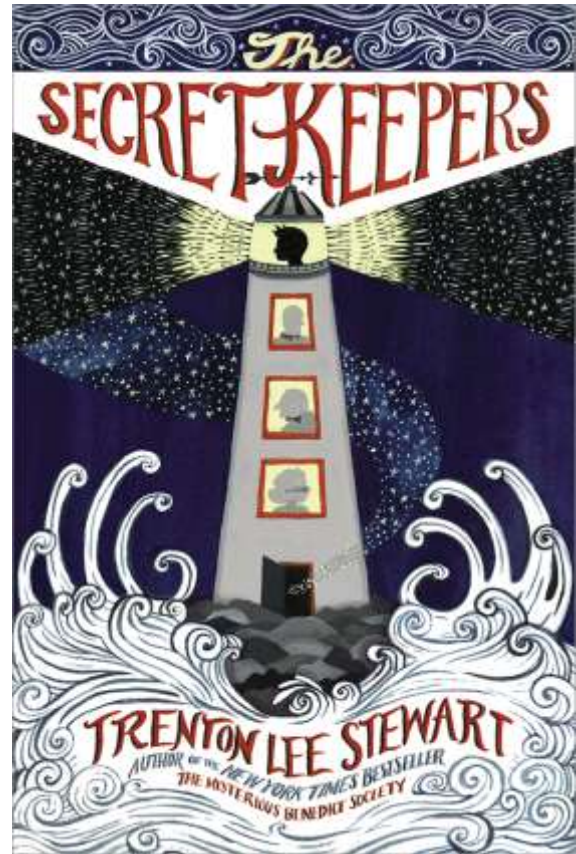


The Secret Keepers

By Trenton Lee Stewart

What would you do if you found a mysterious antique watch with magical powers in an alley? Would you keep it for yourself or sell it to help your mother who is working multiple jobs to take care of you? Would you keep it secret or tell the world? These are questions that eleven-year-old Reuben Pedley must ask himself. However, the more questions he answers, the more mysteries he finds.

Reuben lives in the decaying city of New Umbra, a place where no one feels safe. The police have little power and the devious Counselor rules with fear and the use of his bodyguards, the Directions. Yet, with the help of unlikely allies and the mysterious watch itself, Reuben sets out on the adventure of a lifetime to help his mother and all the people of New Umbra. He will face challenges he could never imagine and make sacrifices he didn't think were possible.



About the Author

Trenton Lee Stewart is the author of many juvenile fiction novels. He is most well known for *The Mysterious Benedict Society* series. Many of his books have made The New York Times Best Seller list. He wrote *The Secret Keepers* in 2016. He has said that the first book he truly loved was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis, because it was the first time he felt like he was being transported into another place in a book. His love of puzzles and finding the answers to difficult questions is reflected in many of his novels. Stewart currently lives in Arkansas with his family.

Getting Started

You can find *The Secret Keepers* at your local or school library, or at local or online bookstores. It's also available as an ebook.

While You're Reading

Every good story is full of captivating characters, timeless and timely themes, significant settings, pivotal plot points, and vivid vocabulary that combine to engage our brains and our hearts. In this section of the website, you will find activities that invite you to dig deeper into each of these literary elements for a better understanding and enjoyment of the book.

To aid your investigation, save our “Writing While You Read” guide (see pages 19 and 20), with helpful tips on keeping a reading journal and annotating a book while you read.

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Part I: The Ticking Clock of *The Secret Keepers*:

- The key way a writer helps his or her readers connect with a story is through its characters. Which qualities, behaviors, and choices do you think make some characters more appealing than others? To help you answer this question with specific evidence from the book, use the Character Grid you'll find on pages 21 and 22 below (and you can make extra copies of page 22 if you need them). Tuck it inside your book, and, each



- time you meet a new character, take a minute to jot down the name and your initial observations about him or her on your Character Grid. Be sure to revisit your Grid every few chapters or so, too! There may be more ideas you want to add as you get to know each character better.
- Reuben has a strong bond with his mom, and recognizes that they are all each other has in the world. Yet, he still attempts dangerous feats as he climbs the walls and buildings of New Umbra. “Now, looking at the alley floor far below him, Reuben became sickeningly aware of how high he had actually climbed” (9).
 - What do you think the author wants us to understand about Reuben based on his daring actions?
 - Why do you think Reuben risks his own safety, even when he knows it might cause his mom stress?

