave her regular fifth-grade class to attend the Gifted Program. Most of all, she does not want her best friend Stephen to feel less good about himself because she is so much smarter. It is this reason that leads Nora to draw a very smart conclusion: that tests and grades should not be the only way students are judged. To prove this, however, Nora sets a not-so-smart plan into action: She decides to flunk fifth grade. What begins as a simple effort to protect her friend and prove her point snowballs into a classroom-wide “Get a Zero” campaign that ultimately involves teachers, counselors, even school administrators and threatens to get both her and Stephen suspended. Worst of all, Nora’s secret is discovered. Or perhaps this is the best result, for now Nora must find a way to be her true, intelligent self as she navigates through the remainder of fifth grade, through family relationships and friendships, and through the rest of her life.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Nora has kept her intelligence a secret from her family, friends, and teachers for a long time. Give several examples of ways Nora keeps her secret. Do you think Nora made a good choice to keep this secret? Why or why not?
- Nora says that she got her terrible report card for Stephen. Explain this statement. List some of the ways Nora describes her friend Stephen. How do you think Nora really feels about Stephen? Do you think protecting Stephen is truly the only reason Nora decided to get a bad report card?
- Nora pigeonholes her sister and brother into specific roles in the family. Ann is the successful student. Todd is the average-yet-likeable guy. What role does Nora see herself playing? How does this affect her actions? Do you feel you play a particular role in your family? How does this affect your behavior?
- Nora feels that the only place she can let everyone see her talents is on the soccer field. Why does she feel this way? How are being a good athlete and being a good student perceived differently at your school? How do you feel about this situation?
- Describe what happens at your school and at home on a report card day. What is special about a report card day? Who opens your report card? How do you feel just before the report card is opened? What happens if you get especially good or bad grades?
- Early in the book, Nora remarks that “fifth grade grades matter.” What does she mean? How do your grades contribute to your opinion of yourself? How do your grades contribute to your parents’, friends’, and teachers’ opinions of you? Do you think your grades paint a fair picture of you?
- Nora’s bad grades get a lot of people in trouble besides herself. This is surprising to Nora. List the people who also get

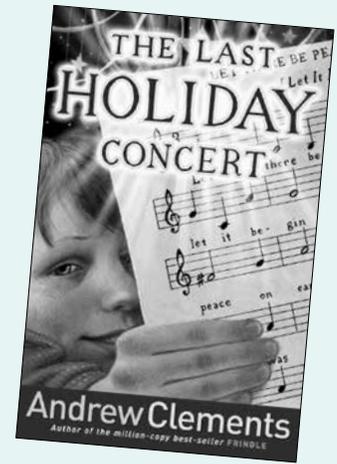
“bad grades” as a result of Nora’s poor school performance and describe the other surprising results of her failure.

- When the school administrators confront Stephen and Nora with their “Get a Zero” plan, Mrs. Hackney says: “A disobedient attitude has been set loose in our school. And we have got to stop it.” Why is Mrs. Hackney so concerned about this problem? What do you think might have happened had Nora and Stephen not been caught so early on in their “zero rebellion”?
- Would you like to go to a school without tests or grades? Why or why not? List some of the possible positive and negative aspects of such a school.
- List the following qualities in order of importance: intelligence, compassion, patience, honesty, creativity, diligence. Explain your list.
- What does it mean to feel, or to be, normal? Describe a “normal” kid or a “normal” day? Do you think being “normal” is a good goal for Nora? Is it a good goal for kids in general? Is there really such a thing as “normal”?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Designing a good educational system, making daily decisions, and keeping discipline in an elementary school is a big challenge. Make a chart depicting the way the administration of your school is organized, starting with your principal, school board, and parent-teacher organization. If possible, interview your school principal, guidance counselor, office manager, or another school administrator about his or her job. Then write a newspaper article about this person and the role he or she plays in school life.
- *The Report Card* is not just a story about tests and grades. It is also a story about friendship and the people we choose to trust. Create a poster featuring famous friends from literature, such as Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn (*Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain) or Betsy and Tacy (Betsy-Tacy books by Maud Hart Lovelace). What qualities do these friendships share? Make a list of the most important qualities of a good friend.
- Early in the book, Nora describes how she first got to know her friend Stephen. Write a paragraph or short story about how you met one of your best friends. Include details about your ages, the place of your meeting, how you were feeling before you became friends, and how you feel about the friendship today.
- One way Mrs. Byrne comes to recognize Nora’s intelligence is by reviewing the websites she visited on the library computer. Keep a log of websites you visit over the next day or week. Afterwards, review your log, or exchange logs with a friend or classmate for review. What can you learn about yourself, or your classmate, from these web logs?
- Although they may not have chosen the right plan, Nora and Stephen have an important message about testing and a valid desire to share their thoughts. Choose an issue about which you feel strongly, such as recycling, protecting an endangered animal, eating organic foods, or improving school safety. Create a plan for sharing your feelings with your school or community. Discuss the plan with a parent, teacher, or community leader. Use their input to refine your plan. Put your plan into action.
- Nora’s sister, Ann, has clear goals for life after high school, while Nora seems uncertain. Consider your own future ambitions. Then write a paragraph describing what you hope to accomplish after high school. If possible, share your paragraph with your class or a group of friends. Do many of you share similar ambitions? Are your dreams very diverse? How might you, and your friends, achieve your goals?
- Go to your library or media center to learn more about intelligence and testing. Then hold a debate on the topic of testing. Divide the group into two teams arguing the pro (for) and con (against) sides of a testing debate. Consider such questions as: Do IQ tests measure intelligence fairly? Should intelligence be measured at all? If desired, expand the debate to consider classroom tests and grades.

THE LAST HOLIDAY CONCERT



ABOUT THE BOOK

Just because he is popular doesn't mean sixth-grader Hart Evans has all the answers. He doesn't know how to get his little sister Sarah off his back. And he doesn't know how to make Mr. Meinert's chorus class any less aggravating. Or maybe he does. One boring afternoon Hart snaps a rubber band toward his teacher's podium with an astonishing result. Struggling to control the class and about to be laid off, Mr. Meinert is in no mood to have his worth challenged by a student prank. So he simply stops rehearsing for the upcoming holiday concert. The class elects an unwilling Hart as their new director. Unlike Mr. Meinert and his iron fist, Hart manages the class with loose, friendly charm and encourages everyone's input. But as the show date approaches, it becomes clear that the concert is chaos. When Hart tries to take tighter control, selecting which kids' acts to include and which to leave out, his popularity plummets. Distressed by his loss of friends yet not willing to put on a mediocre show, Hart turns to Mr. Meinert. The incredible concert that finally comes to the stage incorporates the Hart-generated frenzy of ideas around Mr. Meinert's structured theme. They call it Winterhope. But will it be the last holiday concert of them all?

DISCUSSION TOPICS

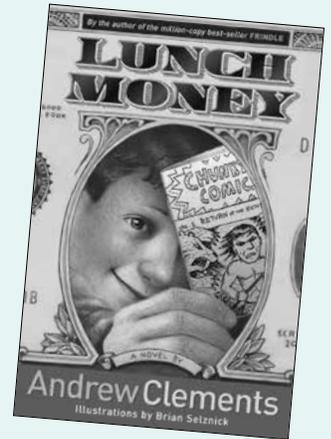
- At the beginning of the story, do you like Hart Evans? Do you think he would be a popular kid at your school? Explain your answers.
- Why doesn't Hart like chorus? What reasons might Mr. Meinert give for being afraid to lose control of his classroom? Do you think there is a relationship between these two problems?
- Do you think the punishment Principal Richards gives Hart for shooting rubber bands is appropriate? How does Hart tell his parents about his punishment? What do these events teach readers about Hart?
- Why is Mr. Meinert going to lose his job after the holidays? What does his wife, Lucy, think he should do about the situation? How does Mr. Meinert feel about Lucy's opinion?
- What happens to the chorus after Mr. Meinert announces that he will no longer be in charge of the holiday concert? What is Hart's reaction to the chorus's election of him as the new director? What might you have done in the same situation?
- What do you think Mr. Meinert expects will happen after he gives up control of the chorus? Are his expectations fulfilled? Explain your answer.
- How does Hart shift from being one of the most popular kids in school to one of the least popular? What happens when Hart finally gets to ride in his father's new sports car?
- At first Hart, as chorus director, encourages his classmates to "think big, think free, think bold." As the concert date approaches, why does Hart begin to reconsider this approach? Was his approach wrong in the first place?
- Hart feels that his problem with the chorus is "human nature itself." He divides the class into three types of people: "the doers, the floaters, and the gofers." How does Hart define each type of kid? Do his definitions apply to the kids you know?

- In the end, how is the problem of the out-of-control concert really solved and by whom? Explain the satisfactions and dissatisfactions the students and Mr. Meinert probably have with the result. How would you have felt to be part of such a concert?
- Might there be more than one reason this novel is entitled *The Last Holiday Concert*? Explain. List three things Mr. Meinert learns about teaching and students. List three things Hart learns about popularity and leadership.

