

THE MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY

and

THE MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY AND THE PERILOUS JOURNEY



by Trenton
Lee Stewart

curriculum connections

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

Ages: 8-12



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Activities

The Mysterious Benedict Society

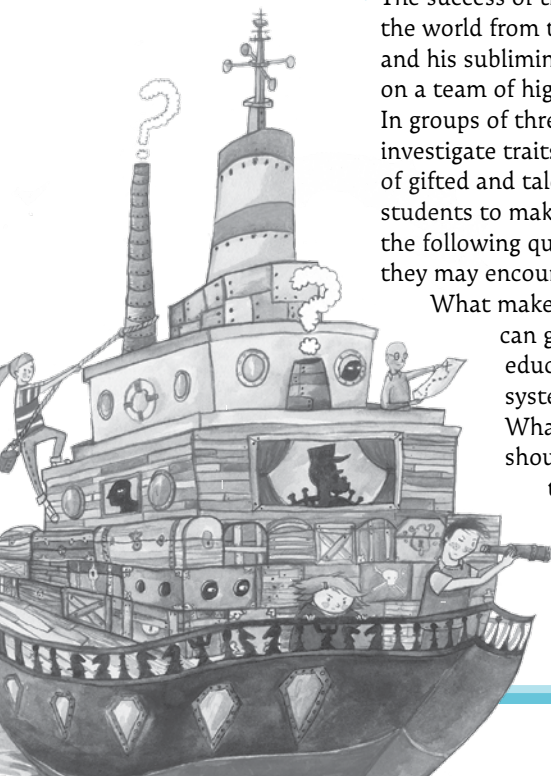
- Reynie and Miss Perumal spend their mornings reading the paper and the latest news about “The Emergency” and pondering the slogan “Things must change NOW!” Ask students to form groups of three, and find a news report they feel portrays an emergency in the United States. The groups should prepare oral presentations of a “breaking newscast” or a news documentary complete with anchorpersons and onsite 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.
- Mr. Curtain transmits subliminal messages into the minds of kids that 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.
- 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.

- The success of the operation to save the world 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.

The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Perilous Journey

- Kate loves her falcon Madge, which she has trained extensively. 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.
- Diana Sudyka illustrates the chapter openers in *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; or page 118, when Captain Noland brings tea to their cabin on the *Shortcut*. 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.
- 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, and symptoms. Students may also want to interview someone with the disorder or a doctor or nurse at a sleep disorder clinic who works with patients that suffer from this condition.
- 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 watercraft 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 prepare an outline of their plan, including the route, the means of escape, and the people involved in helping carry out their plan.



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Questions for Discussion

The Mysterious Benedict Society

- Beginning on page 1, the importance of following directions is stressed to the children throughout the book and is 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 “the special gifted children?” How do they use the instructions to their advantage or disadvantage?
- 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?
- With so much in common, Kate, Reynie, Sticky, and Constance still have dissimilar traits. What are the traits they possess that bring them together? What causes discord among the team members? What in their backgrounds and family life is similar? What is dissimilar? How do the likenesses play a role in their assignment?
- 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?
- What strength does each member of the team contribute to help the team succeed in its goal to stop the evil Mr. Curtain?
- 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?
- 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?
- When Milligan comes to rescue the children, their 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- Mr. Benedict and Mr. Curtain are twin brothers, one benevolent and kind and one evil to the core. What other similarities are there between these brothers? How does their past contribute to their different lifestyles?

The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Perilous Journey

- 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?
- 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?
- Reynie and Mr. Benedict have a unique relationship. Why are they drawn to one another for conversation and companionship?
- 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?
- Why is Reynie uncomfortable and suspicious of Captain Noland? Do his suspicions prove to be founded? Why or why not?
- 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?
- 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 sense what is going to happen before it happens?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?





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 flies past, thrilling us as it goes.”—*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*

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 Mysterious Benedict Society*. Mr. Stewart lives in Little Rock, Arkansas with his wife and two sons.

about the book



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The Mysterious Benedict Society & the Perilous Journey

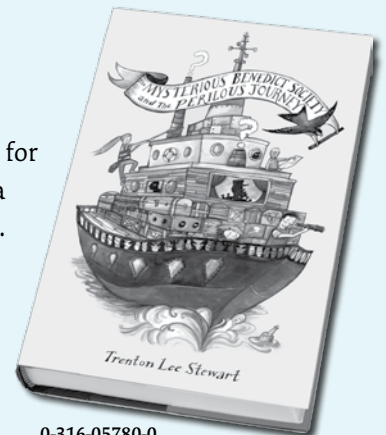
Illustrated by Diana Sudyka

When Mr. Benedict planned 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 his former executives.

The Mysterious Benedict Society

Illustrated by Carson Ellis

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 kids 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.



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