- What do you think Reuben’s mother would do or say if she knew the risks he was taking?
- The author of *The Secret Keepers*, Trenton Lee Stewart, often uses names that are intentionally meaningful. The name of Reuben’s city has specific meaning as the word “Umbra” means “shadow.”
 - What are some examples from the text that illustrate why Stewart chose this particular name for the city?
 - As you read, write down other examples of names in the text that have particular symbolic meanings.
- Reuben spends most of his time alone and has no friends. When he was younger he had friends but as he got older, “His friends had stopped wanting to play hide-and-seek with him.... Somewhere along the way Reuben realized that he was still playing hide-and-seek, was in fact playing it all the time, but by himself, without a seeker. No one was seeking him anymore” (32).
 - Why do you think Reuben continues to play hide-and-seek even as the other kids his age grow out of playing the game?
 - Why is it so difficult for Reuben to make friends now?
 - How do you think Reuben feels about “no one seeking him anymore”? Do you think he prefers to be alone? Why or why not?
- The narrator states that Reuben understood “what invisibility was all about. But something about the encounter was weirdly unsettling. It was as if he wasn’t real, he realized. Present, but not real. An emptiness. A ghost” (93).
 - What do you think the author means by “present, but not real”?
 - Why does the author compare invisibility to being a ghost?
- Why do you think the Counselor’s boss is called “The Smoke”? Do you think the people of New Umbra should remain afraid of him, or should they refuse to give him and The Directions power over them?
- “So it was in a cheerful, unworried frame of mind that he went home that afternoon, unaware of how precious his mood was--as all fine things are precious as they are coming to an end” (102).

As Reuben learns how to use the power of the watch, he feels less worried about the world around him. However, the author is letting us know that Reuben’s cheerful mood will soon be changing. This is an example of foreshadowing in the story. Authors often use foreshadowing to give a reader clues about what will happen later in the story.

- Why do you think that the author uses foreshadowing at this point in the story?
- What clues is the author giving you about what might happen later in the story?
- How does this quote build suspense and make you want to continue reading?
- In literature, *mood* refers to the feelings that an author evokes, or brings to mind, in the reader. Authors are deliberate about the phrases and descriptions they use to create these moods. For

example, when Reuben sees the mysterious old man on the train, the narrator describes the interaction with the following quote: “There was something in the fixed concentration of the man’s gaze, an air about him of coiled tension, that made him seem very much like a cat that had just spotted a mouse” (149).

- What mood or emotion does the author create in this quote?
- What phrases evoke those feelings in you, the reader?
- Why do you think the author compares the interaction to that of a cat and mouse?

Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Part II: The Meyer Legacy of *The Secret Keepers*:

- How does Reuben’s life in New Umbra compare to Penny’s life in Point William? Draw a Venn diagram (see pages 23 and 24 below) in your journal to help you describe the similarities and differences between these two settings. How do the settings affect the personalities and behaviors of Reuben and Penny?

- As Reuben spends more time with the Meyer family, how does he change? Are these changes for the better or the worse? Include some specific examples from the book that show those changes.

- After reading Penelope’s letter, Reuben recognizes that, “There was something about Bartholomew that seemed familiar... And that line about vicious rulers coming in power with the help of a clockwatch-- why did that seem familiar?” (261).

- What characters or occurrences in the current story are similar to Bartholomew and “vicious rulers coming into power” during Penelope’s time?
- Why do you think the author is making the comparisons between the past and the present?
- What clues from Penelope’s letter could help Reuben now?



Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Parts III: Home and Not Home of *The Secret Keepers*:

- After returning to New Umbra, Reuben, Jack, and Penny seek refuge at Mrs. Genevieve’s watch shop. The narrator tells us that, “The sight of her evoked in Ruben an unexpected feeling of tenderness, as if they were lifelong friends” (308).

- What characters or occurrences in the current story are similar to Bartholomew and “vicious rulers coming into power” during Penelope’s time?
- Why do you think the author is making the comparisons between the past and the present?
- What clues from Penelope’s letter could help Reuben now?

- When Reuben is left behind in the Counselor’s Mansion, he explores freely until he uncovers a complex network of trapdoors that lead to the basement prison (363). Why do you think the Counselor/The Smoke uses trap doors instead of other types of security to protect his home and the watch?

- To help Reuben and his friends, Mrs. Genevieve gathers people from a church and asks them to follow her. “Every face in the congregation turn[s] toward the shouting Mrs. Genevieve.... ‘Help!’ She shout[s]. ‘Oh, help! A child is in danger! You must help me, all of you!’” (473).
 - Why do you think the congregation in the church follows Mrs. Genevieve at first, before they know where she is leading them?
 - Why do you think they continue to follow her even after they realize the danger they might encounter at the Counselor’s mansion?

- Towards the end of the story, the narrator states “They didn’t fully understand him-- It was hard for the Meyers to see how Jack could be both an unrepentant liar and an honest man, but they knew it to be true” (496).
 - What are some examples from the text that demonstrate Jack to be both a liar and an honest man?
 - In the quote above, the word understand is in italics. Why do you think author emphasizes the word this way?

Getting to the Root



English is a living language. It changes and grows all the time. One of the best ways to understand the history of the English language and to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words is to learn Latin and Greek word parts. As you study biology, you will learn more and more of these word parts, and once you know them, you will begin to recognize them in all kinds of words—and you'll find that your knowledge of those word parts will help you decipher the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Roots are the "base" of plants, and Latin and Greek roots form the base of many English words. For example, the Latin root *audi* means "to hear." How many modern English words can you think of that include the root *audi*?

Next, take a look at each word part below. Beside each part is a word from *The Secret Keepers* containing that word part. You can find the word in context on the page number in parentheses.

