

DISCOVERING LITERATURE



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DISCOVERING LITERATURE

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continued on page 651

Preview

You know what a mystery is.

A mystery is a secret.

A mystery is a shadow on the wall—or in someone's eyes.

A mystery is a story that begins, "It was a dark and stormy night. . . ."

A mystery is anything that is secret or hidden or unknown. A mystery can be as bizarre as a visit from a ghost or as commonplace as the sound in a seashell. Some mysteries are puzzles waiting to be solved by keen-eyed detectives. Other mysteries lie hidden in objects you touch every day.

The literature that follows explores many different mysteries—each with a great or small secret at its heart. Within each mystery something waits to be discovered. What discoveries will *you* make as you read?

Starry Night, Vincent van Gogh, c. 1889.



CONTENTS

Mystery!



Literature that intrigues and delights—tales of
mystery, problem solving, and imagination

Preview 1

Model for Active Reading	2	Conch Shell <i>Poem</i>	33
Sarah Tops <i>Fiction</i>	3	Federico García Lorca	
Isaac Asimov		Lob's Girl <i>Fiction</i>	35
The Boy with Yellow Eyes		Joan Aiken	
<i>Fiction</i>	7	Roanoke: The Lost Colony	
Gloria Gonzalez		<i>Nonfiction</i>	47
The Landlady <i>Fiction</i>	15	Dan Lacy	
Roald Dahl		Macavity: The Mystery Cat	
May I Have Your Autograph?		<i>Poem</i>	52
<i>Fiction</i>	25	T. S. Eliot NOBEL PRIZE	
Marjorie Sharmat		Miss Hinch <i>Fiction</i>	55
How to Eat a Poem <i>Poem</i>	31	Henry Sydnor Harrison	
Eve Merriam			

Collaborative Learning: Themes	68
Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum	69

Other Lands, Other Worlds



Literature that explores a variety of life experiences over
a wide range of settings around and beyond our planet

Preview 70

Model for Active Reading . . .	72	Southbound on the Freeway	
from El Güero Fiction . . .	73	<i>Poem</i>	111
Elizabeth Borton de Treviño		May Swenson	
NEWBERY MEDAL		from Homesick Nonfiction . . .	113
Song for the Sun That		Jean Fritz NEWBERY HONOR	
Disappeared Behind the Rain-		The Stub-Book Fiction	126
clouds Poem	79	Pedro Antonio de Alarcón	
Hottentot Traditional		The Phantom Tollbooth Drama .	133
from Watership Down Fiction . . .	81	Norton Juster	
Richard Adams		Dramatized by Susan Nanus	
Science Fiction Poem	109		
Reed Whittemore			

Collaborative Learning: Themes	172
Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum	173

Myths, Tales, and Fabulous Beasts



Literature that tells tales grown from the oral traditions of many different countries

Preview 174

Model for Active Reading	176	The Water of Life	201
Pygmalion	177	Howard Pyle	
Doris Gates		A Narrow Escape	
Pegasus and Bellerophon	181	from Robin Hood	207
Margaret Evans Price		Antonia Fraser	
Why the Tortoise's Shell Is		El Enano	219
Not Smooth	186	Charles J. Finger NEWBERY MEDAL	
Chinua Achebe		Bellinda and the Monster	226
The Wise Old Woman	190	Italo Calvino	
Yoshiko Uchida		The Frog Prince <i>Poem</i>	234
The Fools of Chelm and the		Stevie Smith	
Stupid Carp	196	The Stone Dog	237
Isaac Bashevis Singer NOBEL PRIZE		Pura Belpré	
Collaborative Learning: Themes	240		
Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum	241		

Heroes and Survivors



Literature of adventure, courage,
struggle, and victory

Preview 242

Model for Active Reading	244	Life Doesn't Frighten Me	
The Rescue of the Perishing		Poem	290
Fiction	245	Maya Angelou	
William Saroyan		Juke Box Love Song Poem	294
My Friend Flicka Fiction	252	Langston Hughes	
Mary O'Hara		Mi Madre Poem	296
Birdfoot's Grampa Poem	267	Pat Mora	
Joseph Bruchac		Three Days to See Nonfiction	299
Ta-Na-E-Ka Fiction	269	Helen Keller	
Mary Whitebird		freddy the rat perishes Poem	310
To Build a Fire Fiction	276	Don Marquis	
London's early version		from Beowulf Fiction	314
Jack London		Robert Nye	
A Cow Herder on Horseback			
Nonfiction	284		
Russell Freedman			

Collaborative Learning: Themes	322
Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum	323

Disasters Great and Small



Literature that tells the stories of both
natural and personal catastrophies

Preview 324

Model for Active Reading . . . 326	Who Will Teach Me? <i>Poem</i> . . . 356
Earthquake: The Story of an	Nancy Wood
Eyewitness <i>Nonfiction</i> . . . 327	Jigsaw Puzzle <i>Poem</i> . . . 358
Jack London	Russell Hoban
Twister Hits Houston <i>Poem</i> . . . 334	The Circuit <i>Fiction</i> . . . 360
Sandra Cisneros	Francisco Jiménez
The Last Dinosaur <i>Fiction</i> . . . 336	The Green Mamba <i>Nonfiction</i> . . . 366
Jim Murphy	Roald Dahl
President Cleveland,	The Exposed Nest <i>Poem</i> . . . 374
Where Are You? <i>Fiction</i> . . . 344	Robert Frost PULITZER PRIZE
Robert Cormier	The Cold Wave <i>Fiction</i> . . . 377
Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout	Lois Phillips Hudson
Would Not Take the Garbage	
Out <i>Poem</i> . . . 353	
Shel Silverstein	

Collaborative Learning: Themes	386
Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum	387

Science and Storytellers



Literature that focuses on the excitement
of scientific endeavor and discovery

Preview 388

Model for Active Reading . . . 390	Virtuoso Fiction 408
The Flying Machine Fiction . . . 391	Herbert Goldstone
Ray Bradbury	Bats Nonfiction 415
The Microscope Poem 396	Diane Ackerman
Maxine Kumin PULITZER PRIZE	The Bat Poem 421
Arithmetic Poem 399	Theodore Roethke PULITZER PRIZE
Carl Sandburg PULITZER PRIZE	The Chimps Come to Camp
The Christmas Cat Nonfiction . . . 401	Nonfiction 423
James Herriot	Jane van Lawick-Goodall

Collaborative Learning: Themes	436
Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum	437

Passages



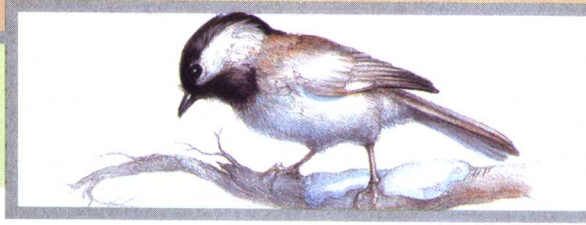
Literature that highlights critical moments of learning and growth

Preview 438

Model for Active Reading . . . 440	A Cycle of Seasons
The Life and Death of a Western Gladiator Fiction . . . 441	January Poem 484
Charles G. Finney	John Updike PULITZER PRIZE
from Path of Hunters Nonfiction . 448	April Rain Song Poem 485
Robert Newton Peck	Langston Hughes
Papa's Parrot Fiction 454	Summer Evening Poem 486
Cynthia Rylant NEWBERY HONOR	Walter de la Mare
Where Are You Now, William Shakespeare? Nonfiction 458	September Poem 487
M. E. Kerr	John Updike PULITZER PRIZE
The Jacket Nonfiction 464	from Jonathan Livingston
Gary Soto	Seagull Fiction 489
The Jump Fiction 468	Richard Bach
Leo Tolstoy	Song Form Poem 496
The Southpaw Fiction 471	Amiri Baraka
Judith Viorst	The Medicine Bag Fiction . . . 498
The Game Fiction 478	Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve
Walter Dean Myers	The Horned Toad Nonfiction . . 506
	Gerald Haslam

Collaborative Learning: Themes	514
Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum	515

The Novel



Literature that combines all the elements of fiction to explore a variety of themes and carry the reader on a full-scale adventure

Preview 516

My Side of the Mountain . . . 519

Jean Craighead George **NEWBERY HONOR**

Collaborative Learning: Themes 608

Collaborative Learning: Across the Curriculum 609

Thinking Skills

Problem Solving	30	Representing	343
Evaluating	46	Evaluating	373
Representing	108	Classifying	414
Evaluating	171	Evaluating	435
Problem Solving	195	Classifying	453
Evaluating	218	Evaluating	495
Classifying	283	Representing	607
Evaluating	293		

Student's Resources

Writing About Literature		Reading and Literary Terms	
Handbook	612	Handbook	626
Writing About Plot	612	Glossary	634
Answering an Essay Question	614	Index of Titles by Genre	648
Writing a Character Sketch	616	Index of Skills	649
Writing a Story	618	Index of Fine Art	655
Writing About Poetry	622	Index of Authors and Titles	656
Writing About Nonfiction	624		

Mystery!



A Model for Active Reading

As you read anything, you think about it. You wonder. You ask yourself questions, and you come up with some answers. You put both your feelings and your mind into what you read. When you do this, you are an active reader.

