

THE MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY



Curriculum connections

- ❖ Teamwork
- ❖ Friendship
- ❖ Family
- ❖ Overcoming Challenges
- ❖ Self-Discipline

Ages 8 – 12

By
Trenton Lee Stewart

ACTIVITIES (MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY)

1. Reynie and Miss Perumal spend their mornings reading the paper and the latest news about “The Emergency” and pondering the slogan “Things must change NOW!” Ask students to form groups of three, and find a news report they feel portrays an emergency in the United States. The groups should prepare an oral presentation of a “breaking newscast” or a news documentary complete with anchor news persons and on site news personnel. The news program should include an explanation of the problem, and how it relates to the slogan above, and propose at least one possible solution.
2. Mr. Curtain transmits subliminal messages into the minds of the people he wants to control and manipulate. With a partner, have students research subliminal messages, specifically locating information pertaining to when they were first used and how they have been used in recent years. Have students start with the following website: <http://library.thinkquest.org/28162/main.html>. Ask students to find examples of the use of subliminal messages on the Internet and to design a project using similar techniques to convey a message of importance to them.
3. The kids in The Mysterious Benedict Society agree to learn Morse code to exchange information with Mr. Benedict while they are at the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened. Ask students to pick a partner and together have them create a poster board listing the Morse code. Then, have each pair of students prepare a creative way to send and receive the messages using simple, available resources such as flags, flashlights, drums, or other instruments. Students can conduct a classroom demonstration sending and receiving their prepared messages.
4. The success of the operation to save society from the evil Mr. Curtain and his subliminal messages

depends on a team of highly intelligent children. In groups of three, ask students to investigate traits and characteristics of gifted and talented children. Ask students to make a brochure answering the following questions and others they may encounter in their research: What makes a child gifted? How can gifted children be educated? What support systems do they need? What special classes should they take? Be sure to include a resource page. Make the brochures available to parents during open house and curriculum meetings.

ACTIVITIES (PERILOUS JOURNEY)

1. Kate loves her falcon Madge which she has trained extensively, a labor of love which pays off for Kate when she needs her. In groups of three, ask students to research falconry — its origins, the use of the falcons, and the current-day sport. Students may begin their research at this site: <http://www.pbs.org/falconer/falconry/index.htm>. Each group should prepare a 5 – 10 minute presentation of their findings, including one or more visual aids.
2. Diana Sudyka illustrates *The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Perilous Journey*, but Mr. Stewart has written numerous descriptive passages that evoke imagery. For example, on page 91 when the foursome see the harbor in Stonetown for the first time; on page 118, when Captain Noland brings tea to their room on the *Shortcut*, or on page 400, when Kate fashions a sled out of a table and Sticky and Reynie pull Mr. Benedict and Constance down the mountain on it. Ask students to select one of these passages, or one of their own choosing, and illustrate the scene using pen, ink, pastels, watercolors, or another medium. Display the artwork in the classroom or in the school’s library for other students to enjoy.

3. Mr. Benedict and his twin brother both suffer from narcolepsy, as do their parents. With a partner, ask students to make an informative brochure about this sleep disorder. Students need to define narcolepsy, and include treatment plans, causes, symptoms, and diagnosis. Students may also want to interview someone with the disorder or a doctor or nurse at a sleep disorder clinic who works with patients who suffer with this condition.
4. The escape from the island is timed to the second to save the lives of Mr. Benedict, Milligan, Number Two, and the four children who risked their lives to rescue them. Based on what students know about the island and the small water craft accessible to the island, ask students to work with a partner to devise an alternate escape plan that would have enabled the victims of Mr. Curtain's evil scheme to escape from their doom. Have students draw a map of the island and the escape route as well as preparing an outline of their plan, including the route, the means of escape, and the people involved in helping carry out their plan.
2. Constance's ability to read others' minds seems to be improving; and she also seems to be gaining an additional ability to transfer her thoughts into others' minds. Ask students to work in small groups to investigate these phenomenon and to discover if there is any scientific support for mental telepathy and thought transference. Ask students to present their findings in a news article or documentary format to be shared with the class.
3. Mr. Benedict wants to adopt Constance and does everything in his power to bring his dream to fruition, finally meeting with success. Ask students to investigate the adoption laws of their state and to make a "How To" brochure for prospective parents who desire to adopt a child. Students should interview an adoption service counselor, a law firm specializing in adoption, and a prospective parent who has gone or is going through the process. Students may also want to talk to students they know who have been adopted.