- ***mens*** – *immense* (10)
- ***numer*** – *numerals* (3, 22)
- ***pell*** – *propelled* (87)
- ***mor*** – *morosely* (121)
- ***mort*** – *immortality* (415)
- ***ject*** – *dejected* (490)

1. Can you determine the meaning of the root from your knowledge of the word beside it?
2. If not, think of other words that you know that also contain that root. What do those words have in common? Based on that common element, can you figure out the meaning of the root?
3. If you're still stumped, check out this [list of Latin and Greek roots](#).
4. Now that you know the meaning of the root, how many words can you generate that use the root?
5. Once you understand the meaning of the root, you'll find that even your understanding and appreciation of familiar words will deepen and grow when you think about how that root works in those words.

Words, Words, Words

The Secret Keepers is full of great words. Below is a list of some of the words from the book that may be unfamiliar to you, along with the page number on which each word appears in the story. Be sure to follow the steps below for other words in the book that are new to you.

- metropolis (4)
- predicament (10)
- deliberate (14)
- unblemished (22)
- relented (62)
- emanated (90)
- vigorously (106)
- precipice (107)
- ruminations (126)
- brusque (136)
- indecipherable (137)
- microfiche (138)
- indignant (196)
- deduced (222)
- acoustics (265)
- anxious (322)
- nonchalance (463)
- dissonant (473)
- wearisome (493)

Before you look these words up in a dictionary—or ask someone what they mean—try working through the following steps:

1. Generate a list of other words that share one or more of the same word parts. What do the words on the list have in common? Are there any clues from those commonalities that you can use to help figure out the meaning of the unknown word? Hint: Some word parts—as they appear in English words—have multiple meanings as we look back at the Latin and Greek, in part because of changes that have occurred in the words over the years. For example, does the "ped-" in "pedestrian" mean the same thing as the "ped" in "pediatrician"? Where there is possible confusion, or when you don't see familiar word parts, context clues (see step 2) are extremely important.
2. Go back and reread the word in its context. This context includes the sentence in which you find the word, but you should also read one or two sentences both before and after the appearance of the word. What context clues do you find that might unlock the meaning of the word for you?
3. Make your best guess at the meaning of the word.
4. Look up the definition in [a dictionary](#). Be sure to also look for information about the word's origin. This information will often contain the Latin or Greek word from which the word is derived.
5. How close was your guess?

Explore

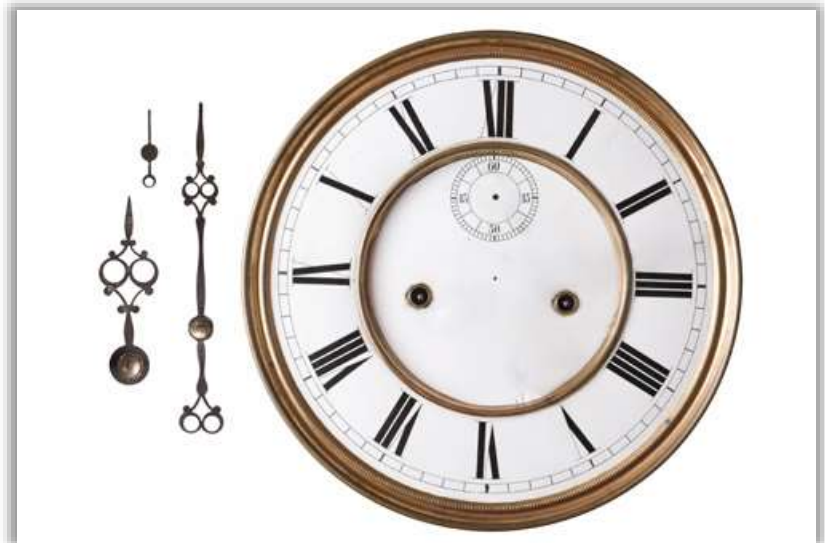
Our world is full of connections—between people, places, and events. In this section of the website, you will find activities that uncover some important connections—in physics, history, architecture and oral storytelling — between *The Secret Keepers* and our world.

It's About Time (and How We Tell It)

Even before Reuben realizes the special powers of the watch, he begins to discover the history and value of the timepiece. When Reuben notes that the clock does not have a minute hand, Mrs. Genevieve explains that, “In the early days of clocks there was no use for a minute hand... such precision was impossible at the time. Even with the hour hand there was much inaccuracy” (60). In this day and age, we take for granted the ability to tell time precisely to the nearest thousandth of a second. In sporting events, like the Olympics, this precision is necessary to determine a winner. However, the ability to measure time more precisely began in 1577, when the minute hand was invented.

Explore the links below to learn more about the evolution of timekeeping.

- [Watch a video on a brief history of telling time.](#)
- Learn about [how clocks work in five easy steps](#)
- Explore a [diagram of the inner workings of an analog clock.](#)
- [Review a description and picture of a “clock watch.”](#)
- [Examine a timeline of clocks and watches.](#)
- [Click here to learn about how different types of clocks work.](#)
- [Read this article](#) to understand how technology has evolved to make it much easier to precisely determine who wins Olympic races.
- [Investigate how to wind a clock with a key,](#) to better understand how Reuben made the clock watch work.