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Popularity is an important issue for many kids. What does being popular mean to you? List ten or more words or phrases that come to mind when you think about popularity. Then create a survey asking friends or classmates to rank popularity, good grades, athletic ability, artistic talent, teachers' approval, and parents' approval in order of importance. Add any other questions you would like. Collect the (anonymous) surveys and create a chart displaying the results. What do the results teach you?
- To express their concerns about war, the kids in Mr. Meinert's chorus make up their own lyrics to "Jingle Bells." Select a theme of interest or concern to you. Write your own lyrics to "Jingle Bells," or another familiar song, in which you explore your theme.
- Write a two- to three- paragraph essay describing the best teacher you ever had. What was special about his or her classroom and teaching style? What was the most important thing you learned from this teacher? How does having a good teacher make you feel or behave? (Note: Unless you want to, you do not have to give the teacher's name.)
- Imagine you are Hart's sister Sarah, his friend Zach, or his friend Alex. Write two journal entries describing how you feel about Hart at the beginning of the story and after the concert. Then write two paragraphs describing how you think Hart felt about himself at these two points in the novel.
- Even good kids act up sometimes. Imagine you are writing a script for a television comedy or drama entitled "The Day I Misbehaved." Choose one scene to write, such as the moment you got caught, telling your parents, serving out your punishment, or telling someone what you learned. Read the finished scene aloud with friends or classmates.
- Many of the kids in the chorus offer Hart suggestions about things they could do in the concert. If you were in Hart's class, what special talent or trick might you have offered? Write a paragraph describing your talent, adding a photograph, sketch, or diagram if desired. Combine your paragraph with those of friends or classmates to create a wall display entitled "Our Many Talents."
- Like Mr. Meinert, does your life outside of school affect your school performance? Keep a week-long journal. Each morning, write a paragraph noting your feelings, thoughts, plans, or concerns. After school, write down observations or recollections about the day. Did you do well on a test? Get into an argument? Receive a compliment? After the week reread your journal. Are there any connections between your home life and school life? Discuss your observations with a friend or classmate.
- With a group of friends or classmates, plan a performance of your own, perhaps for a younger class or for your family. What theme might you choose? What songs, acts, costumes, sets, or other elements will you include? How will you organize and direct rehearsals? Ask an adult to help oversee your rehearsals. After the show, discuss your experience of planning and performing the show.
- What does Andrew Clements mean at the end of chapter eight when he writes: ". . .no one knew Hart Evans as well as they thought they did—including Hart Evans himself"? Have you ever surprised yourself with a skill or talent you did not realize you had? Draw a series of cartoon-style panels depicting this experience.
- Are the arts important to you and your friends? Write a letter to your school or community newspaper explaining why the arts are important to kids or write a letter of support to a local artist or arts organization, such as a theater or orchestra. Participate in the arts yourself by taking a class, attending a performance, or being in a show yourself!

LUNCH MONEY



ABOUT THE BOOK

Greg loves money. When he notices his classmates' ready supply of change for lunchtime treats, he's sure it's the key to reaching his get-rich goal. But Principal Davenport disapproves of peddling toys at school. So Greg invents the Chunky Comic. Who could object to selling books? Greg is frustrated by competition from another comic book maker, his longtime rival, Maura. But when Mrs. Davenport bans comics altogether, the two form an unlikely alliance and make their case to the school committee. The experience teaches Greg a lot about Maura, his principal, and the challenges of running a school system. Most importantly, Greg discovers that making money is much more satisfying if at least some of it can be used to help others.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

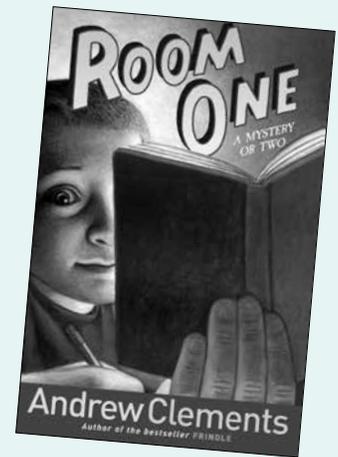
- What is Greg's greatest talent? How does he earn money? Do you like to earn money? How do you earn money? What do you do with your money?
- In Chapter 2, what discovery does Greg make about quarters? What happens when he tries to sell candy and toys at school? Is Principal Davenport correct in her actions? Explain your answer.
- What does Greg sell at the beginning of sixth grade? Describe how he learned to create this product over the summer. Would you have been willing to work so hard to make something to sell? What does this tell you about Greg?
- What competition do Chunky Comics face? Who creates the competition? Describe the relationship between these characters in the first half of the novel.
- What does Mr. Z like about numbers? What happens when he sees Maura give Greg a bloody nose? How does Mr. Z feel about Greg's situation? What role does math play in his analysis?
- When they finally have a serious discussion about comics, what does Greg realize about Maura? What does Maura realize about Greg? How does Mr. Z analyze Greg's claim that Maura "stole" his idea? What happens when the two sixth graders begin to work together?
- How did Mr. Z choose his job? What do Mr. Z's comments about wealth and careers make Greg wonder about his get-rich goal?
- Why does Mrs. Davenport call comic books "practically toys, and *bad* toys at that"? Is she correct to extend her selling ban to comic books?
- Why is Chapter 16 entitled "Art and Money"? Compare and contrast Maura's goal in creating comic books with Greg's. Which character thinks most like you?
- What do Maura and Greg realize about things being sold at school? What case do they make to the school committee? What is Mrs. Davenport's opposing argument?

- How is the Chunky Comics problem resolved at Ashworth Intermediate? Is this a good solution? Would you participate in such a venture at your school? What might you call your store or website? What ideas might you bring to the project?
- Is getting rich a primary goal for you? Why or why not? What future goals are important to you? If you had a lot of money, how would you choose to spend it?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- At the library or online, find several definitions for money. Individually, or with friends or classmates, make a list of synonyms for, words related to, and phrases incorporating the word “money.” Are your lists long or short? Were they difficult to brainstorm, or quick and easy? Why do you think this is the case?
- Review the moments in the story where Greg and Maura compete to make money. Have you ever been in a similar contest? What was the result? Write a short story in which you find yourself up against another kid in a money-making venture.
- Make your own comic book. In addition to the information provided in the novel, consult *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud or *So, You Wanna Be a Comic Book Artist?* by Philip Amara. Share your comic with family members or friends.
- Study selling. Individually or in groups, list corporate logos, promotions, and other types of selling you see at school. Note the number of commercials in an hour of television. Keep a journal of corporate sales efforts at your local library, on sports fields, or elsewhere in your community. Display your observations on an informative poster. Discuss or write about how all this selling makes you feel. Is it okay with you? Why or not? How might things change for the better?
- Imagine Greg and Maura have asked for your help with their school committee presentation. Use PowerPoint or another computer program to create a presentation based on the arguments made in the novel, adding suggestions and ideas of your own. Give your presentation to friends or classmates.
- Assign roles of school committee members, administrators, and parents to your classmates or friends. Then improvise the conversation after Greg and Maura have left the school committee meeting. What points do members feel the kids made? Why do comic sales still pose a school problem? What about future sales proposals from other kids or schools? How do parents feel about this dilemma? How can a principal keep money-making from getting out of hand? Based on your improvisation, write an additional chapter to add to *Lunch Money*.
- Imagine you are Greg or Maura near the end of the story. In the character of Greg, write a journal entry about your changing attitudes toward making money. Or, in the character of Maura, write a journal entry about your changing reasons for making comics.
- Write a newspaper article about the success of Chunky Comics two years later. What has happened to Greg and Maura? How have their dreams changed? Upon what new adventures have they embarked?
- Do you have a great idea for something to make and sell? Write a plan, including a sketch of your product, its name, and how you will sell it. What will your product cost to make, for how much will you sell it, and what profit do you hope to earn? What will you do with your earnings?

ROOM ONE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Ted is a paperboy, a mystery fan, a Boy Scout, and the lone sixth-grader in his shrinking rural Nebraska town's one-room schoolhouse. So when he sees a mysterious face in the window of an abandoned house along his paper route, he must investigate. What he finds is different from mystery novels, because it involves real people with real secrets. Can he help the stranger? And when Ted can no longer handle the situation alone, whom can he trust? The plight of an Iraq War veteran's family and the challenges faced by a small-town teacher add depth to this gripping story of a boy discovering the importance of his family, school, and town, and the role he can play in helping them grow as he grows up.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

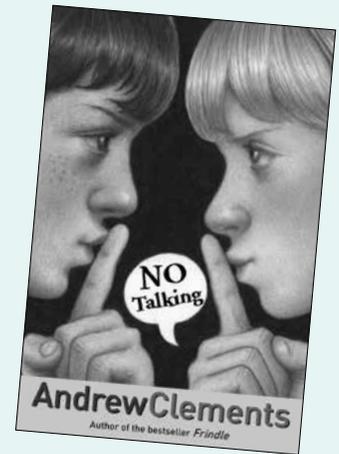
- What do the opening pages of the novel tell readers about Ted's daily routine, his town, and his feelings about both? What is different about the morning on which the story begins?
- Describe the Red Prairie Learning Center. How is it similar to, or different from, your school? Would you like to go to school in Plattsford? Why or why not?
- How does Ted's love of mysteries affect his investigation of the face in the farmhouse window? Was he correct in going to the farmhouse alone?
- How have April and her family come to be hiding in the farmhouse? Do you think April is making a good choice to hide there? Explain your answer.
- How does being a Boy Scout affect Ted's actions? Given the situation, can Ted act honestly toward everyone—April, his family, Ruby Cantrell at the E&A Market, Mrs. Mitchell—at the same time? Have you ever found that keeping a secret for one person required you to behave dishonestly toward another? How did this make you feel? How did you solve your dilemma?
- How has Mrs. Mitchell made her small schoolhouse situation work? What are her concerns for the Red Prairie Learning Center's future? How does Mrs. Mitchell's home life affect her concerns? Compare Mrs. Mitchell's situation to Mr. Hammond's outlook for his farm. What similarities or differences do you note?
- Why does Ted tell his secret to Mrs. Mitchell? How does she feel about keeping Ted's confidence? What does she do? How does Ted feel about her actions?
- What happens when Ted discovers April's family gone from the Anderson farmhouse? What was Deputy Linwood really investigating? What does this confusion suggest about keeping secrets? Where does Ted find April?
- What does Ted decide is the best way to help April and her family? To whom does he reach out for help? What effects do his actions have upon his town?