ACTIVITIES (PRISONER'S DILEMMA)

1. In Chapter two, as Reynie and his friends watch Kate work with her falcon Madge, Reynie realizes that this time together, their self-imposed imprisonment could be the best time of their lives. He wants to savor their time together, so he takes a mental picture and "saves" it. What other events in the story might one or more of the characters want to "save" as a picture to look at later? Ask students to find a particular event or scene and then have them illustrate that scene in a medium of their own choosing: pastels, paint, ink, charcoals, pencil, collage, or another choice. The illustrations should be displayed in the classroom.



ACTIVITIES (SERIES)

1. In every book in the Mysterious Benedict Society series, the author chooses uncommon words to make his writing interesting and entertaining. Ask students to select three words with which they are unfamiliar and follow the pattern below with each word:

1. Write the original sentence
2. Define the word
3. Illustrate the word
4. Write a new sentence

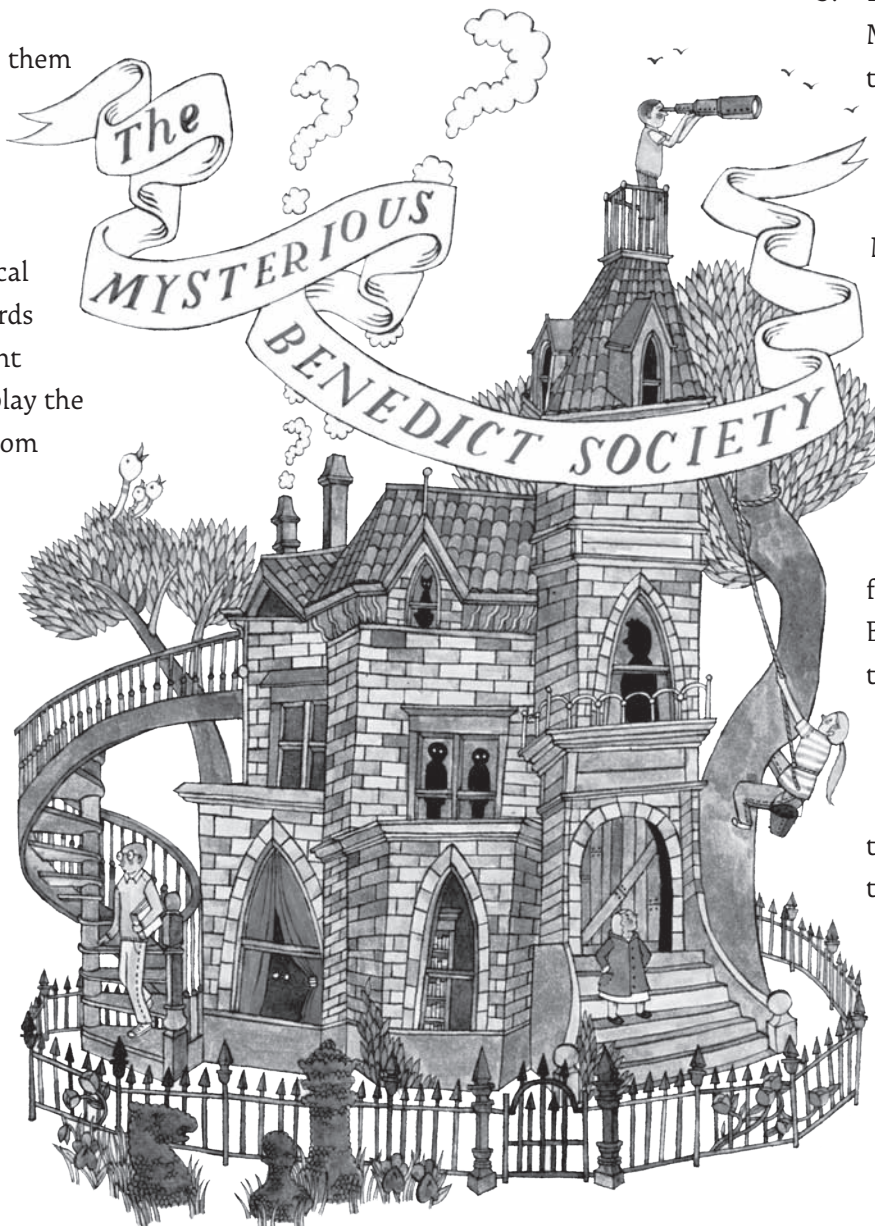
Collect all of the words and compile them into a Mysterious Benedict Society Dictionary.