Why do you think the inventor chose for the magical objects he gave the brothers to be clocks? If you were the inventor, would you have chosen a different object? Why or Why not?

Now You See It, Now You Don't: The Science of Invisibility



Once Reuben uncovers the power and dangerous nature of the watch, he seeks help from Mrs. Genevieve to better understand how the watch makes him invisible. Together they experiment with the watch, and Mrs. Genevieve reasons that, “When the metal of the watch is energized, it generates a field that bends light around it”(129). This field renders the possessor of the clock blind and invisible.

While invisibility is something that is considered a magical superpower and not realistic, the science behind light bending (refraction) is very real. The links below will teach you more about that science and how - with just the right lenses - things can appear invisible!

Activities

- Read a basic [introduction to the science of light](#).
- Watch two short videos on [how light travels](#) and on [refraction of light](#).
- Investigate how the path of light can change using mirrors in this [interactive game](#). (requires Flash)
- Watch a [video and read an article](#) about lenses that bend light so that objects seem invisible.
- [Read an article about how spectral cloaking could make invisibility a realistic possibility](#).
- Learn [about the first “invisibility cloak,”](#) which was developed at our own Duke University!
- Discover how [the metamaterials used in creating invisibility are making their way into other products and applications](#).
- [Complete an experiment](#) to better understand how light can bend with refraction. **NOTE:** Be sure to ask a parent or other trusted adult for help.

Reflection Questions

- Based on what you have learned, what are some examples of refraction that you have observed in real life?
- Do you think scientists’ understanding of refraction will eventually make it possible for people to appear invisible? Why (or why not)?
- What are the positives and negatives of such technology?

Lighthouses and Lightkeepers

The title, *The Secret Keepers*, is a direct comparison to the role of lightkeepers as protectors of ships and the role of the characters in the story as protectors of secrets. The Meyer's family have served as the keepers of the lighthouse at Point William for years. They have taken the job very seriously and believe, "the protection of ships in dark and inclement weather [is] a critically important job, one that must never go unfilled or be entrusted to the hands of a negligent keeper" (182).



Find out more about the history of lighthouses and lightkeepers and their vital roles in the days before GPS and other technology that now keep ships safe from rocky shores.

- [Read an Article and watch a video](#) about the history of lighthouses in North Carolina.
- Explore basic background information on the [History of Lighthouses](#).
- Learn lighthouse terms and vocabulary from this [glossary](#).
- Discover how the [Fresnel Lens](#) changed the way lighthouses emitted light to mariners trying to avoid wrecking on rocky shoals.
- Learn about the [history of lighthouses through primary sources and first person accounts](#).
- Katherine Walker was one of the first woman lightkeepers, you can learn more about her [here](#).
- Watch a video that captures [a day in the life of a light keeper](#) on a remote cape in Uruguay.

Reflection Question

How do the characters of *The Secret Keepers* guard and protect Penelope's secrets and the secrets of the watch much like lightkeepers guard and protect the shores they live on? Give specific examples from the novel.

Pass it On: The Power of Storytelling

After Penny discovers that Reuben possesses the object that her family has waited for for centuries, she tells him her family’s story of Jack and Penelope. “It’s always been the tradition for the oldest Meyer alive to tell the story to you the first time” (203). The family uses the timely art of oral storytelling to pass down their “most closely guarded secret” (182).

Traditional storytelling has existed for thousands of years and is an important way that history and lessons are passed from generation to generation. Check out the links below to discover more about this amazing art form.



Activities

- [Watch a short video](#) or read an [article](#) to learn about the history of storytelling.
- [Discover how storytelling has changed over time.](#)
- [Read an article](#) about how storytelling can help pass down family histories through generations, much like the Meyer’s did with their story of Penelope and Jack.
- [Listen to professional storytellers narrate traditional stories](#) from around the world (click on any link to hear a story).
- Collect stories from your family members using the [tips and interview questions on this web page](#).
- Are you ready to tell a story of your own? Review these [six tips for great storytelling](#).

Reflection Questions

- Why do you think that the family chose to pass down the story orally, instead of writing it down for future generations to read?
- Do you think that this was the best way for them to ensure that the story was preserved? Why or why not?

Create

An important part of learning is having the chance to produce something of your own. Here you will find engaging projects that connect with the novel and that allow your creative abilities to shine.

Create an Oral Family History



As mentioned in the exploration activity above, the Meyer family used storytelling as a way to pass on their family history. The story of Jack and Penelope was true, but Penny explains, “I tell it in my own style, tweaking the dialogue and details and such... But the most important parts have always stayed exactly the same. That’s what being a Meyer has meant ever since that night: not just being trustworthy... but being a great storyteller” (202).

Your family also has a history that is important to preserve. Collect stories from your family members using the [tips and interview questions on this web page](#). After interviewing family members come up with a story from a current or past family member that you think should be passed on from generation to generation. Make sure that your story has the following:

- A beginning, middle, and end;
- A lesson that the listener learns from;
- An entertaining plot;
- Details that make the listener feel like they’re actually experiencing the events unfold. (The story should be based on something that actually happened, but you can embellish it with details to engage your listeners.)