- Is Ted ultimately able to help April? How do the efforts of his town ultimately help others? How does this, in turn, help Plattsford?
- Describe ways in which your school, religious, or civic groups reach out to others. Have you ever participated in such efforts? How did this make you feel? Why is it important for communities to offer help to those in need?
- Imagine you are Ted as a senior in high school. Looking back, how might you describe your Room One mystery experience? What is the most important thing you learned?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Write a letter to Ted recommending a mystery novel. Explain why you think he will enjoy the book and whether or not you think he can solve the case before the final page. If desired, share your recommendation with friends or classmates.
- Create a class survey about jobs. How many students have jobs? Do students plan to get jobs and at what age? What jobs would they like to try? How many students have daily chores at home? How many receive allowances? Compile the results of your survey into a short report, including graphs or tables.
- On a two-columned chart, compare Ted's school to your own. Consider the building, class size, daily routines, and other observations. In small groups, research different ways kids are educated, from public schools to homeschooling. Use your research for a classroom debate on the best types of learning settings.
- In the character of April, write a series of journal entries describing: how you feel when you spot Ted through the window; why you decide to tell Ted your story; your feelings about losing your dad in the war; your concerns about your mother; your feelings just before leaving Plattsford.
- In the character of Mrs. Mitchell, list the pros and cons of keeping Ted's secret. Discuss your list with friends or classmates. Vote to see whether most kids agree or disagree with Mrs. Mitchell's actions. Ask students to explain their votes.
- Go online to learn more about the Boy Scouts (Scouting.org) and/or Girl Scouts (GirlScouts.org). Then write a short essay describing scouting values and conduct codes, or about other groups or organizations to which you belong that have a strong impact on your behavior.
- With friends or classmates, role-play one of the following conversations from the novel: Ted telling April about his plan to help her family; Mrs. Mitchell asking Superintendent Seward not to close Red Prairie Learning Center; Plattsford residents telling television reporters about trying to help April and her family.
- Create an imaginary blog for Red Prairie Learning Center. What would you call your blog? Write a series of postings in the character of Ted, Mrs. Mitchell, and other students in the classroom. What links might the group suggest offering? How might Ted's encounter with April affect the content of the blog?

NO Talking



ABOUT THE BOOK

Keeping quiet at school has got to be a good thing, right? It turns out that, when taken to extremes, silence can cause all kinds of trouble. So when arch-nemeses Dave and Lynsey agree to a boys-against-girls challenge to keep silent for two days, Principal Hiatt must put a stop to it. But Dave, Lynsey, and the rest of Laketon Elementary's exceedingly noisy, argumentative fifth graders don't want to start talking again. Instead, they find themselves working together in a quiet act of civil disobedience. As the entire school joins the experiment, both adults and kids come to realize that, much more than mere noise, talking is a source of individual empowerment, dignity, and pride in Clements's intriguing, often humorous exploration of communication and group control.

"No Talking is Clements's best school story since Frindle." —The New York Times Book Review

DISCUSSION TOPICS

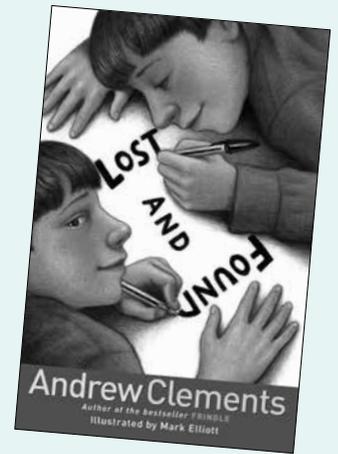
- Who are the "Unshushables"? How do the teachers at Laketon Elementary feel about the "Unshushables"? Have you ever been part of a noisy group? Why do you think this was the case?
- Who is Gandhi and how does he get Dave Packer into trouble? Who helps turn Dave's experiment into a grade-wide contest? What are the terms of the contest?
- Who is Mrs. Hiatt? List some of the unusual steps she has taken to try to handle the fifth-grade class. Have her efforts worked? Has she given up?
- What surprises Mrs. Hiatt at the fifth-grade lunch on the second Tuesday of November? How do Mrs. Marlow, Mrs. Akers, and Mr. Burton each react to the surprise?
- What challenges do the fifth graders encounter as they get through the first hours of the contest? What loopholes do they find that allow them to make noise? What are the differences between talking and noise?
- What does Dave decide is the right word for the contest? Why do you think he chooses this word? Would you choose this same word to describe the contest?
- Why does the author title Chapter 13 "Language Lab"? What experiment does Mr. Burton perform? What is the result of his experiment?
- What do the kids discover as they try to keep quiet at home? How do their parents react to the silence?
- How do the kids handle Mrs. Hiatt's "Pledge of Allegiance" trick? Why do they do this? What happens when Mrs. Hiatt demands an end to their contest? What change is happening in the relationships between the fifth graders?

- Why doesn't Mrs. Escobar mind that the kids have disobeyed Mrs. Hiatt? What happens in her math class? What happens in Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts? How do the kids handle their music class on the second day?
- How does Mr. Burton feel about Mrs. Hiatt's efforts to stop the fifth-grade contest? What does Mrs. Hiatt do when she finds out that the contest is still going on at lunchtime? How does she confront Dave? How does Dave respond?
- How does Mrs. Hiatt feel about her actions? Can you understand why she acted the way she did? What happens when she asks Dave to her office?
- Why is the final chapter entitled "Winners"? Who are the winners in this story? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Go to the library or online to learn more about Gandhi and civil disobedience. Use your research as the basis for a short report about Gandhi and what larger lessons from his life—beyond silence—are at play in *No Talking*.
- Keep a journal in which you record the noisy and quiet times in your day or week. Include comments, such as how noise affected your mood or actions, and which parts of the day you most enjoyed. Share your observations with friends or classmates. Are their experiences and opinions similar to your own, or different?
- Interview a teacher or school administrator about his or her job. Include questions about the value of order and quiet, how it is maintained, and when noise is okay. Have students ever taught them something exciting and new? Based on your interview, write an article about this teacher or administrator for your school or classroom newspaper.
- Explore nonverbal ways people communicate, such as sign language and writing, or through arts such as pantomime, dance, or painting. Divide classmates or friends into small groups to create informative posters about these different ways of communicating. Display the posters in your school or community, along with a "guestbook" inviting viewers to write down their reactions to the information.
- Try one of Mr. Burton's experiments, such as making up a group story with each student offering just three words; spending a class period **WRITING ONLY** but communicating with at least four other people; or holding a debate, such as the pros and cons of soda machines in the cafeteria, using three-word arguments.
- Make a "top ten" list of reasons for keeping quiet. Illustrate and post the list in your home or classroom. Or, list the top ten appropriate ways to make noise.
- In the character of Mrs. Hiatt or Mr. Burton, give a presentation to a group of parents or colleagues, describing the No Talking Contest, its outcome, and how the experience changed your thoughts about teaching and discipline.
- Write a letter to your teacher explaining why you would like to hold a No Talking Contest in your classroom. Do you think the activity will be easy or difficult? What do you hope to learn?
- With the approval of parents or teachers, hold a No Talking experiment in your home or classroom. Agree to a set of rules (use rules from the story if desired), decide if this will be a contest, and determine how long it will last. Afterward, write a short essay about the experiment. Did it work? Who were the winners?
- In the character of Lynsey, write a journal entry explaining why you decided to "even the score" between the boys and girls just before the contest ended. Or, in the character of Dave, write a journal entry explaining whether you would have done the same thing if the situation had been reversed and how you feel about Lynsey's actions.
- Imagine you were one of the Laketon Elementary fifth graders involved in the No Talking Contest. Write an essay describing the two days from your point of view and the most important thing you learned from the contest. Conclude with an explanation of whether you would or would not participate in the contest if it started again tomorrow, and why.

LOST AND FOUND



ABOUT THE BOOK

The Grayson twins are moving to a new town. Again. Although it's a drag to constantly be mistaken for each other, in truth, during those first days at a new school, there's nothing better than having a twin brother there with you. But on day one of sixth grade, Ray stays home sick, and Jay is on his own. No big deal. It's a pretty nice school—good kids, too. But Jay quickly discovers a major mistake: No one seems to know a thing about his brother. Ray's not on the attendance lists, doesn't have a locker, and doesn't even have a student folder. Jay almost tells the school—almost—but then decides that this lost information could be very useful. And fun.

As Ray and Jay exploit a clerical oversight, they each find new views on friendship, honesty, what it means to be a twin—and what it means to be yourself. Entertaining, thought-provoking, and true-to-life, this clever novel is classic Andrew Clements times two: twins!

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- After reading *Lost and Found*, talk about the pros and cons of being a twin. How would you feel if you had a twin? Do you think you would like it, or not?
- Jay and Ray are identical twins, but they are also individual people. Discuss their relationship with one another. How are they *unlike* despite the fact that they look the same? Do you think Jay and Ray would have a different relationship if they were not identical twins?
- What is the real reason the twins pass themselves off as one person? If you were in this situation, would you have agreed to do this? Do you think the twins realize what will happen when they eventually get caught in their game?
- Talk about the twins' parents, Sue and Jim Grayson. Do you think they relate well to Jay and Ray? Do you think they really understand their sons?
- Author Andrew Clements uses suspense throughout *Lost and Found*. Define "suspense" and identify some parts of the story that are especially suspenseful. Why do you think Clements writes this way?
- When you were reading *Lost and Found*, could you predict what was going to happen next in the plot? Why or why not? Were you always right in your plot predictions?
- Many characters in the novel make mistakes in this book. Who makes mistakes, and what are they? Is making mistakes normal? How do the characters move beyond their mistakes?
- Jay and Ray start to notice girls in *Lost and Found*, and their relationship with girls is a big part of the novel. Did you find this realistic?
- The concept of honesty is explored in this story. How are the characters honest and not honest with one another in the story?

