

TEACHING GUIDE

THE SECRET ZOO

BY BRYAN CHICK



ABOUT THE BOOK

When Noah's sister, Megan, goes missing, Noah and his fellow Action Scouts, Ella and Richie, follow a trail of mysterious clues to the Clarksville City Zoo. Once inside, they discover a big secret—a secret so big that it must be protected at all costs. With the help of some very smart animals, Noah and his friends must rely on one another as they try to rescue Megan and save the magical world of the Secret Zoo.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do Noah and Megan go beyond just being siblings to being friends? Why do you think Noah is so determined to find his sister? Do you think he feels guilty for not believing her the night she claimed to see monkeys on the rooftops? Explain.
2. Why do you think Noah has a hard time telling Ella and Richie about the messages from the animals at the zoo? Why does he decide that he needs their help and “cannot do this alone” (p. 35)?
3. Why don't the Action Scouts trust the zoo employees? Are they right to be suspicious? Why is it hard sometimes for young people *not* to trust adults?
4. How is the City of Species a “union of humans and animals, city and nature” (p. 162)? Do you know of any real places like the City of Species? Explain.
5. Which of the four scouts do you most relate to and why? Which one do you most admire and why?
6. How are the Action Scouts good problem solvers? Give specific examples from the novel.
7. When Mr. Darby invites the scouts to help protect the Secret Zoo as Crossers, Ella is surprised because they're “only kids” (p. 286). Do you ever feel discouraged because you're “only” a kid? What can you do as a kid that might surprise a lot of adults?
8. Mr. Darby says that Podgy is able to fly not because of his flippers but because of “the strength of his spirit” (p. 287). How can the spirit be more powerful than physical ability? How do the scouts prove that they have strong spirits?
9. What is foreshadowing? At the beginning of the story, the narrator says that Megan's journal “would eventually alter the course of the world” (p. 7). How is this statement an example of foreshadowing? What other examples of foreshadowing can you find in the novel?
10. How do the Action Scouts support and take care of one another? Why are they more powerful together than apart? Why is it important to have good friends and also to *be* a good friend?

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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Zoo Journal.** Megan records her observations about the animals' strange behavior in her journal; your students can also keep journals with their animal observations. Take your students on a field trip to a zoo or wildlife preserve and have them watch three different animals for at least ten minutes each, recording their observations in their journals. Once you're back in the classroom, have pairs of students share their journal entries. What was the most interesting thing they observed? What was the most surprising? Which animal did they enjoy watching the most, and why?
- Join the Club.** Noah, Megan, Richie, and Ella are members of a self-made club—the Action Scouts. Have small groups of students create their own clubs to present to the rest of the class, complete with original names, secret passwords, and distress flags. Ask students to vote for their favorite club, and then designate the winning one as the official class club that every student is a member of.
- Map It Out.** What does the Clarksville City Zoo look like? Have each student draw a visitor map of the zoo showing the various exhibits and attractions, including the Arctic Zone, Creepy Critters, the Forest of Flight, Giraffic Jam, the Langur House, Little Dogs of the Prairie, Metr-APE-olis, and more. What does the Secret Zoo look like? Now ask students to draw a second *secret* visitor map showing the City of Species, the numbered sectors, and the Dark Lands. Display the maps around your classroom or library, placing each student's Secret Zoo map under his or her Clarksville City Zoo map—only those who know the secret will know that a second world is hidden under the first!
- The Dodo's Demise.** Though extinct in the real world, the dodo is alive and well within the Secret Zoo. Reread Richie's explanation of what happened to the dodo (p. 182). Then discuss the topics of endangered species and extinction with your students. How do animals become endangered or extinct? What are individual people and governments doing to help protect and preserve natural wildlife? What is the Endangered Species Act? What can your students do to help?
- Monkeys and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!** Encourage students to learn more about the many animals that appear throughout the novel with this research project. Assign pairs of students one of the animals from the novel, such as the cheetah, the monkey, the penguin, the polar bear, the prairie dog, the tree frog, or the tiger. Ask students to research their animal's physical characteristics, eating habits, reproduction, and habitat as well as interesting or unique facts about it. Student partners should then create a multimedia presentation about their findings to share with the class.



Photo by Amy Peterson

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Chick came up with the idea for *The Secret Zoo* when he was just nine years old. He wondered what it would be like if zoo exhibits had secret passages that allowed kids to get in and animals to get out. Over the next twenty years, that one idea became an epic story to be told in a series of novels. When not exploring the worlds in his head, Bryan visits schools and talks with young people across the country. Bryan Chick lives in Michigan with his family, and you can visit him online at www.theseecretzoo.com.

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