Practice telling your story to several different family members or friends, then record a video of you telling the story. Make sure that you use your voice to convey emotions and feelings as you tell the story. You may also want to add voices if there are different characters speaking in your story. Share your video with friends and family to ensure that the story lives on.

Design a Dream House

Reuben and his mother spend many evenings creating plans for a dream home. “Designing and modifying dream homes [is] their favorite thing to do together. It had started at their old place, when the rent went up and his mom began looking for a cheaper apartment” (39). This activity is a way for them to escape the dismal reality of their life in New Umbra.

Have you ever imagined a home that gives you all the comforts and luxuries of your dreams? This is your chance! Use your imagination to plan your home.

Here are some suggested steps to guide your project:

- Start by listing all the things you would like for your home to have, like Reuben included a climbing wall inside of an indoor swimming pool.
- Make a floor plan on graph paper that includes all the rooms in the house. This [site](#) will teach you more about how to draw floor plans.
- Use this [blueprint symbols glossary](#) to show where specific things (doors, stairs, appliances, etc...) will be located in your house.
- Then draw the outside of your house on blank paper. This drawing should be in color and include the landscape that would be around the house. [Check out these dream houses if you are in need of ideas.](#)



After designing the plans for your home, you can try building a small version of your home. Ask a parent to help you find materials like clay, paper, balsa wood or other creative materials.

A Reporter on the New Umbra Beat



Towards the end of the novel, the narrator lets us know that Reuben and Penny know very little of what happened to The Smoke after the police took him away. “Thus their knowledge of what was going on had been limited to what they were told and what they read in the newspapers, which boasted such headlines as *The Counselor to See a Counselor*” (491).

Write a newspaper article that describes what you think happened to The Smoke after Penny and

Reuben left New Umbra. Make sure to include a beginning paragraph about how The Smoke came to be captured. Remember that the true events of the clock were not released to the public.

It is a good idea to read several newspaper articles for examples that can inspire you. Get a family member to help you find articles on the internet or purchase a newspaper. You can also check out this lesson on how to write a newspaper article.

Once you have written a rough draft of your article, you can type it into a [template like this one](#) (Flash required). Print and share your published article with friends and family.

Reflect & Connect Prompts

In Duke TIP's online Book Club, the "Reflect & Connect" prompts provide an opportunity for students to share their ideas about the book with other Duke TIP students. You may choose to record your responses to these questions in your Reading Journal, or you can use them to talk about the book with friends or classmates who have also read it.

Hope

After discovering the watch and seeing Officer Warren, Reuben is in a good mood. "Indeed, he [is] perhaps the only person for blocks in every direction who at that moment [is] feeling hopeful" (34). Hope is a very important emotion for people because it enables them to see solutions to problems and gives them the power to make things better in their lives. The people of New Umbra have very little hope. They mostly live in fear.

- What do you think has caused this lack of hope in New Umbra and how does it affect the way citizens live and interact with each other? Give examples from the story.
- As Reuben and his mother are designing their dream home, they use the designer's guiding principle, "never to say no to any suggestion but rather to figure out how to make it work" (40). How does this principle show that they have hope that things can and will get better?
- Give an example of a time in your life where you have maintained hope to persevere and solve a problem.

Is the Risk Worth the Reward?

Mrs. Genevieve informs Reuben that a newspaper advertisement is put in the paper every day offering a large reward for the clock Reuben has found. Mrs. Genevieve questions the motive of the advertisement, "Why does this person want the watch so badly? Why does The Smoke? How do they know of it? And do you really wish to become involved with either? I would not advise this" (70). Reuben realizes the risk but also knows that the reward could greatly help him and his mother.

- What would you do if you were Reuben? Would you contact the newspaper for the reward? Why or why not?
- Do you think the risks Reuben takes are worth it in the end?

Super Power

Reuben is extremely excited when he fully realizes what he can do with the watch. "*I can turn invisible!* he [thinks]. *Invisible!* He laugh[s] and leap[s] up as high as he [can] trying to touch the ceiling" (87). This is probably the best power for Reuben. He spends most of his life trying to appear invisible to the people around him, and now he has the power to actually **be** unseen. This power enables him to understand things about his town and the mysterious Directions that he was not able to understand before.

- What would you do if you had possession of the watch and the power to be invisible?
- Write several examples of times in your life where invisibility would have been helpful.

- If you could have any super power, would you choose invisibility or would you choose a different power? Explain why or why not.

The Curse of Watchfulness

During Penelope’s and Jack’s story, Penelope describes what it’s like to constantly to be looking over her shoulder in fear. “Constant watchfulness has kept me alive, but it’s also a curse. I’m always wary”(194). For lightkeepers constant watchfulness is also a necessity, but as the quote above demonstrates, sometimes our actions or habits can become great burdens in our lives.

- How do you think the Meyer family’s vital role as lightkeepers have burdened them in the story?
- Why do you think people choose jobs or roles that require them to make personal sacrifices?
- What other real-world examples can you think of where a necessary skill or habit can become a burden or a curse?

What’s In a Name?