- What is the significance of the title *Lost and Found*? Why do you think the author chose this title for the book?
- How did you feel about the ending of this story? Did you feel that Mr. Grayson was right in wanting to discipline Jay and Ray at home? Do you feel that Mrs. Lonsdale, the principal of the school, should have been able to discipline the boys as well? What do you think Jay and Ray's punishment should be?
- Going forward, how do you think Jay and Ray will deal with being twins? Do you think they will ever pull a prank like this one again? Why or why not?
- Do you think this situation could happen at your school?

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- Ask your students to find out more about famous or notable twins from today and the past. Think about twins who are actors on television, twins who were prominent in history, or twins that are characters in books. After their research is complete, compare and discuss their findings with the rest of the class.
- Many schools have sets of twins who are students. If your school has a set, have your students interview them. Some questions your students can ask: What is the best thing about being a twin? What do you not like about being a twin? How is being a twin special? Then, have your students compare their answers.
- Why did author Andrew Clements decide to write a book about identical twins? Find out more about Andrew Clements and his special connection to twins. Share this information with the class.
- Have your students write their own book reviews of *Lost and Found*. In each review, students should write about what they liked—and didn't like—about the book. Would they recommend *Lost and Found* to other readers?
- As a class, write an alternate ending to *Lost and Found*. What if Jay and Ray's prank was never discovered? What if Jay and Ray's parents let their school discipline them?

EXTRA CREDIT



ABOUT THE BOOK

It isn't that Abby Carson can't do her schoolwork; it's just that she doesn't like doing it. And that means she's pretty much failing sixth grade. When a warning letter is sent home, Abby realizes that all her slacking off could cause her to be held back—for real! Unless she wants to repeat the sixth grade, she'll have to meet some specific conditions, including taking on an extra-credit project: find a pen pal in a foreign country. Abby's first letter arrives at a small school in Afghanistan, and Sadeed Bayat is chosen to be her pen pal. . . Well, kind of. He is the best writer, but he is also a boy, and in his village it is not appropriate for a boy to correspond with a girl. So his younger sister dictates and signs the letter. Until Sadeed decides what his sister is telling Abby isn't what he'd like Abby to know. . .

DISCUSSION TOPICS

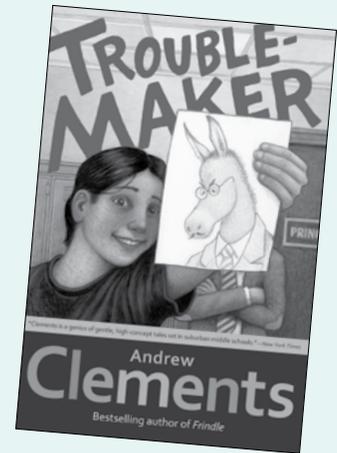
- Author Andrew Clements chose the state of Illinois in the United States and Afghanistan as the settings in *Extra Credit*. Why do you think Clements selected these locations? What kinds of differences between the two countries—cultural and otherwise—can you identify after reading the book?
- On the first page of *Extra Credit*, Afghani student Sadeed thinks that his teacher is going to “recommend him for a special honor,” but when he finds out that his teacher wants him to help write letters to a girl in America, he is very disappointed. Nevertheless, how does this letter writing eventually turn into a “special honor” for Sadeed?
- The character of Abby is introduced in the story when she is climbing a rock wall in her school's gym. Are you surprised to find out that Abby is struggling in school after reading about her abilities on the rock wall? Despite her grades, do you believe that Abby is actually very smart? Why or why not?
- As a class, have a discussion about Abby and Sadeed. Do Abby and Sadeed have similar personalities? Also, compare and contrast their everyday lives by talking about the following: their homes, their schools, their teachers, and their parents. How are they alike and how are they different?
- As pen pals, Abby, Sadeed, and Sadeed's sister Amira communicate the old fashioned way—by sending letters to each other in the mail. Why is this their only method of staying in touch? What are some conveniences Abby and her friends have in the US that Sadeed and Amira do not have in Afghanistan?
- The rock wall at Abby's school in Illinois and the mountains of Afghanistan are symbols in *Extra Credit*—they stand for something else. What do they represent?
- Abby learns from Amira and Sadeed's letters that not all of the girls in their Afghanistan village are allowed to go to school. Amira is glad that her father “permits” her to go to school. How did this make you feel when you read this?
- The connection between brothers and sisters is explored in *Extra Credit*. How is Sadeed's relationship with Amira different from Abby's relationship with her brother Tom?

- In the novel, Sadeed writes to Abby that he only has one book in his home, and that his teacher has taken a chance by allowing him to read books that are not approved by the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan. What did you think about this?
- Discuss how a writer uses “foreshadowing” in a book. How does Clements use foreshadowing throughout *Extra Credit*? Identify parts of the story where foreshadowing is present.
- While reading this book, we learn that Abby and Sadeed are taking risks by communicating with one another. Why do you think Sadeed decides to correspond with Abby when he knows that it is forbidden? Do you think Abby realizes that her letters to Sadeed would create controversy at home and in Afghanistan?
- When Abby gives her oral report on her project at the end of the book, her classmates look bored and uninterested. Imagine you are a student in Abby’s class. Would you feel the same way about her report? Why or why not?
- Abby is reluctant to do her extra credit assignment at first. But how was the project actually a good thing for her in the end?
- By the end of the story, Abby and Sadeed have a greater understanding of each other’s lives and cultures. After finishing the book, talk about what else you think Abby and Sadeed learned from exchanging letters.

ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH

- How much did your students know about the country of Afghanistan before reading *Extra Credit*? Find out more about this country. Research the history of Afghanistan, and talk about present-day life in this country. What problems does the country face today?
- Start your own “Project Pen Pal” in your classroom! Encourage your students to find and communicate with their own pen pals. Conduct research on the Internet to find organizations that supply pen pal names and information. Then, after a few months of correspondence, create a bulletin board similar to Abby’s. Display pen pal letters and other information from your class’s new friends.
- Talk about the significance of the small rock Sadeed sends to Abby from Afghanistan, and the dirt Abby sends from Illinois to Afghanistan. If your students had a pen pal in another country, what would they send to them to represent your hometown? Have everyone bring this item into school. It will be interesting to see if everyone brings in the same thing—or not!
- *Extra Credit* is a book that celebrates the power of friendship. Have your students make a list of other books they have enjoyed that celebrate friendship, and share these lists with the class.
- What would it be like to be a character in *Extra Credit*? Ask your students to imagine if they had the power to jump into this book. Would they be a friend of Abby, Sadeed, or someone else? Why?
- Read Arnold Lobel’s story *Frog and Toad Are Friends* with your students. After reading the story, ask your students why they think Clements chose this book to highlight in *Extra Credit*. Who in your class can identify more with Frog? And who is more like Toad?
- Continue the story in *Extra Credit* after the book ends. Have your students write about what they think happens to Abby and Sadeed. Do Abby and Sadeed get back in touch again? Do they ever meet? What does the future hold for Abby and Sadeed? Compare and contrast everyone’s thoughts.

TROUBLE-MAKER



ABOUT THE BOOK

Clayton Hensley has been getting into trouble since he started elementary school. From running in the halls to drawing an unflattering cartoon of the principal, he's always been pretty proud of his pranks. Then his big brother, Mitch, returns home from a stint in jail with a new attitude and wants Clay to change his ways, too. But Clay's rambunctious friends don't understand. Resisting the urge to act up when somebody bugs him is not as easy as he thought it would be. And a few weeks of good behavior may not be enough for the people Clay tricked and ridiculed to stop thinking of him as a troublemaker. Clements tells a thought-provoking and important story about rules, reputations, and the possibility to change course for the better.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

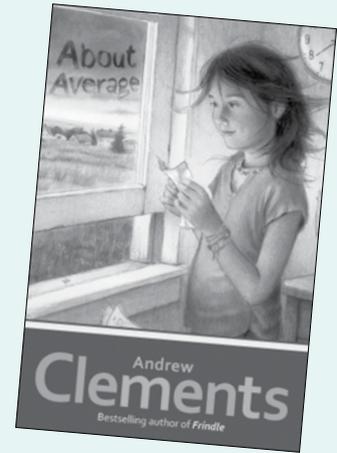
- List at least three things you think you know about Clay after reading only the first page of *Troublemaker*. What is your opinion of Clay at the end of Chapter 1?
- Who is Mrs. Ormin? How does she help readers understand Clay's story? How does Clay feel about Mr. Dash, Mr. Kelling, and Mrs. Ormin? Is he angry at them? Why do you think Clay behaves the way he does in the early chapters of the book?
- What do you think Clay expected would happen after Mr. Dash and his classmates see the donkey picture? What events resulting from the inappropriate drawing surprise Clay?
- If you were the school principal, would you have dealt with Clay's disrespectful cartoon in the same way as Mr. Kelling? What message would you have wanted to get across to Clay? Explain your answer.
- When we first meet Clay's brother, Mitch, he has just been released from jail. Why was he there? How have Clay, his mom, his dad, and Mitch himself reacted to this experience?
- Is the Mitch who came home from jail the person Clay was expecting? How does Mitch respond when Clay shows him the donkey portrait?
- Why does Mitch want Clay to start behaving better? Why does he ask Clay to trust him? Why does Clay decide to do so? How do you decide whether or not to trust a person?
- List at least three things that Mitch makes Clay change about his appearance. Why might this help Clay make the more important change—to his attitude? Do the clothes and hairstyles of your classmates affect the way you think about them?
- On his first day at school with his new look, what opportunities for trouble does Clay resist? How does Clay's friend Hank react to the new Clay? How do Clay's other classmates and teachers react?
- Why does Clay have so many suspects to consider when he wonders who defaced his self-portrait? What does this say about Clay? Why does Clay stay home on Halloween night?