Have one student make an alphabetical index of all the words and another student make a cover. Display the book in the classroom library.

2. Throughout the series the members of the Mysterious Benedict Society have formed lasting bonds of friendship as a result of the dangers they have survived together. In groups of

three, ask students to conceive a project that will keep the friends together and utilize their unique talents. Have students keep in mind that the kids will want the project to help others and to stamp out evil. Have each group create an imaginative, creative, detailed plan with goals and objectives, action steps, responsible parties, and prioritization of steps and deadlines. Have groups present the plan to the class in a visual format such as a poster, power point presentation, or flow chart.

3. Both Mr. Benedict and Mr. Curtain rely on spies to help them achieve their goals. Mr. Curtain uses the spies to gain information about Mr. Benedict's domain, but Mr. Benedict uses the spies to send false information back to Mr. Curtain. With a small group ask students to write a reader's theater scenario from each of the Mysterious Benedict Society books to illustrate the use of spies by both brothers. Students should practice and present their reader's theater scenario to the class.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (MYSERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY)

1. Beginning on page 1, the importance of following instructions is stressed to the children throughout the book and accompanied by the threat of dire consequences if instructions are not followed to the letter. How do the instructions play a role in helping and/or hindering the children in reaching their goal of being selected as “one” of the special gifted children? How do they use the instructions to their advantage or disadvantage?
2. What is the most important test the children pass in order to be selected? How are they tested? Why doesn't it seem to matter that all the children solve the problem in a different way, yet still make it to the next round of testing?
3. With so much in common, Kate, Reynie, Sticky, and Constance still have dissimilar traits as well. What are the traits they possess that bring them together in unity? What causes discord among the team members? What in their backgrounds and family life is similar? What is dissimilar? How do their likenesses play a role in their assignment?
4. Why do Reynie, Kate, and Sticky take an immediate dislike to Constance? How does Constance finally overcome their opinion of her?
5. At The Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened, along with the other messengers, the children in the Mysterious Benedict Society are taught that there are no rules. What is ironic about this statement? Why is there no truth to it?
6. What strength does each member of the team contribute to help the team succeed in its goal to stop the evil Mr. Curtain?
7. How does Mr. Curtain determine what type of brain function he performs on the adults he kidnaps to work for him? A complete brainsweep? Or a Lacunar Amnesia? What is the difference between these brain operations?



8. What is the Whisperer? How does it work? Why does it make the Messengers feel so good about themselves when they sit in it and put the helmet on their heads?
9. Why are Reynie and Sticky so terrified to become Messengers? Are their fears founded? Why or why not?
10. When Milligan comes to rescue them, the children's decision to stay on the island seems foolish and a sure death sentence for them. Why do they feel like it is the only decision they can make?
11. Kate's willingness to break into The Whispering Gallery alone to dismantle the computer demonstrates her commitment and bravery. Why does Reynie allow her to take such dangerous steps? How does Constance show her loyalty?
12. Why is Milligan so devoted, even willing to die for the team throughout the story? Who is he? How does he come to work for Mr. Benedict?
13. Mr. Benedict and Mr. Curtain are twin brothers, one benevolent and kind and one evil to the core. What similarities are there between these brothers? How does their past contribute to their different lifestyles?
14. Mr. Benedict challenges those readers who want to know his first name to decipher the code “within your grasp” to determine his name. Have you figured out his name? If so, what is it?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (PERILOUS JOURNEY)

1. How does Reynie's view of people change after his mission with Mr. Curtain? What advice does Mr. Benedict offer him? Does Reynie's opinion change?
2. Reynie and Mr. Benedict have a unique relationship. Why are they drawn to one another for conversation and companionship?
3. When Reynie, Sticky, Kate, and Constance find out Mr. Benedict and Number Two have been kidnapped, they set out on their own to find them. Should they have waited for Milligan and Rhonda to go with them or at least left information as to their whereabouts? Why or why not?
4. Why is Reynie uncomfortable and suspicious of Captain Noland? Do his suspicions prove to be founded? Why or why not?
5. Why are Sticky, Kate, and Constance so hurt when Reynie throws the Captain's radio out the window of the train? What is the significance of the gift Captain Noland gave Reynie?
6. Once Milligan catches up with the foursome, they refuse to follow his orders and continue to put themselves in danger. Milligan threatens to send them back to Stonetown. Why does he decide to let them stay with him?
7. How does Constance adapt to her new skill? How does her new ability help the team? Why are they all apprehensive about her ability to read their minds and sense what is going to happen before it happens?
8. Mr. Curtain and Mr. Benedict's personalities are markedly different. Would Mr. Curtain's plan to impersonate Mr. Benedict have worked? Why or why not?
9. How does Mr. Benedict convince S.Q. to unlock his handcuffs? Why is S.Q. so surprised when Mr. Benedict uses the opportunity to unlock Reynie, Sticky, Kate, and Constance and escape? How does S.Q.'s reaction affect Mr. Benedict? Why?
10. Mr. Curtain and the Ten Men escape once again because Milligan and Kate refuse to kill them when they have the opportunity. Why do Kate and Milligan make the choice to let them live when they know Mr. Curtain and his Ten Men want to kill Mr. Benedict and his friends?
11. What are Reynie and Sticky expecting from their parents when they return to Mr. Benedict's house? Surprisingly, how do their parents react to them?
12. When Mr. Stewart introduces all four children in *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, they are all orphans and totally alone in the world. When we meet them again one year later, they have all been in a loving family. How has their environment changed them?



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (PRISONER'S DILEMMA)

1. Constance's ability to read minds is expanding to mind control and mental telepathy. How does this knowledge first affect Kate, Reynie, and Stinky? Why do their opinions change? What do they continue to dislike about her special skills?
2. Understandably, Mr. Benedict refuses to use the Whisperer for evil, but he also refuses to use it on evil people to gain information to prosecute them or to discover where they have hidden stolen goods or people. Why is he so reticent about using it on Constance to discover who her parents were?
3. The friendship and love that has developed between Kate, Reynie, Constance, and Stinky is apparent when they risk their lives for each other. First, when they try to warn Kate of the trap Mr. Curtain set for them, and then again when they are captured and put into the locked room. Both boys immediately assure Kate she needs to escape to get help, knowing that she might not return. In what other ways do the members of the Mysterious Benedict Society show their loyalty and love for one another?
4. While Milligan and the four kids walk through the prison trying to escape, what special skill does each child utilize that helps them in their escape? Why does Milligan think they all need to stay together?
5. In addition to the fact that Milligan and Kate are father and daughter, what makes their relationship so special?
6. Even after S.Q. realizes that Mr. Curtain is evil and has hurt him by erasing his memories, why is S.Q. so willing to risk his life to help Mr. Curtain? Is Mr. Curtain grateful to S.Q. for his sacrifice? Why or why not?
7. Reynie begins to understand the difference between the stated reasons and the real reasons behind the decisions surrounding the electrical power and the Whisperer. How does this new understanding help him stand up to Mr. Curtain? What does he gain by taking a stand? How does Stinky step out of character to help him?
8. Mr. Curtain is sentenced to fifteen years in jail, and Mr. Benedict's hope is that in that fifteen years Mr. Curtain will be persuaded to use his talent for good. How will Mr. Benedict's weekly visits have a positive impact on his twin brother? What could Mr. Curtain do with his talent that would benefit society?
9. Mr. Benedict is truly a kind benefactor to the members of the Mysterious Benedict Society, and their new living arrangements are further proof of his generosity. In what other ways has he proven his kindness to the children and others in his employ?

praise for *The Mysterious Benedict Society*



"A happy ending with hints of more adventures to come make this first-time author one to remember."—*School Library Journal* (starred review)



"Readers will enjoy getting lost in this fully imagined realm."—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)



"Smart kids who like Blue Balliet's books are the natural audience for this; but, read aloud, the novel will attract many others as well."—*Booklist* (starred review)

"With its lively style, fresh character portrayals, and well-timed revelations, this story flees past, thrilling us as it goes. Just be sure your batteries are well charged."

—*The Horn Book*

"Rich in moral and ethical issues, as well as in appealingly complex characters and comedy sly and gross, this Lemony-Snicket-style outing sprouts hooks for hearts and minds both..."—*Kirkus Reviews*

about the book



After passing a series of mind-bending tests, four gifted children are selected by Mr. Benedict to thwart a mad man's efforts to destroy the minds of humans throughout the world. Kate, Reynie, Sticky, and Constance form a team to operate undercover in Mr. Curtain's school where this evil man trains the messengers who create the subliminal messages that will be transmitted worldwide through the use of his special machine, The Whisperer. The four extraordinarily gifted children must destroy the machine and escape the school alive.

The Mysterious Benedict Society

Illustrated by Carson Ellis

978-0-316-05777-6 HC • 978-0-316-00395-7 PB • AR 5.6 • F&P U



When Mr. Benedict plans a surprise reunion trip for Kate, Reynie, Sticky, and Constance, he had no idea he would be kidnapped by his evil twin brother, Mr. Curtain. So when the foursome arrives at Mr. Benedict's house expecting a fun adventure, they learn that both Number Two and Mr. Benedict's lives are in danger, and it is up to the children to rescue them. So off the team goes without Milligan or Rhonda, traveling by foot, train, boat, and plane, all the while dodging Mr. Curtain's fierce Ten Men and Jackson, Jillson, and

Martina Crowe, his former executives.

The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Perilous Journey

Illustrated by Diana Sudyka

978-0-316-05780-6 HC • 978-0-316-03673-3 PB • AR 6.1 • F&P V



Members of the Mysterious Benedict Society find themselves in yet another adventure when the evil Mr. Curtain attempts to control the political minds and the electrical systems of Stonetown by stealing The Whisperer from his kind twin brother Mr. Benedict. Once again, Mr. Curtain underestimates the varied and ever-increasing talents of Kate, Stinky, Reynie, and Constance. His Ten Men are no match for Kate's quickness and Constance's unprecedented mental telepathy that almost single-handedly guarantees the capture and conviction of

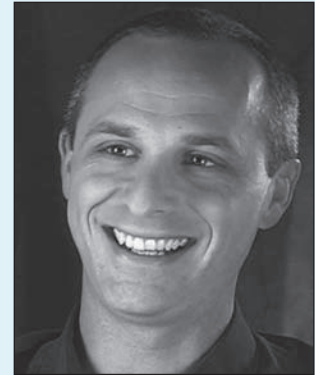
Mr. Curtain and his evil partners in crime. Alas, The Whisperer must be destroyed and Mr. Benedict and the Mysterious Benedict Society together will use their talents for the benefit of mankind.

The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Prisoner's Dilemma

Illustrated by Diana Sudyka

978-0-316-04552-0 HC

about the author



Trenton Lee Stewart is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and author of the adult novel *Flood Summer*. The idea of his debut children's novel, *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, first appeared to him in the form of a chess problem he thought of on the way to a restaurant. Where it came from, he had no idea. But by the time he reached the restaurant he had decided it ought to go into a children's novel. So began *The Myterious Benedict Society*. Mr. Stewart lives in Little Rock, Arkansas, with his wife and two sons.



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Educator's Guide prepared by Susan Geyse