Families often name their children after prior family members to honor them. The Meyer Family does this with a specific purpose. ““Ever since that night there’s always been a Jack Meyer at Point William Light... every first born son for generations has been named Jack.’ ‘And every first born daughter has been name Penelope”” (205). Each child named Jack and Penelope is expected to take on the responsibility of continuing Penelope’s legacy to save society from evil. Penny embraces this responsibility, but her brother Jack resents it and has grown angry with the family because of their expectations.

- How would you feel if you were expected to carry on such an important responsibility? This would be similar to being expected to do the exact same job as your parent. How would this make you feel?
- Why do you think the current Jack feels so resentful?
- Now that both watches are safely at the bottom of the sea, should the tradition of naming the first-born children Jack and Penelope continue?

Ocean of Secrets

Reuben, Jack, and Penny hatch a plan to dispose of the watches once and for all. They choose to drop them far out into the ocean because, “The ocean [is] the greatest secret keeper of all. Some of its secrets, like the hidden shoals, [can] be discovered, but most [will] never be known... The ocean [is] probably the most mysterious thing in the world, Reuben [thinks], except for a person” (494).

- Do you agree that the ocean is the best secret keeper? Explain your thinking with examples.
- If it was your choice, what would you have done with the watches after defeating The Smoke?
- What do you think Reuben means by a person being the only thing more mysterious than the ocean?

Fountain of Youth

The letter from Penelope that Reuben finds in the tunnel, explains that if a person possesses both clock watches they will possess immortality. Penelope describes how the desire for life eternal causes much evil in the world. However Reuben knows, “History [is] full of people searching for a fountain of youth, [isn’t] it? To someone like The Smoke--someone who obviously [relishes] his power-- the prospect must be irresistible. He could rule New Umbra forever” (265).

- Why do you think people are so attracted to the idea of immortality?
- What would be the greatest benefits of immortality?
- What would be the greatest disadvantages to immortality?
- Would you want to live forever? Why or why not?

A Mother’s Love

Reuben and his mother have a very close relationship. His father is no longer alive, and she works tirelessly to provide both financial and emotional support to Reuben. She worries about him constantly and is very protective. “Despite her excessive caution, his mom [is] something else, and Reuben knows it. He wouldn’t... [trade] her for half a dozen moms with better jobs and more money, and in fact... told her exactly that just the week before” (6).

- Give examples from your life of how your parent(s) act in ways that protect you.
- Compare and contrast Reuben’s dynamic with his mother to another character’s relationship with a parent from a book you have read. Which relationship is more similar to your relationship with a parent?

Keep Reading

A few thoughts on books and reading...

"When I have a little money, I buy books; and if I have any left, I buy food and clothes."—Erasmus

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."—Dr. Seuss

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."—Groucho Marx



What's next?

We hope that you enjoyed reading *The Secret Keepers*, by Trenton Lee Stewart. Check your email for information about our next book club selection. In the meantime, if you are looking for a new best friend—and aren't inside a dog—here are some books you might enjoy. Don't forget to use the tips from "Writing While You Read" (see pages 19 and 20) to deepen your enjoyment and understanding of these books too.

- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, by Robert C. O'Brien
- *Rasco and the Rats of NIMH*, by Jane Leslie Conly
- *All Four Stars*, by Tara Dairman
- *The Stars of Summer*, by Tara Dairman (sequel to *All Four Stars*)
- *The Tell-Tale Start* and other books in "The Misadventures of Edgar & Allan Poe" series by Gordon McAlpine
- *Masterminds*, by Gordon Korman
- *My Near-Death Adventures*, by Alison DeCamp
- *The Scavengers*, by Michael Perry
- *A Single Shard*, by Linda Sue Park
- *The Island of Dr. Libris*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *The Lost Kingdom*, by Matthew J. Kirby
- *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*, by Kate DiCamillo
- *The House of Power*, by Patrick Carman
- *Rivers of Fire*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Dark Planet*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster
- *Navigating Early*, by Clare Vanderpool
- *The Apothecary*, by Maile Meloy
- *The Apprentices*, by Maile Meloy (sequel to *The Apothecary*)
- *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The People of Sparks*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Prophet of Yonwood*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Diamond of Darkhold*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, by Trenton Lee Stewart
- *Chasing Vermeer*, by Blue Balliett
- *The Lightning Thief*, by Rick Riordan
- *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick



Writing While You Read

Have you ever read every word on a page, and turned every page, but when you finished reading, you couldn't remember anything that you had read? If so, you're not alone! Reading can be relaxing, but sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that reading is passive, when it should be active. This doesn't mean you need to run while reading – that might not be a good idea. Writing as you read, however, makes reading active. This process involves some effort, but the payoff for that effort is a deeper understanding and greater enjoyment of the books that you read.

Two strategies for being an active reader are keeping a reading journal and annotating your books.

How do I keep a reading journal?

Below are some suggestions of things that you might write in your reading journal. Experiment with them. You may find that one strategy works really well for you, while others don't work at all. There's really not a right or wrong way to keep a reading journal, as long as you use it as a place to explore your thoughts, reactions, and questions as you read.

What Do I Write?