- How does his family react when the police come looking for Clay? Why is the trust Clay put in Mitch important now? How else does trust play a role at this moment in the story?
- What does Clay realize about his father's attitude toward himself and his big brother? Is Clay surprised by his realization? Why or why not?
- Do you think Mr. Kelling was right to suspect Clay of painting his door? Would you have suspected Clay? Was Clay right to go to Mr. Kelling's house the next day? How does Clay look back on past Halloweens now?
- Compare Clay's drawing of the donkey-faced principal to Hank's destruction of Clay's self-portrait. How are these actions similar? What do you think Clay comes to understand about each of them? Do you think Clay and Hank will remain friends? Explain your answer.
- How is the transcript of first-grader Clay's visit to the principal's office different from the transcript of his last sixth-grade visit? What do you think the future holds for Clay?

ACTIVITIES & RESEARCH

- Imagine you are another student in Mr. Dash's art class, along with Clay. Write a two to three paragraph journal entry describing the day Clay drew the donkey-principal picture and how you felt about it. Consider noting how you imagine Mr. Kelling will feel when he sees the picture and/or what you think of Clay.
- In the character of Clay a week before the story begins, write a one-page letter to your brother Mitch in jail. How are you feeling? What do you want to do with Mitch when he returns home? What do you want him to know?
- Get a copy of your school's student handbook or rules of conduct. Find out what type of punishment you think Clay would have received if he had been a student at your school when he drew the donkey cartoon. With friends or classmates, discuss what you feel would have been the most appropriate discipline for Clay.
- Cut pictures of kids and teenagers from old magazines and newspapers. Holding up one picture at a time, ask classmates to describe the kind of students or friends they imagine each person would be, based on their clothing and hairstyles. Discuss your results. Do most people make the same decisions about the pictures they see? What clothes, hairstyles, colors, or accessories tend to cause people to make assumptions about an individual? Is it right to make these assumptions? Write a dress code for your school based on this discussion.
- When Clay changes his behavior, his goals change too. He begins to take drawing more seriously. On a sheet of paper, write down your goal or goals for the school year. Goals can be related to schoolwork, sports, other activities, your family, or your community. Below your goal(s), write down what attitudes and actions might help you achieve these goals. If desired, discuss your goals with a parent, teacher, or other adult who might have some suggestions to help you reach them.
- With a friend or classmate, role-play a conversation between Clay and Hank in which the truth about the defaced self-portrait is revealed, or a conversation between Clay's mother and father in which they discuss whether or not to believe Clay is innocent of the Halloween graffiti incident. Then, discuss with friends or classmates whether you think there is a "right" and a "wrong" person in either one of these scenarios.
- Clay is a talented artist who, at the end of the story, discovers that drawing can be even more rewarding than pulling pranks. Go to the library or online to find careers that would be good for someone with Clay's talents, such as animator and graphic designer. Make a list of at least ten jobs to recommend to Clay.
- In the character of Clay, write a paragraph describing how and why you decided to include the donkey mask in your prize-winning self-portrait.
- Use colored pencils to make your own self-portrait. Include your face as well as at least one other object or image that shows something special about your goals or your attitude.

About Average



ABOUT THE BOOK

Jordan Johnston wishes she were extraordinarily popular, pretty, athletic, musical, intelligent . . . something! She dreams about escaping her average existence but what she can't figure out is exactly how. Then nature intervenes and Jordan discovers something way above average about herself that may have been there all along.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- From the start of the novel, it is clear that Jordan is frustrated by her lack of special talents. Reread the first ten pages of the novel and then list at least four things at which Jordan appears to have skill. Can you think of a word or phrase to describe the types of aptitudes Jordan possesses? What kind of “above average” abilities does she want?
- What does Marlea Harkins do that upsets Jordan? What options does Jordan consider to retaliate against Marlea? Do you agree with her thought process? What advice would you give to Jordan at the end of Chapter Four?
- At the end of Chapter Six, Jordan observes that: “Numbers were so clean and simple. No words, no feelings, no mind tricks. Numbers were like a hiding place, a quiet corner of the world.” Do you feel this way about numbers or can you understand what Jordan means? Is there another school subject or activity that brings you comfort? Explain your answer.
- Who is “Joe the Weather Guy”? What gives Joe a bit of extra insight into the weather in central Illinois?
- How does Jordan feel when she overhears her parents discussing her abilities? Have you ever had the experience of hearing adults discuss your academic, athletic, or artistic skills, or your future? How did you react to this experience?
- Who are Jordan’s good friends? How does she relate to these friends? Who are the members of the Cuteness Club, why are they called that, and how do they intersect with Jordan’s group of friends? Do you think Jordan should have discussed the Marlea situation with one of her friends? Why or why not?
- What ingenious idea does Jordan finally have for dealing with Marlea? What is your opinion of this idea? Do you think you could pull it off? What possible reactions could you envision for treating difficult people in your school or community with “extra niceness”?
- What is Jordan’s genius babysitting trick? How does this trick show Jordan’s insights into kids and people in general? How does it foreshadow her actions later in the story?
- What contest does Jordan win in Mr. Sanderling’s class? How does Jordan feel about the win? Is it enough to satisfy her need to be “not average”?
- What does Joe feel in his bones in Chapter Fifteen? Can you find evidence in the chapter that others also have a sense of foreboding about the weather? What decision does Joe make?
- Why is Mr. Graisha’s decision to hold the after-school rehearsal in the auditorium building a bad one? What happens shortly after the rehearsal begins? What happens to the teacher? How do the other kids react?
- How does Jordan’s earlier decision to set simple goals affect her own reaction to the weather situation? What does she do?

- Does Jordan’s dream of being applauded by her community come true in the way she imagined? What happens at sixth-grade graduation?
- Is Jordan really average at all? Is anyone?

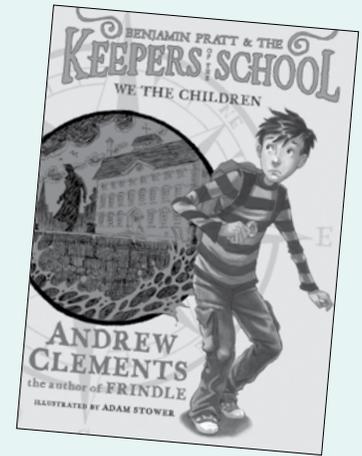
ACTIVITIES & RESEARCH

- Use an online dictionary to find the multi-part definition of the word “average.” Write at least six sentences using the term in different ways and/or different parts of speech. Write a paragraph describing a fictional average student, athlete, singer, or other type of person.
- Create an informative poster describing the study of meteorology, including how one becomes a meteorologist and a list of at least four jobs meteorologists can do other than being a television or radio weather person. With friends or classmates discuss whether you would consider a career in meteorology.
- In the character of Marlea, write a journal entry from her point of view, describing what happened the morning she read Jordan’s list in the bathroom. Or, with friends or classmates, role-play the bathroom scene with Jordan, Marlea, and the girls to whom she reads the list (improvising their reactions), and a scene in which Marlea tells Kylie what she did and Kylie reacts (this scene is not in the actual novel).
- Jordan feels that Marlea’s actions toward her are bullying. Do you agree or disagree? Write a paragraph defining the term “bullying” and, if necessary, discussing how you might categorize other types of unacceptable school behavior.
- Describe the plans in place to help kids handle bullying situations at Jordan’s school. Does your school have an anti-bullying policy? If it does, compare your plan to that of Jordan’s school. If not, brainstorm a plan to propose to your teacher and principal.
- With friends or classmates, make a wall-sized poster or mural depicting things at which you excel, such as soccer, spelling, pet-sitting, etc. Write a few words describing each ability in colorful lettering and illustrate them with photographs of you and your friends in action.
- Survey friends, family, or classmates about whether they use lists for decision making, to remember things, for shopping, for schoolwork, or for other reasons. Have they ever had difficulty with a list getting into the wrong hands? What is the most important list they have ever made? Create a graph or chart summarizing your survey results.
- Jordan decides to deal with the Marlea situation using kindness. Spend a few hours or even an entire school day using only kind words in your interactions with friends, classmates, and teachers. Afterward write a journal entry describing the experience, noting whether this behavior affected your mood, concentration, or schoolwork. If desired, share your observations with friends or classmates.
- The weather plays a critical role in the novel. Write two to three paragraphs describing the climate of your hometown. Be sure to include some notes on the most dangerous types of weather you experience in your region. For one week, start each day by stepping outside your front door and then writing down your best guess at the kind of weather the day will bring. Then, take note of the daily weather report given on your local television or radio station or online. At the end of each day, compare the professional forecast and your guess to the actual weather of the day.
- Have you ever experienced a hurricane, tornado, blizzard, severe heat wave, or other dangerous weather situation? Write a short story describing this experience.
- Find out whether your family, school, and community have plans to deal with dangerous weather situations. Visit the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration online at Legislative.noaa.gov/NIYS/ to learn more about making a weather emergency plan for your area. Encourage friends and classmates to educate themselves about weather preparedness.
- You are the person assigned to create Jordan’s special commendation. Use a computer graphic design program and be sure to include the wording noted in the final chapter of the novel.

