

GREYSTONE SECRETS

THE STRANGERS



EDUCATORS' GUIDE

DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

INCLUDES:

EXTENSION
ACTIVITIES

REPRODUCIBLE
ACTIVITIES

Jacket art © 2019 by Anne Lambelet



ABOUT THE BOOK

Chess, Emma, and Finn lead a pretty normal life with their mother, a website designer. Normal, that is, until one day a news report about missing children catches their attention. The three kids in the photo look remarkably like Chess, Emma, and Finn, and the mother of the missing kids looks like their mother. The kids also have similar first names and the same birthdays. What do the missing kids have to do with Chess, Emma, and Finn’s mother suddenly leaving town—for an indefinite period of time, and without her cell phone? The Greystone siblings and an unexpected new friend work together to figure it out, searching for clues and cracking codes. The answer is frightening and almost impossible to believe—and it changes their lives forever.

Clement Photography



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margaret Peterson Haddix grew up on a farm in Ohio. As an adult, Haddix worked as a newspaper reporter and copy editor in Indiana before her first book, *Running Out of Time*, was published. She has since written more than forty books for kids and teens, including the Shadow Children series, the Missing series, the Children of Exile series, and lots of standalones. Her books have been honored with numerous state reader’s choice awards and the International Reading Association’s Children’s Book Award, and they’ve been translated into more than twenty languages. Haddix and her husband, Doug, now live in Columbus, Ohio, where they raised their two kids. You can learn more about her at www.haddixbooks.com.

PRAISE FOR GREYSTONE SECRETS #1: THE STRANGERS

★ “Portrays the complex anxieties and internal lives of close, caring family members grappling with a single set of extraordinary circumstances—separately and together. A secret-stacked, thrilling series opener.”

— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Maintain[s] suspense from the beginning to the cliffhanger ending . . . A high-stakes adventure full of teamwork with a multifaceted mystery and complex themes.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

“A hair-raising, mind-twisting adventure full of intrigue, humor, and charm. The spunky, quirky Greystones are easy to cheer for and relate to, and I can’t wait to see what happens next.”

— JOHN DAVID ANDERSON, author of *Posted* and *Ms. Bixby’s Last Day*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Finn's personality and his role in the family. Emma thinks early in the book that she, Chess, and their mom act "as if taking care of Finn and keeping him happy was the most important thing" (p. 33). Give examples of how they do that. What motivates them to treat him so well?
2. What are Emma's strengths? What role do numbers and counting play in her life? "Emma's teachers were always telling her she had a scientific mind" (p. 310). What evidence do you see of that in the story?
3. Chess compares how he reacts to new people to how his siblings react (p. 42). What do the differences tell you about him? Discuss how Chess treats Emma and Finn and describe his approach to being the oldest sibling. What are his feelings about Natalie?
4. How does Natalie act toward the three Greystone siblings at first, and why? How does her attitude change, and what prompts the changes? Describe her personality and her strengths as demonstrated by her actions.
5. Find places in the story where the four children have to work together to succeed. What is the challenge? How do each of them make a difference in solving the problem? Discuss how their strengths complement each other.
6. Identify foreshadowing in the first part of the book that hints at what the children later encounter. For example, how does the telephone conversation that Chess overhears between his mother and Joe foreshadow future problems?
7. What do the Greystone siblings think at first when they hear about the Gustano children and see their photographs? What do they learn that changes their understanding of those children and Mrs. Greystone's connection to them? Describe some of the clues and how the kids figure them out.
8. Why are Chess, Emma, and Finn worried about their mother leaving? What are some indications that her departure isn't ordinary? What do Natalie and her mother think happened to Mrs. Greystone?
9. What kind of person is Ms. Morales? Why does she try so hard to help mothers and children? In what ways is she helpful to Chess, Emma, and Finn? Describe Natalie's relationship to her mother and how it changes throughout the story.
10. Discuss the structure and narrative points of view in the book. Why do you think the author changes the focus of chapters among Chess, Emma, and Finn? What is the effect of using third-person narratives instead of first-person ones?
11. What are some of the ways that Mrs. Greystone left clues and coded messages for her children? How do they figure these out? What role does the phrase "You'll always have each other" play in the messages? Why do you think she uses a butterfly as a symbol?
12. Describe the process of getting to and from the alternate world. How do the children figure it out? What happens to that pathway at the end of the story, and why does it matter?
13. What makes the alternate world seem dangerous to the Greystone siblings and Natalie? Besides the danger, what are other negative aspects of the alternate world that they observe? Give specific examples.
14. Emotions prove to be important in the alternate world. Emma describes going through "patches of feelings" that go along with a smell (p. 284). What do these turn out to be? How do the people of the alternate world show kindness to the children even when it's dangerous? Why do you think they do that?
15. Find chapters that end with cliffhangers, which are paragraphs, sentences, and phrases that leave the reader in suspense. What makes a cliffhanger effective? Analyze the ones you find to see how they create suspense. To what extent does the ending of the book incorporate cliffhangers, and why?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