Here is an example of the kinds of reactions a reader can have to the beginning of a story. The

comments show some of the thoughts that went through one reader's mind while reading the story for the first time.

On the following pages you will find the entire story. Make a point of thinking and reading actively as you enjoy the story. What ideas and questions occur to you as you read?

I guess this story is about a girl or woman named Sarah.

Isaac Asimov

Sarah Tops

Who is telling the story?

I came out of the Museum of Natural History¹ and was crossing the street on my way to the subway when I saw the crowd about halfway down the block; and the police cars, too. I could hear the whine of an ambulance.

Sounds like there's been an accident.

So the person telling the story is in eighth grade.

For a minute, I hesitated, but then I walked on. The crowds of the curious just get in the way of officials trying to save lives. My Dad, who's a detective on the force, complains about that all the time.

I just kept my mind on the term paper I was going to have to write on air pollution for my 8th-grade class and mentally arranged the notes I had taken during the museum program on the subject.

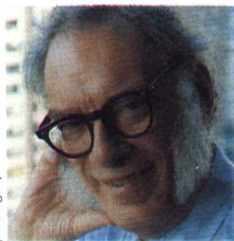
What is "it"? The accident, I suppose.

The person telling the story is a boy.

Of course, I knew I would read about it in the afternoon papers. Besides, I would ask Dad about it after dinner. He sometimes talked about cases without telling too much of the real security details.

After I asked, Mom looked kind of funny and said, "He was in the museum at the very time."

What happened "at the very time"? an accident or a crime? Is this a mystery?



When he was three years old, Isaac Asimov (1920–1992) came to the United States from Russia with his parents. At seven he was already teaching his younger sister how to read. He soon began reading the science-fiction magazines in his father's candy store. He kept busy reading and writing ever afterward. Asimov wrote a book every six weeks on average. He published over four hundred Works—more than any other author in America. “It’s not my fault,” he said. “I like to write and people seem willing to let me.”

I saw the crowd about halfway down the block; and the police cars, too. I could hear the whine of an ambulance.

.....

Isaac Asimov

Sarah Tops

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I said, “I was working on my term paper. I was there first thing in the morning.”

Mom looked very worried. “There might have been shooting in the museum.”

“Well, there wasn’t,” said Dad soothingly. “This man tried to lose himself in there and he didn’t succeed.”

“I would have,” I said. “I know the museum, every inch.”

Dad doesn’t like me bragging, so he frowned a little and said, “They didn’t let him get away entirely—caught up with him outside, knifed him, and got away. We’ll catch them, though. We know who they are.”

He nodded his head. “They’re what’s left of the gang that broke into that jewelry

1. **Museum of Natural History:** New York City museum housing one of the world’s largest collections of natural science exhibits.



New York with Moon, Georgia O'Keeffe, 1925.

store two weeks ago. We managed to get the jewels back, but we didn't grab all the men. And not all the jewels either. One diamond was left. A big one—worth \$30,000."

"Maybe that's what the killers were after," I said.

"Very likely. The dead man was probably trying to cross the other two and get away with that one stone for himself. They turned out his pockets, practically ripped off his clothes, after they knifed him."

4 *Mystery!*

"Did they get the diamond?" I asked.

"How can we tell? The woman who reported the killing came on him when he was just barely alive. She said he said three words to her, very slowly, 'Try—Sarah—Tops.' Then he died."

"Who is Sarah Tops?" asked Mom.

Dad shrugged. "I don't know. I don't even know if that's really what he said. The woman was pretty hysterical. If she's right and that's what he said then maybe the killers didn't get the diamond. Maybe the dead man left it with Sarah Tops, whoever she is. Maybe he knew he was dying and wanted to have it off his conscience."

"Is there a Sarah Tops in the phone book, Dad?" I asked.

Dad said, "Did you think we didn't look? No Sarah Tops, either one P or two P's. Nothing in the city directory. Nothing in our files. Nothing in the FBI files."

Mom said, "Maybe it's not a person. Maybe it's a firm. Sarah Tops Cakes or something."

"Could be," said Dad. "There's no Sarah Tops firm, but there are other kinds of Tops companies and they'll be checked for anyone working there named Sarah."

I got an idea suddenly and bubbled over. "Listen, Dad, maybe it isn't a firm either. Maybe it's a *thing*. Maybe the woman didn't hear 'Sarah Tops' but 'Sarah's top'; you know, a *top* that you spin. If the dead guy has a daughter named Sarah, maybe he gouged a bit out of her top and stashed the diamond inside and—"

Dad grinned. "Very good, Larry," he said. "But he doesn't have a daughter named Sarah. Or any relative by that name as far as we know. We've searched where he lived and there's nothing reported there that can be called a top."

"Well," I said, sort of let down and