



Novel Guide for Gifted and Advanced Readers



This guide is appropriate for use with gifted and advanced readers. It addresses their affective and cognitive needs through questions that can be used for discussion. Depending on the length of the book, students should read the entire book before conducting the bibliotherapy lesson, the **Group Discussion** using the higher order questions and the **After Discussion** activities. Students should be given the **Before Discussion** activities to complete during their time while reading the book. If the book is exceptionally long, you may need to modify this lesson plan. See **Novel Guide: Notes for Implementing** for additional procedures and recommendations.

Book Title: *The Mysterious Benedict Society*

Author: Trenton Lee Scott

Interest Level: 5th-7th Grade

Lexile: 790L

Reading Level: 6.3

Length: 486 pages

Guide developed by: Joanna Bisher

Summary: A mysterious ad appears in the Stonetown Harbor newspaper that reads, “Are you a gifted child looking for special opportunities? If interested, attend one of these test sessions.” And so, through a series of very odd and challenging tests, only four children are chosen for the secret assignment based on their powerful love of truth and unique talents. Even though they’d never met before, the 4 must work together as secret agents to complete the assignment given to them by their benefactor, Mr. Benedict. Each will need to use their special gifts to overcome physical and mental challenges. Their mission? To help save the world from the evil Mr. Curtain.

Conceptual Connections

Conceptual Lens: Belonging

Other Key Concepts: family, talents, teamwork, facing fears

Essential Understandings:

- It is human nature to feel the need to belong.
- Families come in a variety of forms.
- Different people have unique talents, and by working together, more can be accomplished.
- One way to overcome our fears is to confront them.

Essential Questions:

- Why do people feel the need to belong?
- How are families the same? How are they different?
- Why is it important to recognize and celebrate each other’s talents
- Why is it important to express our fears and not keep them hidden

Affective Focus (Bibliotherapy)

Introductory Activity/Hook

1. Go to the website <http://www.mysteriousbenedictsociety.com/> and read the section titled, "Summary" of Book 1- *The Mysterious Benedict Society*. (see Appendix A)
2. Next, watch the first 3min. 30sec. only of the 8min 30sec student-made You Tube trailer for, *The Mysterious Benedict Society* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDQYbrQ-zBQ>. This clip gives students enough background information to get them excited about the book, but not too much to give away the whole plot.
3. Finally, have students go to the Games section of the website <http://www.mysteriousbenedictsociety.com/> and play, *Which Mysterious Benedict Society Member are You?* Discuss student's results orally with the group.
4. Read the short descriptions of each of the 4 main characters from Appendix B. Allow students to tell which character they identify with the most, giving specific examples from their life.

Menu of Bibliotherapy Questions

Identification:

- How are Reynie, Sticky, Kate and Constance different from the other gifted children who took Mr. Benedict's tests? (Reread passage on p. 102)
- What unique talent(s) does Reynie have? Sticky? Kate? Constance?
- How does Reynie's "family" change from the beginning of the book to the end of the book? Sticky's? Kate's? Constance's?
- What fears does each of the children have?
- What kind of person is Mr. Benedict?

Catharsis:

- How did Reynie feel about living at the orphanage?
- How do you know it bothers Kate that her father (allegedly) abandoned her when she was small? (p. 51-54)
- Why does Reynie wonder if it's worse to have felt loved and then be rejected, or to have always felt alone? (p. 255)
- How did Sticky feel about his parents using his intelligence to make money?
- How did Sticky feel when he overheard his parents say that maybe it's for the best that Sticky ran away? (read 478-481 for explanation)
- How did Reynie feel when he overheard Mr. Benedict referring to him as, "Our young hero," when talking to Number Two? (p. 142)
- How do you think the children were feeling when they met Mr. Curtain for the 1st time, and they thought it was Mr. Benedict? (p. 176)
- How do the children's feelings about each other change in the story?
- Which character do you feel you're most like? Why?

Insight:

- What do your family and friends say and do to make you feel wanted?
- What does it feel like to not belong or feel wanted?
- How can you help others (family members, friends, classmates) feel like they belong?
- Have you ever felt betrayed? How did it make you feel?
- How do you feel when you use your talents to contribute to a team effort?
- When you think about your fears or worries, how does that make you feel?

Universalization/Follow up Activity

Write a letter to someone letting them know they are needed and loved by you. Let them know how you feel about them and why you feel that way. Mention their specific talents and what makes them special. Ask about one of their fears (or worries), and let them know how you might help them overcome it. Sign and deliver your letter. If you feel comfortable, share the results with the group and/or your teacher.

Reading Comprehension: Independent Work and Group Discussion

To foster strong reading comprehension, literacy skills, and love of literature, students need to read critically, respond to what they read with text-based evidence, develop a robust vocabulary, and engage in high level discussion with peers. The following activities address these components.

Before Group Discussion (Activities for students to complete independently)

A. Knowledge and Comprehension Questions related to the novel. Students use sticky notes to locate answers in the text as they read. Teacher may use student's answers for a grade.

Knowledge Questions

- Can you list and describe the 6 main characters?
- How were the 4 children chosen as Mr. Benedict's special assignment?
- Why hadn't Mr. Benedict been able to form a team before this?
- What is the relationship between Mr. Benedict and Mr. Curtain?
- Can you describe the L.I.V.E. School on the island of Nomansaniland?
- Mr. Curtain was sending out subliminal ideas over the airways; what did the messages say?
- What is the name of machine Mr. Curtain built to dispatch the messages?

Comprehension Questions

- Why do Rhonda and Number Two follow Mr. Benedict around so closely?
- Why is Mr. Curtain in a wheelchair?
- What triggers Mr. Benedict's narcolepsy? Mr. Curtain's?
- What was Mr. Curtain trying to accomplish?
- Why is Constance the only one who can hear the messages without the aid of Mr. Benedict's machine?
- Why do Kate and Constance have to crawl through the air shaft to get to Reynie and Sticky's room to talk?
- Why did the children work so hard to become the "top students?"
- Why does The Whisperer ask, "What is your greatest fear?"
- How does The Whisperer make the children feel good?
- Reread p. 378. Why does Mr. Curtain tell Martina and S.Q., "The only way fears disappear is if you confront them but who wants to do that?"
- What will happen after Mr. Curtain starts recording the messages to go over the airways?
- What do the children find in Memory Terminal?
- Can you explain how the children and Mr. Benedict solve eliminate The Whisperer?
- At the end of the story, why does Mr. Benedict want to just let the children play outside even though it's getting dark?

B. Vocabulary Study: Students will complete the following activities with vocabulary from the novel. The activities may be used for a grade, but should also be included in the discussion.

- Students look up the word in the dictionary or online, noting the definition that best fits how the word is used in the passage. Also, determine possible synonyms and evaluate the author's use of the word in the passage.
- Students will complete a graphic organizer provided by the teacher.

Vocabulary Words

- embroidered p. 6
- narcolepsy p. 75
- prodigious p. 78
- gumption p. 80
- profoundly p.97
- anvils p. 208
- imprudent p. 228
- insolent p. 237
- de'ja`vu p. 238
- empathy p. 256
- tactical p. 259
- austere p. 317
- interminable p. 353
- emetic p. 400
- flummox p. 420
- concur p. 479
- pernicious p. 480
- ignominious p. 483
- melee p. 484
- victuals p. 485

Group Discussion: Teacher-facilitated small group discussion. Teacher may choose to provide students with a set of the questions prior to the discussion. Students should also be encouraged to create their own questions.

Higher-Level Questions (using Bloom's categories):

1. Application

- Do you know of another instance where twins seem to be opposites?
- If you were an orphan, what do you think you would miss?
- What examples from the story can you find to support the following statement? *This line is repeated throughout the book: "The only rule is, there are no rules (at L.I.V.E.)." On the contrary, there seems to be numerous rules to follow.*
- If you met Mr. Curtain, what questions would you ask him?
- Predict what would have happened if Mr. Benedict hadn't destroyed "The Whisperer."
- What other ways can you think of to solve the problem?

2. Analysis

- What genre is this story and how do you know?
- What factors distinguish the main characters from the secondary characters?
- What qualities did the 4 children have that allowed them to be chosen for Mr. Benedict's secret mission?

- Besides a powerful love of truth, what other commonality make the 4 children a good choice for Mr. Benedict's secret mission? (Children w/o guardians are in a particular kind of danger – parents don't want to send their children into danger p. 82)
- What clues did the author give to help you figure out that Constance was only 2? (Always tired, small, terrible manners, spilled food, didn't know the ending for the phrase, "Good Lu___.")
- What are the major differences between the twins, Mr. Benedict and Mr. Curtain?
- How does The Whisperer work?
- What steps were needed to solve the problem of Mr. Curtain trying to take over the world?
- What part of the story was the most exciting? Funniest? Saddest?
- Compare and contrast Mr. Benedict's study with Mr. Curtain's office. What does each reveal about their character? (p. 70-71 and 239)

3. Evaluation

- Based on what you know, how would you explain the significances of the live violet in Mr. Benedict's office and the artificial violet in Mr. Curtain's office? (p.239)
- Reynie, Sticky, Kate and Constance put a plant product in their classmate's food to make them sick. This seems unethical. Can you justify this action? Why or why not?
- What does this story tell you about belonging? About family? About teamwork?
- Why would you recommend or not recommend this book?

4. Synthesis

- How would this story have been different if Mr. Benedict hadn't found Sticky's parents and brought them to take him home?
- Can you develop a new character for the story; a gifted child with special talents to add to Mr. Benedict's group of secret agents?
- Can you negotiate with Mr. Curtain to convince him to destroy his whisperer and become a good character?
- Can you propose an alternate way (other than Morse code) that Mr. Benedict, Mulligan, Number Two and Rhonda could have communicated with the children while they were on the island of Nomansanisland?
- Can you think of 2-3 new titles that would convey what the story is about?

After Group Discussion: Activities for students to complete with a partner, in a small group, or individually. Activities may be used for a grade.

A. Connections to the Curriculum: Students will make connections to a curriculum area (math, science, social studies, language arts, art, or careers) using one of the concepts from the story. The product should reflect creativity as well as critical thinking.

- **Math** –Plan another "test" the gifted children need to pass to get chosen for Mr. Benedict's secret society. The test needs to be clever by using logic, mystery, riddle, game, multiple meanings of words, deductive reasoning, etc. It should involve math concepts such as geometry, patterns, time (clock and calendar), money, graphs, tables, etc.
- **Science/Social Studies** – In the story, people received subliminal messages about an impending emergency. If people are prepared for an emergency, it can save lives and make it easier to get through. Choose an emergency situation. (i.e. fire, crash, tornado, hurricane, earthquake, power outage, flood) Research information about the situation, as well as the steps people can take to prepare for such an event. Create a pamphlet that educates people about the emergency, and steps they can take to prepare for it. (For example, a tri-fold brochure in MSWord) Distribute your flyer to classmates, family and friends.

- **Language Arts-Writing –**
 1. Take the test at the end of the book, “Are you Mysterious Benedict Society material?” Check the answer key. From your answers and the character you are most like, figure out the pattern to the questions and answers. Write 5 new questions that could be part of the test.
 2. Metaphor activity- Trenton Lee Scott includes descriptive language metaphors in his book. For example, “Where adult thoughts would lumber into the mind like an elephant, children’s creep in on cat feet and find a shadowy place to hide.” (p. 101) and, “so that the (fall) trees appeared candy-coated.” Look through, The Mysterious Benedict Society and find at least 3 other descriptive metaphors. Write 5 new metaphors to describe different ideas from the book.
- **Arts –**
 1. Create a representation listing the Morse code. Create an activity with a Morse code message for your classmates to figure out. Develop 5 different methods to “send” the Morse code message (flashlight, electric keyboard, etc.)
 2. Watch the rest of the trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDQYbrQ-zBQ>
Write your own screenplay for the book or your favorite scene in the book and act it out for the class. Video tape your play. With your parent’s permission, put your video on YouTube for others interested in the Mysterious Benedict Society.
- **Careers –**The Special Opportunity for Gifted Children was listed as an advertisement in the newspaper. Research the following advertising techniques: Emotional response, Bandwagon, Repetition, Promotions, Association, Claims, Plain Folks Appeal, Glittering Generality, Facts & Figures, Hidden Fears, and Snob Appeal. Make a 3 column table that lists at least 5 of these advertising technique, their description, and 1 or more real-life examples of each technique. Using 1 of the techniques, create your own advertisement (newspaper or magazine ad, billboard, on-line ad, info-graphic, flyer, TV or radio commercial, etc.) for a product, service, or opportunity.

B. Creative Reading: Using the following list of creative products, students will complete a project reflecting their personal connection with the novel (students may determine their own creative product with the approval of the teacher):

1. Create a puppet play based on a favorite scene in the story
2. Create a poem based on the novel, a character, or favorite scene
3. Illustrate a favorite scene(s) from the story
4. Create a story board of the plot of the story
5. Write a screen play based on the story
6. Create a new ending for the story
7. Create a map of the location(s) of the story
8. Create a mural representative of the story and characters
9. Extend the story into another sequel
10. Rewrite a portion of the story from another character’s perspective
11. Rewrite the story in another time or culture
12. Create an online product: infographic, video, character blog, etc.
13. Write a song that one or more of the characters might sing
14. Create an interpretative dance for the story
15. Student idea for a creative product related to the story

Appendix A

Summary



THE MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY

BOOK 1

When this peculiar ad appears in the newspaper, dozens of children enroll to take a series of mysterious, mind-bending tests. (And you, dear reader, can test your wits right alongside them.) But in the end just four very special children will succeed. Their challenge: to go on a secret mission that only the most intelligent and resourceful children could complete. To accomplish it they will have to go undercover at the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened, where the only rule is that there are no rules.

As our heroes face physical and mental trials beyond their wildest imaginations, they have no choice but to turn to each other for support. But with their newfound friendship at stake, will they be able to pass the most important test of all?

WELCOME TO THE MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT
SOCIETY.

Appendix B

1. Reynard "Reynie" Muldoon is an eleven-year-old boy living at Stonetown Orphanage. He is exceptionally talented at problem solving, logical deduction, and reading people's emotions, and his intelligence resulted in the assignment of a special tutor at the orphanage, Miss Perumal (who later adopts him). Reynie looks between the lines, observing and questioning, and solve most problems by finding the "puzzle" within the situation. He is described as an especially average-looking boy with average brown hair, average pale complexion, and average clothes.
2. George "Sticky" Washington is a tea-skinned boy with a no hair (caused by the self-application of hair remover). He is also eleven. He has a prodigious photographic memory (everything "sticks" in his head) and a talent for speed-reading. He is, however, timid and nervous and resorts to polishing his glasses in stressful situations. He ran away from his parents because they forced him into academic competitions and because he thought they no longer wanted him around.
3. Kate Wetherall is a twelve-year-old girl who is resourceful and athletic, possessing great agility, dexterity, strength, and stamina. After being orphaned, she ran away to the circus. She has blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. She carries a red bucket containing various items which she thinks are useful, including a Swiss Army knife, a flashlight, a pen light, a rope, a bag of marbles, a slingshot, a spool of clear fishing twine, a horseshoe magnet and a spyglass disguised as a kaleidoscope. She is very cheerful and optimistic. Kate's mother died when she was a baby, and she believes that her father abandoned her.

4. Constance Contraire is a small, extremely intelligent, precocious, stubborn and often unpleasant girl. She has the ability to write clever and whimsical poems, and her ultra-sensitive mind is also the most severely affected by the hidden messages transmitted by the Whisperer. She is often compared to a crab by Kate, who often carries her to speed things up. Reynie, Sticky and Kate find Constance to be stubborn, petulant and often immature. At the end of the book, it is revealed that she is only three years old, which explains her behavior. Also at the end of the book, Mr. Benedict offers to adopt her.” (*Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.*)

References

- Stewart, T. L., & Ellis, C. (2008). *The mysterious Benedict Society*. New York: Little, Brown & Company.
- THE MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY* by Trenton Lee Stewart. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.mysteriousbenedictsociety.com/>
- The Mysterious Benedict Society Movie Trailer [Video file]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDQYbrQ-zBQ>
- The Mysterious Benedict Society* - *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 16, 2014, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mysterious_Benedict_Society