WE THE CHILDREN

Book One of

BENJAMIN PRATT & THE KEEPERS OF THE SCHOOL



ABOUT THE BOOK

Benjamin Pratt's school is about to become the site of a new amusement park. It sounds like a dream come true! But lately, Ben has been wondering if he's going to like an amusement park in the middle of his town—with all the buses and traffic and eight dollar slices of pizza. It's going to change everything. And, Ben is not so big on all the new changes in his life, like how his dad has moved out and started living in the marina on what used to be the "family" sailboat. Maybe it would be nice if the school just stayed as it is. He likes the school. Loves it, actually. It's more than 200 years old and sits right on the harbor. The playground has ocean breezes and the classrooms have million dollar views...MILLION DOLLAR views. And after a chance—and final—run-in with the school janitor, Ben starts to discover that these MILLION DOLLAR views have a lot to do with the deal to sell the school property. But, as much as the town wants to believe it, the school does not belong to the local government. It belongs to the CHILDREN and these children have the right to defend it! Don't think Ben, his friend Jill (and the tag-along Robert) can ruin a multimillion dollar real estate deal? Then you don't know the history and the power of the Keepers of the School. A suspenseful six book series, book one, *We the Children*, starts the battle on land and on sea. It's a race to keep the school from turning into a ticket booth and these kids are about to discover just how threatening a little knowledge can be.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- One of the first things readers learn about Ben is that he has caps on his front teeth. What happened to his front teeth? How does this experience affect his feelings about saving Oakes School?
- What does Mr. Keane give Ben? Who owned this object before Mr. Keane? Why does Mr. Keane believe the school is about to be attacked?
- Who was Duncan Oakes? What objects in and around the school remind students of Captain Oakes? Does your school have paintings, statues, trophies, or other items that help students remember its past? Do you ever think about these items? If so, describe one or more of these items and what thoughts, ideas, or inspiration they bring to you.
- In Chapter 3, Ben thinks to himself, "Welcome to the exciting new theme of Benjamin Pratt's life-change." List three changes about which Ben is thinking. How does Ben feel about all these changes? Is change a theme in your life? If so, in what ways?
- Who is Mr. Lyman? Why is he different from past janitors at Oakes School? What secrets does Jill discover about Mr. Lyman? In addition to Mr. Lyman, from whom do Ben and Jill keep Mr. Keane's coin and last words secret? Do you think this is a good decision? Why or why not?
- How does Ben feel about sailing an Optimist? How long has he been sailing? Which other student at Oakes races sailboats? Are his attitudes toward sailing and school the same as Ben's? Explain your answer.
- How has his parents' separation affected Ben? Describe Ben's different relationships with his mom and his dad. What evidence in the story suggests that Ben is hoping his parents will get back together? What advice might you give Ben about his parents' separation?

- Why do Ben and Jill want to save Oakes School? What arguments could be made for and against the new amusement park? How would you feel if a developer wanted to build a new amusement park in your town? How would you feel if your school was at risk of being demolished to make room for another type of new building?
- How does Ben’s sailing experience help him figure out the meaning of the mysterious instructions on the coin and how they relate to Oakes school? Where is the “rose on the floor”? To what do the rose and coin lead Ben and Jill?
- What do Ben and Jill find inside the square of pine? What do you think the inscription means? Do you think Duncan Oakes’s idea to entrust the school to the children was a good one? Why or why not?
- On the morning of the race, how does Ben prepare himself and his Optimist? What observations does he make about the race spectators, including his mom and dad? What does Ben love about sailing? Do you participate in a sport or other activity that makes you feel similar to the way Ben feels when he is out on the water? Does this feeling help you in other aspects of your life? If so, in what way?
- On the last page of the book, Ben, his mom, and Jill discuss Ben’s rescue of Robert. Ben tells them, “maybe *he’s* the one who rescued *me*.” Did Ben need rescuing? What do you think Ben learned about himself from the experience of saving Robert? How do you think the rescue experience has affected his feelings about being a “Keeper of the School”?

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. WE THE CHILDREN

- A. Readers are drawn right into history with the book title, *We the Children*, a twist on the first words of the preamble to America’s Constitution. Go to the library or online to learn more about the Constitution, the people who wrote it, and the reason the document was created. Then, write a paragraph explaining why you think Andrew Clements chose to name his story this way.
- B. Like the writers of the Constitution, Duncan Oakes and his community could not have foreseen exactly what would happen to his school and town in the future. With friends or classmates, make a list of at least twenty changes to life in America that Duncan Oakes probably could not have imagined, such as cell phones and places like Disney World. Take a class vote to see which change people think would have surprised Duncan Oakes most of all.
- C. How do you think not knowing what the future would hold affected what was written on the copper tablet found by Ben and Jill? In the character of a present-day historian examining the copper tablet, write a one-to-three paragraph report explaining why you think the message on the tablet was written in such a mysterious way.
- D. Write a one-page letter to students one hundred years in the future. Think of an important message you would like to share, or an important object you would like schoolchildren of the future to notice. As you write, make sure to consider what the recipients of your letter might be able to understand about the technology and history of the twenty-first century. What might be a good place to store your letter?
- E. Interview a grandparent or other older adult about what life was like when he or she was your age. Here are some possible questions: What was life like without cell phones, handheld music devices, the Internet? What was television like? How did they get news and information? How did they make plans with friends? What was their school like? What did they do after school? What was their city or town like? Do they think life is better or worse for kids today than it was when they were young? Prepare a short oral report to share information from your interview with friends or classmates. Or collect all of the interviews from friends and classmates into an oral history notebook to keep in your school library.

II. BUILT INTO HISTORY

A. Much about American history can be learned from its buildings and architecture. Go to the library or online to learn more about historic buildings in America. (Hint: Start by visiting the US General Services Administration Historic Buildings website (GSA.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/contentView.do?contentType=GSA_OVERVIEW&contentId=14925), or the Library of Congress Historic American Buildings Survey: Memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/hhmap.html). Make a list of five buildings you would like to visit and why. Or write a short speech or newspaper-style article explaining why you feel it is important (or not important) to preserve historic buildings. Use examples from your research and quotes from *We the Children* to support your argument.

B. Ben lives in a coastal New England town, full of maritime history. Visit Smith's Master Index to Maritime Museums (MaritimeMuseums.net) and find a museum of interest to you. Plan a trip to visit this museum. How would you get there? Where would you stay? Where would you eat? What museum exhibits will you visit? Are there other historic sites near the museum you will also visit? Write up your itinerary to share with friends, family members, or classmates.

C. In what year was your school built and what grades were taught at that time? What was the population of your town in the year your school was built? What changes have been made to the school building or its purpose? Has your town or city population changed? In what important ways is your town now different from the way it was when your school was new? Compile your answers to these questions, and others of your choice, into an informational booklet about your school and its place in the community.

D. On a large sheet of poster board, create a sign headlined "Welcome to Oakes School." Based on details from the novel, complete the poster with an illustrated list of highlights, points of interest, and other details you might post at the entrance to a historical school building.

E. Make a "top ten" list of reasons to save Oakes School, and another list of reasons to allow the theme park to be built. Divide your class into two groups, to debate for and against the demolition of Oakes School to build an amusement park.

III. KEEPERS OF THE SCHOOL

A. Before he dies, Mr. Keane tells Ben how the coin was passed down from previous janitors dating back to the time of Duncan Oakes. In the character of Mr. Keane, or another past janitor, write a journal entry describing what happened on the day you were given the coin and how you felt about your new responsibility.

B. Imagine you are Thomas Vining, Louis Hendley, or Abigail Baynes, one of the three children who signed the sheet of copper found by Ben and Jill. In the character of one of these children, write a journal entry describing how you felt about putting your name to this document, and why you feel this might be important in terms of your hopes and dreams for the future of yourself and your town.

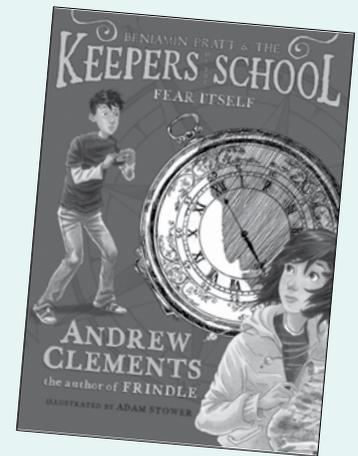
C. You are a student at Oakes School. Ben and Jill have told you about the coin and the discoveries they have made and have asked you to help them with their mission to save the school. Write an outline describing the plan you would suggest that they follow.

D. In the character of Ben or Jill, write a poem or song lyrics encouraging your classmates to help save Oakes School. Begin with the words, "We the children."

E. Imagine *We the Children* is being made into a movie! Draw the movie poster featuring Ben and Jill fighting to save Oakes School. Include an exciting sentence or two to encourage school kids to watch the film.

FEAR ITSELF

Book Two of
BENJAMIN PRATT & THE
KEEPERS OF THE SCHOOL



ABOUT THE BOOK

Time is ticking as the countdown to Ben Pratt's school's total demolition continues. Ben has been given a handful of clues that could help them save the school, but they are all written in maritime riddles. "After five bells sound, time to sit down." What the heck does that mean? It's hard to know where to begin when Ben and Jill don't even know what they are looking for. All Lyman, the snake posing as the school janitor, needs to know, though, is that they are looking, and that could mean the end of the 30-million-dollar development deal that pays his salary. (Which, by the way, is MUCH larger than what a typical janitor makes.) As Lyman lurks in the shadows—and sometimes not in the shadows—Ben and Jill have to add another to-do to their list of things to accomplish in the next twenty-one days: (1) Figure out the clues left by past Keepers of the School groups, (2) figure out how these clues will help them save the school, and (3) stay one step ahead of Lyman. That's the mission...that seems, at times, impossible.

