



# Myrtle, Means, and Opportunity

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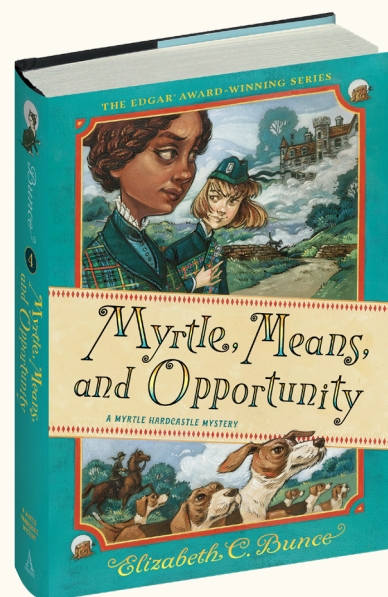
## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

In the fifth book of the Edgar® Award-winning series, Myrtle Hardcastle uncovers a string of murders during a treasure hunt on a haunted Scottish estate.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The title of the novel is a play on the phrase “motive, means, and opportunity,” familiar to any mystery fan. But it also refers to the change in Miss Judson’s fortunes. What new means and opportunities does she have now? Were those opportunities different for a woman of color in 1894 than they would be today?
2. In the Myrtle Hardcastle Mystery series, Miss Judson has always been a strong advocate for women’s independence, encouraging Myrtle to pursue her academic interests and career ambitions. Do you think that the choices Miss Judson makes in *Myrtle, Means, and Opportunity* fit her character? In what ways? What do you think of her final decision in the story (on page 349)?
3. Each chapter in *Myrtle, Means, and Opportunity* (like other books in the Myrtle Hardcastle Mysteries) opens with an “epigraph,” or a quote from a fictional book about estate management. Writers have employed this literary device for centuries. What did you think of these epigraphs? What purpose do they serve in the story? Why do you think the author chose to use this technique in her series?
4. In Chapter 2 Mr. Macewan’s office displays his Macewan clan heritage through his blue plaid tartan and coats of arms—just as many people of Scottish heritage do today. What ways can you think of that you show your loyalty to a special group (like your family, your school, or a favorite team)?
5. Many of the chapter titles in *Myrtle, Means, and Opportunity* are taken from Scottish clan mottos. For example, the title of Chapter 16 is “Hold Fast,” the motto of Clan MacLeod. These mottos are often derived from significant events in clan history, so families will remember the heroic deeds of their ancestors and feel united by a shared sense of purpose. Take a moment to think about your own life story. If you had a personal motto you wanted your descendants to remember, what would it be?



6. In Chapter 5 Myrtle finds the devices Uncle Augustus had been crafting to study the paranormal phenomena plaguing Rockfforde Hall. Do you believe in ghosts? What evidence is there to support their existence? Do you think science will ever develop a way to contact the spirit world? What do you think the author meant by the scene on page 350, when Myrtle sees a face in the window of Rockfforde Hall? Has Myrtle really seen a ghost?
7. One of the themes of *Myrtle, Means, and Opportunity* is family loyalty. Name some examples of how characters in the story demonstrate their loyalty to their families—and some examples of characters who do not. Do you think the saying “blood is thicker than water” (meaning that family ties are the most important relationships) holds true—either in the novel or in real life?
8. In Chapter 2 when Myrtle learns of Uncle Augustus’s plans to sell Dunfyne Island to Fyne Fisheries, she tells us that “in general, I am a great supporter of Progress—scientific, technological, social, medical, judicial—but a fish-processing factory did not sound entirely ideal.” (page 23) What do you think she means by this? Do you agree with her? Name some examples of the kind of progress Myrtle describes that have occurred since 1894, when the novel takes place. Name some areas where you think advancement is still needed.
9. The novel alludes to a history of conflicts between neighboring countries Scotland and England, which are both part of the United Kingdom. In Chapter 5 we learn that Scottish forces were defeated in the most recent war, 150 years ago. How does Myrtle feel about being an English girl on Scottish soil? Can you think of any similar conflicts in your own country’s history that can help you relate to her feelings? In what way?
10. A number of the characters in *Myrtle, Means, and Opportunity* are involved in the scheme to defraud Augustus MacJudd and, ultimately, the murder of Hector Macewan. Who do you think is the most responsible? In your opinion, has everyone involved been brought to justice?
11. In Chapter 23 we learn that Uncle Augustus described Rockfforde Hall and its legacy as a burden. Discuss how Miss Judson inheriting the estate could be both an opportunity and a burden. Make a list of the pros and cons of the inheritance and decide which is greater. What might make someone decide to hold on to such an estate, even if it makes little financial sense?
12. Why do you think Uncle Augustus ultimately left Rockfforde Hall to Miss Judson? Would you have made the same decision, or do you think he should have named someone else as his heir? Who do you think would make the best next Laird of Clan MacJudd, and why?