Write a brief summary, in your own words, at the end of each chapter or section. Include the main ideas or concepts of the chapter, major events in the plot, and any new information that you learn in the chapter.

Do you meet a new character? If so, what is the character like? How do you know? What are the reasons behind what that character says and does? How is the character like other characters in the book? How is the character different? Does this new character remind you of characters you've read about in other books?

Does the setting change? If so, how does the new setting compare and contrast with the previous one? Why does the setting change?

Create your own title for the chapter. If the book includes chapter titles, you might write about why the author has chosen that particular title for the chapter. How does it relate to the main ideas or concepts, major events, and character action in the chapter?

Respond to the chapter. What is the most interesting thing in the chapter? What did you learn that you didn't know before? Do you agree or disagree with the choices the author is making about plot and character? Why or why not? What do you think is going to happen next? How can you connect what is happening in the book to other things you've read? To other things you know? To your own experience?

Identify words that you don't know. Some of these words may just be new to you; others may be jargon, terminology that is used in a particular field or academic discipline. Look these words up in a dictionary, write down their definitions in your notebook, and be sure you understand their meanings and how the author is using them. Often these words are some of the most important in the reading.

Make note of passages where you are confused and/or have questions, and be sure to include a page number. Once you finish the chapter, you can return to the passages. Perhaps further reading clarified the confusion. If not, you know exactly which points in the text to further research or to ask questions about.

Write down striking or unusual use of language. Often writers use particular words, expressions, or sentences in ways that we wouldn't have thought to use them, and the effect can really jump off the page at us. If you come across a passage that seems really cool to you, write it down in your reading journal.



Throughout the online book club activities, you will find activities that are specifically labeled "Reading Journal." When you see that label, read the writing prompt, and respond to it in your reading journal. These prompts will usually ask you to write about a personal connection to what you've been reading. For example, a journal prompt might ask you to write about a time when you found yourself in a situation that is similar to a situation of one of the characters in the book.

To Write or To Type, That is the Question!

Your reading journal doesn't have to be a hard-copy, hand-written one, but there are some advantages to using an old-fashioned journal:

- The physical act of writing promotes a stronger memory for new words, phrases, and strategies you will be learning
- The hard copy notebook can evolve into a collage, a scrapbook, even a work of art that represents your creative, messy, overflowing mind!

How and where you keep a reading journal is much less important than actually doing it! So find an old notebook that may be buried in your desk, ask mom or dad if you can buy an inexpensive composition book, or create a new folder on your home computer and get started!!



How do I annotate a book?

As the word suggests, annotating a book involves making notes or other types of marks that help you focus on particular words or passages that seem important, are often repeated, relate to other things you've read, or simply interest you as a reader. An active reader annotates a text by doing any or all of the following:

UNDERLINING

Specific words that convey significant events or elements of the story's characters, plot or theme

VERTICAL LINE ALONG THE MARGIN

This helps the reader quickly find an important passage underlined, or to highlight a paragraph or other section too long to underline.

✱ ASTERISK/STAR/DOODLE ✱

Placed in the margin, this device is reserved for the most important, special ideas, events or elements of the book. There would be no more than a dozen of these in the entire book; by flipping through, one could easily find once again the most significant passages in the text.

4. NUMBERS

Placing numbers in the margin can help count a set of related points or ideas the author is listing.

P.#32 PAGE NUMBERS

Often indicated by "p. #" or "Cf. #" next to the number, this indicates an idea or element is connected to another on different page of the book, and should be considered together.

CIRCLES

These serve the same function as underlining key words or phrases, but may be reserved for the **BIGGEST** ideas or facts in the book.

Of course, all of these strategies involve marking in the book. So if you're planning on annotating your book, we recommend that you have your own copy – librarians take a very dim view of writing in books that belong to the media center/library!



Names, Places, & Faces...Oh, My!

Keeping Track with a Character Grid

When reading a new book, it can be helpful to keep track of the characters you meet and what you think about them. This Character Grid is one way to do just that!

Characters in books (or movies!) are often very like people you meet every day in real life. You may notice the way a character dresses, talks, thinks, behaves, or makes new friends. As you record your ongoing thoughts here, remember that some characters will change and grow depending on what happens to them—or whom they meet—as the story progresses. These are called **dynamic** characters. On the other hand, some characters stay the same no matter what happens to them. These are called **static** characters. Whether a character is willing to change and grow can affect the kind of person he or she turns out to be in the end, and it can also influence how we, as readers, feel about that character.

For example, Marlin, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, starts out as an overprotective dad who doesn't believe his son Nemo should try new things because he might get hurt. As the movie progresses, though, Marlin makes new friends, like Crush and Dory, who help him learn to guide and encourage his son without keeping him from experiencing the fun life has to offer. By the end of the movie, Marlin has changed his way of thinking about how to be a "good" dad. This not only makes him a dynamic character but also makes us like him better and want him to succeed as a parent. (If Marlin had not changed his ways, we might have ended up being frustrated by him.)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Tuck this Character Grid into your book or Reading Journal. Then, each time you meet a new character in the book, take a moment to write down his or her name on the grid and answer the "As You Are Reading" questions. (If you run out of writing room, feel free to create your own grid or answer these questions in your Reading Journal!)
2. Once you have finished the book, go back through your grid and answer the "After You Have Finished the Book" questions. As a way of wrapping up, consider: With which character(s) did you connect most strongly? What does this tell you about yourself?