The second book in this riveting and mysterious six-book series is as action-packed as the first one, culminating in a faceoff between Ben, Jill, and Lyman. "After five bells sound, time to sit down" makes for a good riddle, but Ben and Jill also know when it's time to stand up...for Oakes School and for themselves.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Why is Ben a "local hero" at the beginning of the story? How does Ben feel about the attention he is getting for his heroic act? How does this experience impact his plan to "be invisible"? Why does Ben want to be invisible at the start of the story?
- Who was Captain Duncan Oakes? What conclusions does Ben reach about Captain Oakes in the opening chapters of the story? What role do janitors play in the captain's plan? How does this relate to the history of the school building?
- What does Mrs. Sinclair accuse Ben of stealing? Though he did not steal it, why is this object important to Ben? Who does Ben discover is the real thief? Why does this realization frighten him?
- Describe Ben and Jill's friendship at the beginning of the story. In what way does Jill's behavior confuse Ben? On what extra credit project are Ben and Jill working and how does this help them gain access to the school?
- How does Ben's research report on Jack London help him unravel the clue of the five bells? To what does this research lead Ben and Jill? What is the "first safeguard"?
- Describe several instances where Mr. Lyman frightens Ben and Jill. What does Jill mean when she tells Ben there should be "no tiger teasing"? Do you think she is right or do you agree with Ben that he should "look the tiger in the eye"? Explain your answer.
- Name some of the people Ben sees at Mr. Keane's funeral. What is important about the conversations he has with Mrs. Keane and with old Tom? What does Ben promise to try to find for Tom? What gift does Mrs. Keane secretly give to Ben?

- In Chapter 10, how does Jill take the law into her own hands and why? How does Ben participate? Do you think the kids' behavior is correct? What feelings might lead them to take this kind of action? If you were a friend of Ben and Jill, what might you say to them about the events of the evening?
- In several moments in the story, Ben fails to tell his mom his whereabouts in a timely manner. How does she react? How does this affect her relationship with Ben? Have you ever experienced a similar situation with your parent or guardian? Do you think Ben is being reasonable in these situations? If possible, include examples from your own experience when you explain why or why not.
- Name at least three people whom Ben must decide whether or not to trust at some point in the story. What decisions does he make about these people? Do you agree with his decisions? What advice might you give to Ben about trusting people with his Keeper of the School secret?
- Discuss the term “a conflict of interest.” Name at least three characters in the novel who must deal with a conflict of interest. How does this affect their actions towards Ben? Have you ever been in a situation where doing the right thing might not have the best outcome for you? Describe this situation and how you dealt with it.
- What does Ben find in the old toolbox? What do he and Tom decide to do with their discovery? Do you think their logic makes sense? Have you ever worked hard (or wanted to lend a hand) in support of a cause in which you believe? Describe your thoughts and, if possible, your experience. What advice might you give to Ben and Tom as they continue their mission to defend the school?

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. FEAR ITSELF

- A. Like the first book in the Benjamin Pratt & the Keepers of the School series, this story's ties to history begin with its title: *Fear Itself*. In his 1933 inaugural address, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt told Americans that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Go to the library or online to find the complete text of this speech. Read it aloud with friends or classmates.
- B. Create an annotated, two-column timeline comparing some important events that happened around 1933, the year of FDR's inaugural address, to events in America in recent years. (Hints: What happened to the US economy in 1929 and 2008? Who was appointed chancellor of Germany in 1933 and how did this affect Europe? What is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan in this decade? To what do the phrases “Dust Bowl” and “Hurricane Katrina” refer?) After creating your timeline, write a paragraph explaining whether this exercise has affected the way you think about history.
- C. In Chapter 12, Ben is confronted by Mr. Lyman and “the fear paralyzed him.” (p. 120) Have you ever been so frightened that you had a physical reaction? Write a descriptive paragraph or poem, make a drawing or painting, or create another work of visual or literary art depicting your experience of fear. Along with your work, write a brief description of the fear situation that inspired it.
- D. How do you handle frightening situations? With friends or classmates, compile a top ten (or top twenty) list of ways to conquer your fears. Invite parents, teachers, and others to share their fear-busting tips too. Write your list on a large sheet of poster paper; add illustrations and other details.

II. FICTION & HISTORY

- A. Go to the library or online to learn more about American author Jack London, whom Ben is researching for a project in *Fear Itself*. Read a short story or novel by Jack London. Write a short report including a summary of the story, information on when and why London wrote the story you chose to read, and whether or not you would recommend it to other readers.
- B. Historical fiction is fiction that incorporates historical figures or events into the narrative. With friends or classmates, discuss the ways in which *Fear Itself* might be read as a work of historical fiction.

C. With friends or classmates (and perhaps the help of your school or local librarian), create a reading list of historical fiction titles, such as *Adventure in Gold Town* by Deborah Hopkinson; *The Secret of the Sealed Room: A Mystery of Young Benjamin Franklin* by Bailey MacDonald; *That Book Woman* by Heather Henson, illustrated by David Small; and *The Houdini Box* by Brian Selznick. Create a classroom display of historical fiction picture books and novels. Invite friends or classmates to give short presentations on favorite books from the list or display.

D. Write a one-page fan letter to your favorite historical fiction or adventure novelist. If possible, visit this writer's website to learn more about your favorite book by this author and how they came to write it.

E. Do you have a favorite historical period? Write an outline for a story set in your favorite time period. List the main characters, the setting, and the important historical events that will impact your story. Try writing the first chapter or two.

III. SEASCAPES & COLONIAL COINS

A. Make a list of nautical terms and images from *Fear Itself*. Find definitions, reference books, quotations, or other information related to each term. Compile your findings in an illustrated booklet. If you have also read the first Keepers of the School title, add seafaring terms from that story to your booklet.

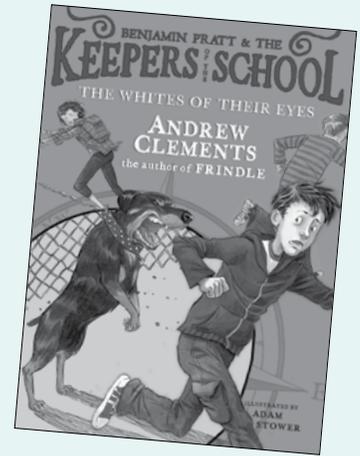
B. Learn more about the "ship's bells" system by taking cyber-visits to maritime museums. (Visit History.navy.mil/museums/index.html, MaritimeMuseums.net/MA.html, or nmm.ac.uk/ to begin your research.) Create an oral report, complete with a PowerPoint presentation, posters, or other visual aids, explaining the bells and other interesting elements of maritime timekeeping.

C. In the toolbox, Ben finds many colonial era coins, including Pine Tree shillings. Go to the library or online to learn more about these coins. Are they rare? What are they worth today? What other coins might be found in a collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England coins? In the character of a famous coin collector whom Ben and old Tom have asked to comment on their treasure, write a letter to your two clients explaining the value of their coins and making a recommendation as to what they should do with them.

D. Design your own book cover, bookmark, or poster for *Fear Itself*. Brainstorm a list of key images, characters, themes, or objects from the story to include in your design. Choose colors that fit the seaside setting of the story. Display your creations with those of friends or classmates in an artwork collection for *Fear Itself*.

THE WHITES OF THEIR EYES

Book Three of BENJAMIN PRATT & THE KEEPERS OF THE SCHOOL



ABOUT THE BOOK

Benjamin Pratt is back in the third installment of this lively modern adventure that harkens back to New England's historic past. While still trying to cope with his parents' separation, Ben and his friend, Jill, continue their efforts to stop their beloved Oakes School from being turned into an investment property—and their cozy town into a giant parking lot for a new amusement park. This time, Ben and Jill find an unlikely ally in Ben's sailing nemesis, Robert Gerritt. But will it be enough to stop the efforts of Mr. Lyman, the corporate spy disguised as the school janitor?

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- In the first chapter of *The Whites of their Eyes*, Ben encounters a small dog. How does this event foreshadow frightening events that will happen later in the novel?
- Ben and Jen take on a new ally in Robert Gerritt. What past conflicts with Robert must Ben deal with so that they can work together? (Feel free to refer to previous Benjamin Pratt and the Keepers of the School novels if you have read them.) Do you think you would be able to work with a person like Robert? Why or why not?
- What spy gear has Lyman installed in the school and how do the Keepers thwart his spy efforts? Would you have used similar strategies against Lyman? Explain what you might have done and why. What other roles does technology play in the story?
- How is the mystery of “After four times four, tread up one more” solved? What do Ben and his friends find when they unlock the meaning of this clue?
- In Chapter 8, Ben thinks about the Revolutionary War and the concept of keeping the “high ground.” Explain what this means and how Ben applies this knowledge to the Oakes School problem. What do you think is the importance of studying history more generally?
- How do Ben and Jill keep their alliance with Robert a secret from Mr. Lyman? What happens when they meet at Buckle's Diner? How does Robert suggest they make Lyman's newfound knowledge about their friendship work against him?
- Describe the ways in which Ben and Jill's relationship is challenged and complicated by the presence of Robert. Try to consider both Ben's and Jen's points of view. What advice might you give to each of them?
- What does Ben discover about Robert's family situation? How does this affect their friendship? How does learning about Robert's family change Ben's perspective on his own situation?
- Who is Mrs. Keane? What advice and help does she give Ben? How is Mrs. Keane's family situation similar to that of Robert Gerritt? Does reading this story help you gain perspective on being a friend to people dealing with grief and loss?

- List at least three facts Mr. Arthur Rydens shares with the Keepers, Mrs. Keane, and Tom when they visit the bank. How might these facts change the Keepers' strategy?
- As the novel draws to a close, what threat does the Glennley Group pose for the Keepers? What do you think the Keepers should do next? Do you think the Keepers can win their battle? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITIES & RESEARCH

- Ben and Jen want to protect Oakes School from being demolished to make room for an amusement park. Using information from this and other books you may have read in this series, create a poster or PowerPoint presentation listing at least four reasons Oakes School should be saved. (Hint: Go to the library or online to learn more about the environmental impact of amusement parks and/or the National Register of Historic Places.)
- In the character of Ben or Jen, write an email (minimum of two paragraphs) welcoming Robert Gerritt to the ranks of The Keepers of the School and explaining the rules and responsibilities of membership.
- Is your hometown similar to or different from Edgeport? Make a two-columned chart comparing your town to Edgeport. Be sure to consider the climate, proximity to water, historic significance, and your school building, as well as other points you observe.
- Ben reflects on the Revolutionary War, particularly the Battle of Bunker Hill. Go to the library or online to learn more about the American Revolution and the historic Bunker Hill battle. Then write a short essay describing any parallels you see between this battle and the fight for Oakes School.
- Go to the library or online to find a definition for the word "legacy." With friends or classmates, make a list of ideas and images that come to your mind when you think about this word. Once the list has at least twenty-five items, discuss whether most people have similar or different ideas about this term. Is it important to leave a legacy and, if so, what kind of legacy would you want to leave?
- After completing activity five, above, use words that you have contributed to the list as the starting point for writing a poem or lyrics to a song you could title "Legacy."
- Throughout the story, Ben, Jen, and Robert must grapple with the fact that they are sneaking around, misleading their parents, and entering the school without permission in their efforts to protect it from Lyman and the Glennley Group. In the characters of the three Keepers, role-play a conversation in which you discuss your feelings about breaking the rules.
- Ben feels happy on a boat. *The Whites of their Eyes* concludes with Ben looking up through a porthole. Draw a picture of a place that makes you feel happy and content. Caption your drawing with a few sentences describing what you like to do in this place.
- What would you find? Make a list of the artifacts Ben, Jen, and Robert find hidden in Oakes School. Which artifact is most interesting or intriguing to you? Then imagine you found a fascinating historical object or document hidden in your school. Write a newspaper-style article describing what you found, where you found it, and the significance of your discovery for your school or community. If possible, create a mock version of your discovery and take a picture of yourself holding the document or object to accompany your article.
- What would you save? Visit your local library, historical society, or a nearby museum to learn about your community's past. Select a building, landmark, park, or other site that you feel is worth preserving for future generations. (Note: Your selection does not have to be a place that is currently threatened in any way.) Make a large, illustrated poster with the heading, "Let's make sure future generations can enjoy _____ (your chosen site)." Consider including photographs, drawings, historical information, and quotations from local officials or residents discussing the site on your poster. Present your poster to friends and classmates.

Books by Andrew Clements



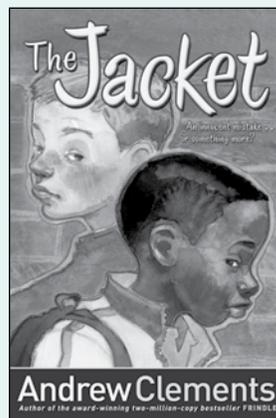
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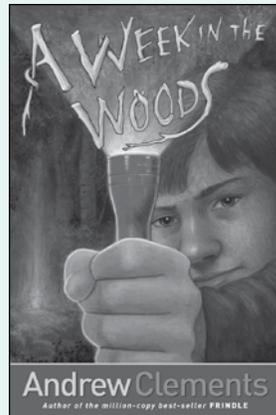
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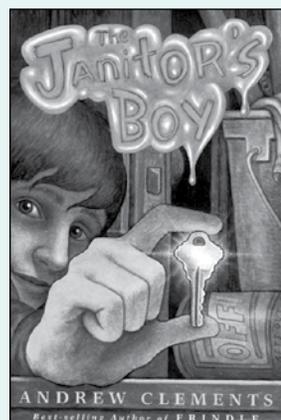
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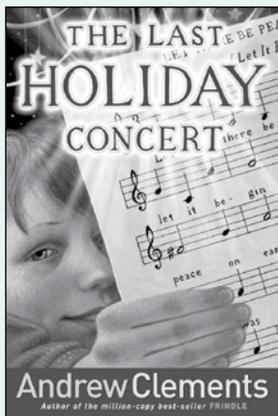
The Janitor's Boy

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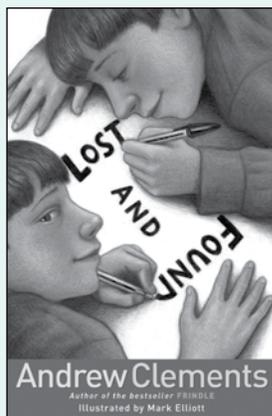
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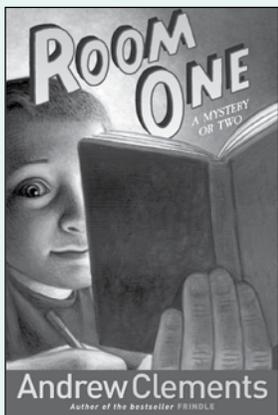
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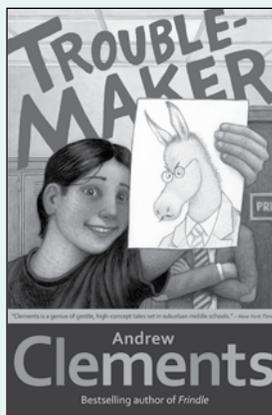
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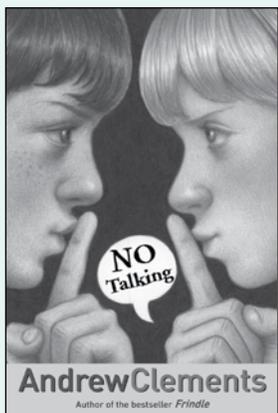
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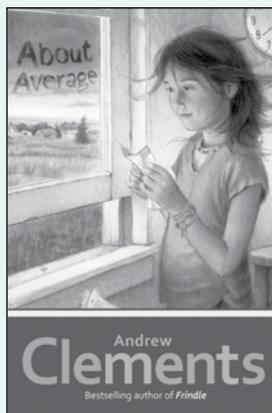
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About Average

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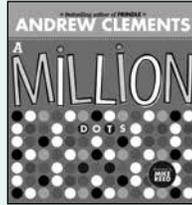
Big Al

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By Andrew Clements
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Big Al and Shrimpy

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Illustrated by Yoshi Kogo
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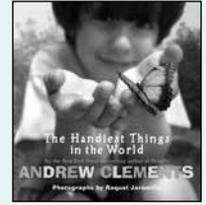
A Million Dots

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SSLI Book Award Honor Book



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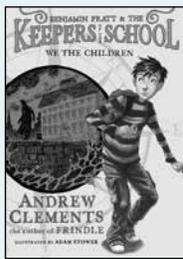
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Illustrated by Tim Bowers
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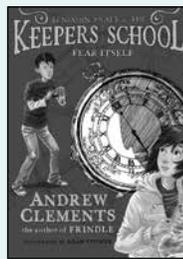
By Andrew Clements
Illustrated by Raquel Jaramillo
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BENJAMIN PRATT AND THE KEEPERS OF THE SCHOOL



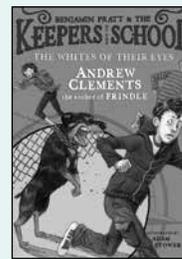
We the Children

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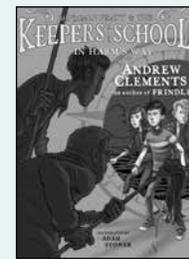
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The Whites of Their Eyes

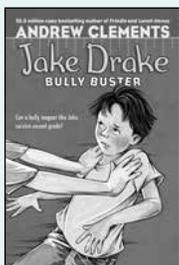
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In Harm's Way

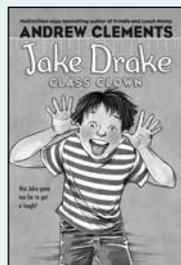
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THE JAKE DRAKE SERIES



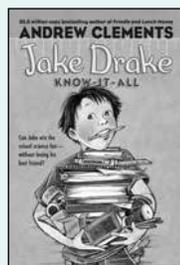
Jake Drake, Bully Buster

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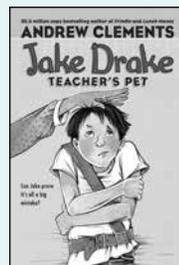
Jake Drake, Class Clown

By Andrew Clements
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Jake Drake, Know-It-All

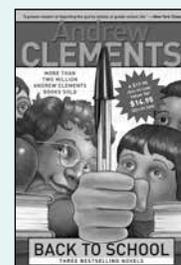
By Andrew Clements
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Jake Drake, Teacher's Pet

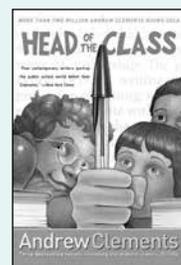
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BOXED SETS



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