Ask students to consider the personalities of Chess, Emma, Finn, and Natalie and then find a quote from each that conveys something important about them. Have students gather in small groups to compare and explain their choices. The students should write out the quotes and post them on a bulletin board, grouped under the name of each of the four characters.

NATALIE'S BACKSTORY

The reader learns some things about Natalie's life and past but not a lot. Invite students to combine what they learn about her in the novel with their own imagination and write her backstory. It should expand on her family, friends, interests, and past experiences. The imagined information should be based on her character and actions in the novel.

FAMOUS CODES AND CODEBREAKERS

When she's trying to figure out her mother's code, Emma thinks about the Enigma codebreakers, who broke codes in England during World War II. Working in pairs, have students use library and online sources to do research on famous codes or codebreakers throughout history. They should present their findings to the class as a multimedia presentation.

RETHINKING FAILURE

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." Emma tries to remember this quote, which is attributed to Thomas Edison. Hold a classroom discussion about failure and persistence in relation to the novel and on broader terms. How can failure be viewed as positive rather than negative? Have students contribute their own experiences and examples from history.

PLAN A PROTEST

People under restrictive governments like the alternate world have sometimes organized protests despite the dangers. Have students in small groups draw up plans for a protest in that world, listing their reasons for protesting. They should research and brainstorm strategies such as speeches, marching, making signs, chanting slogans, and so on. The groups should share the plans with the whole class. Then discuss the freedom to protest in our society and elsewhere, and its importance.



A CLASSIC CODE



INSTRUCTIONS:

In a substitution code, you replace each letter of the alphabet with another letter by shifting the alphabet over a given number of spaces. For example, if you shift just one space, A becomes B, B becomes C, and so on. For two spaces, A becomes C,

B becomes D. The final letters wrap around to the beginning of the alphabet so if you've shifted just one letter, Z becomes A.

CHOOSE HOW MANY SPACES YOU WANT TO SHIFT THE ALPHABET AND FILL IT IN ABOVE.

NOW WRITE A VERY SHORT NOTE TO GIVE TO A CLASSMATE, SUCH AS THE TITLE OF A BOOK YOU RECOMMEND.

WRITE YOUR MESSAGE IN CODE BY USING THE SHIFTED ALPHABET YOU CREATED:

COPY THE ENCODED MESSAGE ON A CLEAN SHEET OF PAPER TO GIVE TO A CLASSMATE. TO MAKE IT EASY, YOU CAN EXPLAIN THE CODE YOU CHOSE. FOR A CHALLENGE, LET YOUR CLASSMATE FIGURE OUT THE CODE.

ALTERNATE REALITIES

INSTRUCTIONS: What are some things the kids observe in the alternate world that are different from their own world? In the middle column, write areas of comparison. These can be broad categories such as government or everyday topics like clothing. Then, in each world's corresponding column, write a few words to describe the kids' observations.

OUR WORLD

EXAMPLE:
People have a right to complain about the government

AREAS OF COMPARISON

EXAMPLE:
People's rights

ALTERNATIVE WORLD

EXAMPLE:
It's dangerous to complain about the government