Character's Name	As You Are Reading...		After You Have Finished the Book...	
	Where/When do you meet this character?	Describe this character's appearance and behavior.	What stands out to you about this character's name, behavior, or choices?	Why is this character important to the story overall?
			Is this character static or dynamic ? What evidence from the book tells you so?	

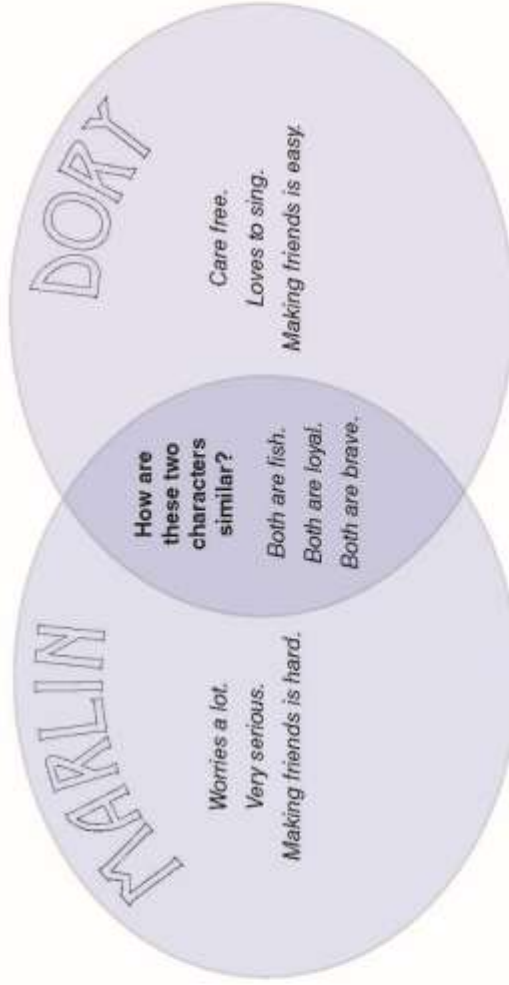


Finding Common Ground

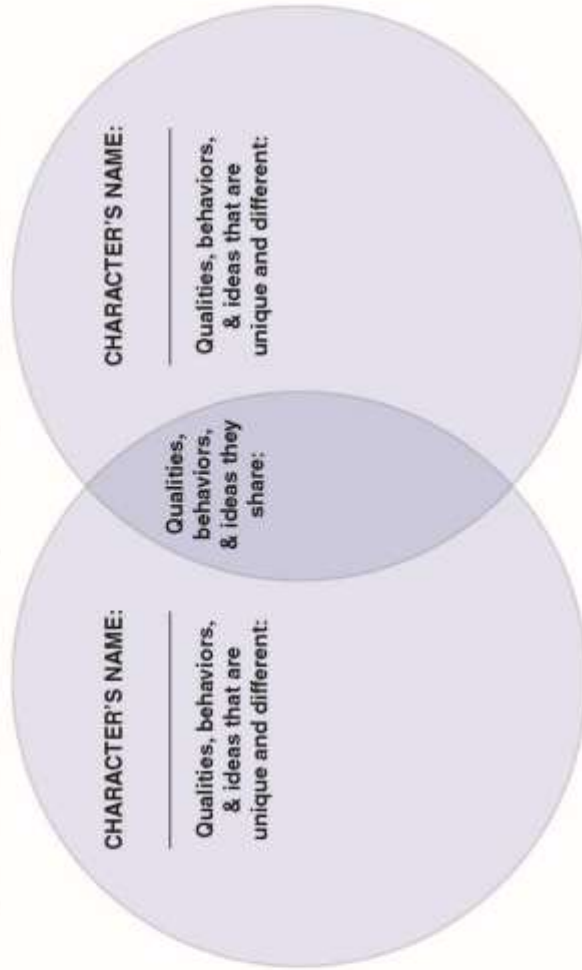
Side-By-Side Comparison with a Venn Diagram

Creating a Venn Diagram can help you visualize and make sense of the similarities and differences between two or more things. For example, as you are reading a book, you could use a Venn Diagram to compare key characters, places, or events.

A basic Venn Diagram is made up of two, partially overlapping circles. Let's say you wanted to compare two characters. In the outer part of each circle, you would write one character's name and list the qualities, behaviors, and ideas that make him or her unique and different. In the space where the circles overlap, write down characteristics the characters share. If we were comparing Marlin and Dory, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, here is how our Venn Diagram might look. (If you've seen this movie, try adding some observations of your own!):



Now you are ready to draw your own Venn Diagram in your Reading Journal! To get started, try something like this:



If you want to compare more than two characters, places, or events, simply add additional circles to your Venn Diagram. Be creative! Just pay attention to the places where your circles overlap and look for similarities there. Here are some other possibilities:

