

The Egypt Game Study Guide

The Egypt Game by Zilpha Keatley Snyder

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Overview

The Egypt Game is a story about a group of diverse, imaginative children playing a game about Egypt. Like most of Snyder's books, however, the novel's simple title belies its complex subject matter; The Egypt Game focuses on the experiences of its precocious female protagonist, April, as she encounters loneliness, prejudice, friendship, and murder. Sent to live with her dead father's mother in California, April learns to adjust to her new environment, make friends, and care for her grandmother.

April and her friends who play the Egypt Game share a camaraderie that ignores differences in race, culture, and age. Although the members include whites, blacks, and Asians spanning from ages four through eleven, all are held together by their fascination with Egypt and their extremely active imaginations. But when real danger threatens the children, the adult characters reveal their prejudiced views and eventually learn from the children not to make assumptions about an outsider just because the person seems different.

Overall, The Egypt Game is an excellent study in the growth of love and the acceptance of others.

About the Author

Zilpha Keatley Snyder, born on May 11, 1927, in Lemoore, California, has spent most of her life in her native state. Growing up before the age of television, traveling infrequently, and seeing few movies led her to depend on books for excitement. A nearby library provided an inexhaustible supply of magic, adventure, and excitement. She decided at the age of eight to become a professional writer, but many years passed before the publication of her first book, *Season of Ponies*.

Before her success as a writer, Snyder attended college, married, had children, and taught school for nine years. She says students she had taught in Berkeley, California, served as models for the six main characters in *The Egypt Game*. Snyder also bases her characters and plotlines on her own experiences, family, friends, pets, interests, and travels.

Three of her novels—*The Egypt Game*, *The Headless Cupid*, and *The Witches of Worm*—have been runners-up for the Newbery Medal. *The Changeling* and *The Headless Cupid* have been awarded the Christopher Medal in recognition of exceptional quality.



Plot Summary

April Hall has been sent to live with her paternal grandmother, Caroline Hall. Although she misses her mother, Dorothea, and longs for the time when she can return to her, April knows she must make the best of the situation.

Not long after moving in with her grandmother, April meets a fellow sixth-grader named Melanie Ross. A fast friendship is formed when the two girls discover they share a vivid imagination and love for inventing stories and making up games. Of particular interest to both girls is ancient Egypt, and both Melanie and April spend time learning about Egypt and its ceremonies after finding a hidden storage yard in which to play. Along for the ride is also Melanie's four-year-old brother, Marshall. The storage yard is in back of a shop run by a reclusive Professor. He is as mysterious as their new game, The Egypt Game.

Melanie works hard to help April fit in at her new school. A child of Hollywood, April has a fondness for wearing false eyelashes and her hair in a dramatic upsweep much like her mother does when she is acting in movies. Thanks to Melanie, April is able to easily discard the "Hollywood act" and make new friends at Wilson School. Another new girl, fourth-grader Elizabeth Chung, moves into the same building as Melanie and April and becomes a member of the Egypt gang.

Not long after school starts, a neighborhood girl is murdered and her body is found in a nearby marsh. This throws the entire neighborhood into a state of panic and paralysis and The Egypt Game is put on hold while children are kept indoors to play. On Halloween night two fathers of Wilson School students take a large group of kids trick-or-treating. Melanie and April's secret game is discovered by two sixth-grade boys, Ken Kamata and Toby Alvillar, who are from the girls' class. Initially, they invite the boys to join in order to make sure that they don't tell on them.

As the game goes along and as fall turns into winter, Ken and Toby continue to participate in The Egypt Game. One night, while April is babysitting Marshall, the two of them go to the land of Egypt to rescue April's math book. As a result of this adventure, April is attacked by a man, but is rescued thanks to the Professor's help. If it hadn't been for the Professor yelling out for help, April could have met with the same fate as the neighborhood girl who was killed.

The land of Egypt is closed down because of what happened to April (the loose board in a wooden fence is replaced and there's no other way into the yard). Over Christmas vacation, the Professor meets with all of the kids from The Egypt Game and gives them each their own key to the new padlock on the storage yard door. This permits them to continue their game, which he had watched with a rapt attention all along.



The Discovery of Egypt

The Discovery of Egypt Summary

The story all begins in a university town in a time not long ago. A curio shop full of old relics, much like the proprietor himself, occupies space in a residential block filled with young families. The owner of this shop, selling antiques, curios, and used merchandise, is an old man everyone knows only as the Professor.

The Professor's shop is surrounded by apartment houses filled with children of all ages, sizes, and colors. These children are afraid of the Professor not for what he says but for what he doesn't say. His appearance is also scary: a scraggly white beard crawls up his cheeks and is met by a pair of deep-set and foreboding eyes. It is said that he lives in the back part of the store, but no one really knows for sure.

It was a day in September when the Professor witnessed the beginning of The Egypt Game. In the back of the shop is a little used storeroom that has a window looking out on a storage yard. The yard, covered in weeds, has a small lean-to where some discarded items are stored. He sees three children, one boy and two girls, wiggling through the back fence. The boy carries a stuffed toy octopus named Security that is so large he has trouble fitting it through the loose fence board.

The girls, April Hall and Melanie Ross, eye all of the broken pottery and pieces of discarded goods in the yard and their imaginations kick into high gear. The lean-to has a sagging tin roof held up by old porch pillars. Inside there is a statue of Diana and a bust of Nefertiti sitting in an old concrete birdbath. For the girls this is Egyptian heaven. The children clean up the yard, pull weeds, and straighten up. Just before leaving for the day, they leave a bouquet of weeds at Nefertiti's feet.

The Discovery of Egypt Analysis

Readers are thrown full throttle into this story as they initially watch the children through the eyes of the Professor. Almost instantly there's an aura of mystery and tension. The Professor is presented as foreboding figure. What child has not run up against someone scary? Also, although readers get a sense of the neighborhood in which the children live and where the Professor's antiques store is located, the name of the town where the story occurs is never stated. This missing information lends a sense of mystery to the story.



Enter April

Enter April Summary

A brief flashback in this chapter presents a little bit of information about who April Hall is. April comes to live with her paternal grandmother, Caroline, in a university town. Until this time, she lived with her mother, Dorothea, in Hollywood. Dorothea is a singer and an aspiring movie actress. Caroline lives in a rundown apartment building called Casa Rosada, and works at the university library. Caroline has made an arrangement with the downstairs neighbors, the Ross's, for April to have lunch with them and perhaps become friends with their daughter, Melanie. The Ross's also have a four-year-old little boy named Marshall.

Once Caroline leaves for work, April decides to go out and explore the neighborhood, particularly the store across the street that has interesting things in the window. She enters the store and begins to look in the glass cabinets at all of the figurines. The Professor watches her from the counter above her. Although April is initially fearful of him, she thinks she can read adults pretty well. The Professor's silence, however, causes her to blab about her circumstances and what brought her to the area. He has very little response.

Enter April Analysis

More mystery and tension are introduced in this chapter as readers learn that April has come to live with her paternal grandmother, Caroline. It appears that Dorothea has sent April to live with her because she's going to be performing on the road. However, readers may question exactly why April goes to live with Caroline. It will be clear to readers that April believes she will only be living with her grandmother for a short period of time and that soon she will return to Hollywood and her mother. There is some foreshadowing that occurs when discussion of getting ready for a new school year occurs between Caroline and April. The theme of abandonment is starting to arise both for April and Caroline.



Enter Melanie -- And Marshall

Enter Melanie -- And Marshall Summary

April returns to her grandmother's apartment just in time to dress up for lunch with the Ross's. She piles her blonde hair on top of her head, puts on a new pair of false eyelashes she bought at a drugstore just that morning, puts on one of her mother's old fur stoles, and tells Melanie Ross when she comes to fetch her that her name is April Dawn. April has decided to adopt this last name because her mother is known in Hollywood is Dorothea Dawn.

At first, Melanie is put off by April's haughty attitude and her bragging about living in Hollywood. April tells Melanie that she loves everything having to do with ancient Egypt. After pawing through books in Melanie's room, April runs across an old geography book. She opens it and finds cut out pictures of people sprinkled throughout. Melanie says that she likes to create families and put them into stories. This intrigues April and the girls soon start to weave tales about the families. Gone is April's haughty Hollywood attitude and in its place are curiosity and a desire for a good friend.

Enter Melanie -- And Marshall Analysis

Readers get to have a peek into the life of Mr. and Mrs. Ross and their children, Melanie and Marshall. Although April approaches her lunch with the Ross's as something to be dreaded, she soon finds that Melanie is a girl who likes the same things and has the same vivid imagination. The theme of isolation is touched on in this chapter when Melanie reveals that she doesn't really have any friends that play "imagining games" like April does. Tension from the previous chapters is released because April seems to have found someone she can play and have fun with. This may cause readers to breathe a sigh of relief that she is not completely on her own and does not have to behave like an eleven-year-old going on thirty.



The Egypt Girls

The Egypt Girls Summary

After the realization that Melanie and April have a lot in common, they spend most everyday together before school starts. April ignites Melanie's imagination through her love of Egypt and all things ancient. Everyday the girls go down to the local library and with the help of one of the librarians, read every book they can find on Egypt. Egypt becomes their shared passion.

As fun as it is to play with Melanie, April is starting to have doubts about starting at a new school. Melanie is also worried because she doesn't know how April will fit into her circle of friends at school. She's worried about April's "Hollywood Act" and particularly about the false eyelashes that April continues to wear. Melanie decides to "kidnap" the eyelashes so April won't have a chance to wear them to school.

The Egypt Game begins just before school starts. Melanie finds the entrance into the old abandoned yard and the bust of Nefertiti. Since they had been studying everything about Egypt, both April and Melanie are excited to see Nefertiti waiting for them in the lean-to.

The Egypt Girls Analysis

Melanie and April are creating a friendship based on mutual imagination. Melanie is already trying to look out for April's interests by making sure she can't wear the fake eyelashes to school. This lessens some tension by ensuring that April will fit in more naturally with the kids at school. However, that tension isn't completely dissipated because readers will wonder if April will ever find out what happened to her eyelashes. This chapter catches up with and overtakes the very first chapter where readers were introduced to the beginning of The Egypt Game. Foreshadowing occurs in the guise of Melanie being April's savior; it won't be the only time Melanie stands up for her friend.



The Evil God and the Secret Spy

The Evil God and the Secret Spy Summary

Marshall, Melanie, and April return to the abandoned yard to continue playing their new game. Everything is just as they left it the day before. They continue to pull out the rest of the weeds and stash them in an old dumpster. Both Melanie and April take a good look at the lean-to: it really is only about a foot off the floor sitting on a palette and surrounded on two sides by the old fence. Inside the lean-to, the children had done everything they could to straighten up and make it something Melanie and April now call a "temple."

Melanie wonders if the Professor might be watching them. The rumors she'd heard about him make her nervous. After looking around the yard, they see the window at the back of the Professor's store. Their fears of being spied upon are eased when the kids see the window caked with dirt making it nearly impossible to see through.

The girls make up a story about a young Pharaoh named Marshamosis (played by Marshall, of course) and the evil God Set. Melanie and April are high priestesses to Set and plan to capture and take the bloody heart of the Pharaoh. Partway into the game with Set and the Pharaoh, Marshall, Melanie, and April decide they needed more supplies for the temple for it to really be a temple. They find boxes that will be perfect for making thrones and altars and an old metal mixing bowl, which will be a great fire pit for building sacred fires. Through it all, however, they never notice the Professor watching them through the dirty window.

The Evil God and the Secret Spy Analysis

The theme of isolation, for April as a new student and for Melanie as her friend, is heightened in this chapter with Melanie's worry over whether April will fit in to her new school. April herself is concerned because she knows what it's like to be a new kid in a new school. A foreshadowing, and perhaps a foreboding, is seen in the Professor's voyeurism. This creates an eerie feeling. The worry is outweighed somewhat by the joy of the friendship being shared by two girls who need each other.



Eyelashes and Ceremony

Eyelashes and Ceremony Summary

The night before school starts, Melanie visits April in order to steal the eyelashes. To do this, she brings a couple of books she knows April will like. April removes the eyelashes in order to read. When Caroline comes in to tell the girls it's time to go to bed, Melanie slyly runs her hand on the dresser where April left the eyelashes, picks them up, and takes them home.

Despite her fears, April gets comfortable at Wilson school. Even the coolest boys in the class started calling April by a nickname rather than her first name. This signals to Melanie that everything will be fine. In the meantime, the girls and Marshall continue to play The Egypt Game in the afternoons and on weekends. The temple is becoming much more decorated and the yard is kept consistently neat. Melanie and April decide to make a statue of Set to go along with the bust of Nefertiti. They make Set from some old molding clay and when it hardens his face becomes an evil and cracked sneer.

There is always much to do in the land of Egypt. Altars are built and decorated, thrones are crafted, and rites and ceremonies are decided upon and written down. For now, everything is written in English, but April and Melanie are devising their own form of hieroglyphics. On their way to school one day, April and Melanie find something that they later declare as the "crocodile stone." Since it looks evil, they lay it at the feet of Set.

Eyelashes and Ceremony Analysis

The worry and tension of April fitting into a new school is relaxed when readers find out that Melanie has helped out and even the coolest kids in class have accepted April. The Egypt Game continues and grows more elaborate every day. The themes of abandonment and isolation are put aside, replaced by the fun of childhood imaginings.



Neferbeth

Neferbeth Summary

After school begins, a new family moves into Casa Rosada. A woman named Mrs. Chung and her three daughters now occupy one of the basement apartments. Mrs. Chung has recently lost her husband and needs to find a job to support her three girls. One of the girls, Elizabeth, is close in age to Melanie and April and it's suggested that they make her feel welcome. The problem is that Elizabeth is only nine-years-old.

Melanie and April are worried. They don't want another friend to join their game nor do they want someone to butt into their friendship. They decide to help her at school, but no more than that. After meeting Elizabeth and walking to school, they find her to be a ready and eager addition to their game and friendship. It does not hurt that from the side, Elizabeth is the spitting image of Nefertiti.

Neferbeth Analysis

Isolation comes up again but this time at the hands of Melanie and April. The girls have already judged Elizabeth as being too young for them as a fourth-grader, and therefore, they will only do the barest of things to help her out. They really like Elizabeth in spite of themselves, however. Even though April understands better than anyone what it's like to be isolated and left alone, she hesitates to include Elizabeth at first. This tension is released when the girls find Elizabeth to be an engaging person and they invite her to be part of their game.



Prisoners of Fear

Prisoners of Fear Summary

Elizabeth Chung turns out to be the icing on The Egypt Game's cake. She's enthusiastic and full of admiring comments. Then, however, something happens in the neighborhood that almost puts an end to The Egypt Game. Right in the middle of a ceremony, Melanie hears her mother's voice calling. Mrs. Ross had canceled her class and come home early. Although adults tried not to let the children in on any details, Melanie and April find out that a young girl from the neighborhood has been found dead.

This casts a pall over the entire neighborhood. It also means that children who were able to play outside freely can no longer do so for the time being. The Egypt Game at the storage yard is put on hold. Melanie, April, Marshall, and Elizabeth try to play the game inside but it just isn't the same.

The four Egyptians decide it is important to make Egyptian costumes and so they go about getting fabric and jewels to make them. It is easy to cover up their interest, because Halloween is almost near. Elizabeth turns out to be very creative and a huge help when it came to making costumes. The most successful creation is Marshall's crown: an old bleach bottle, one of his plastic pins from a bowling set, a cardboard vulture's head, and a cobra glued to the front. Marshall is very proud.

Not long after the police find the body of the little girl, the Professor is questioned about his involvement. Since the Professor is such an unusual and eccentric man, some neighbors decide his guilt before any evidence emerges to show he had any involvement. The smattering of business that used to come in regularly to the Professor's store drops off drastically as the police continued to question him.

As weeks go by, news of the little girl's death drops off and slowly parents begin to allow children to go outside and play again. The children stop by the land of Egypt to make sure nothing has changed. They notice some interesting things: the crocodile stone seems to have moved from its place in front of Set and the flowers on Nefertiti's altar seem to stay fresher much longer. The kids attribute these things to Set's evil powers and Nefertiti's beauty.

April misses her mother but has received only one letter from her in the past month. Although she has asked Dorothea when her mother will be coming home, Dorothea never answers her.

Prisoners of Fear Analysis

The dead body of a neighborhood girl is the focal point of this chapter and the cause of extreme tension in the children and adults. The neighborhood protects its own and when the Professor is suspected, and even accused, tried, and convicted by some, an



isolationism of the adult kind is exposed. The Professor is an odd man, which makes him an outcast even though his shop has been a staple in the neighborhood for years. He's isolated because of his perceived eccentricity and his lack of socialization with the rest of the neighborhood; he's branded a murderer before any evidence suggests it.

Tension is heightened for the kids when they stop by Egypt and find that, even after several weeks of not being there, a few things have changed. Could it be the evil power of Set or the beauty of Nefertiti? Could it be someone who's been watching them?



Summoned by the Mighty Ones

Summoned by the Mighty Ones Summary

All through the month of October, it appears as though Halloween will be canceled for the kids of Casa Rosada and Wilson school. The murderer has still not been found and parents and teachers are understandably nervous about letting their kids go out trick-or-treating alone.

However, a PTA meeting just before Halloween saves the day. A number of fathers volunteer to accompany large groups of kids so that Halloween is not lost. It is at this time that the Egypt gang decides it would be a great idea to try to split off from the group to visit Egypt at night.

April has a grand plan to return to Egypt at night and, although Melanie readily agrees with the idea at first, she quickly grows concerned when she is alone and thinks more about it. April hasn't told Elizabeth because she tends to be nervous about not getting permission, and so April waits until Halloween night. Marshall is too young to understand. After the children dress in their splendid costumes, April announces to the Egyptians that they'll wait for a "sign" indicating when they should split off from the larger group to visit Egypt; the sign eventually comes.

Summoned by the Mighty Ones Analysis

Tension in this chapter is heightened and released and heightened again with the introduction of the possibility that Halloween may not occur for the kids of Orchard Avenue. Fathers step up to the plate to save the day and April decides that the Egyptians must go make a visit to their land. The theme of isolation is found in the fact that the four children want to split off from safety and go into danger. The fact that their costumes are so elaborate and different from typical ghosts, goblins, and witches also sets them apart from members of the larger group.



The Return to Egypt

The Return to Egypt Summary

Melanie, April, Marshall, and Elizabeth join a larger group on Orchard Ave. and begin trick-or-treating. April interprets a shooting star as the "sign" to break off from the group. And breaking off from the group wasn't that difficult: by the time they finish with their last house, the admiration of their costumes, and running into Melanie and April's friends Ken and Toby from school, the larger group had already turned the corner and left them behind.

The four Egyptians find that Egypt is even more enticing at night than it is during the day. Lit only by a flashlight, a jack-o'-lantern and a distant streetlight, April asks everyone to wait outside the temple while she lights the incense pot in front of Set. She also lights the two candles standing in front of Isis and then motions everybody to come inside. Once inside, all four children kneel down in front of Isis and Set and chant the Celebration of the Return to Egypt.

The Return to Egypt Analysis

Preparation meets opportunity in the form of April Hall. April sets everything in motion by suggesting that the four kids will get a "sign" that will tell them the best time to leave the large trick-or-treating group. Tension is heightened when April seizes the chance to go to Egypt after the group of four had fallen so far behind the larger group that it becomes only too easy to split off. The sign comes in the form of a shooting star, which is merely coincidence. Readers' heartbeats will increase in fear for the children's safety, but also in anticipation of what Egypt will look like at night. The four Egyptians have isolated themselves and possibly put themselves in harm's way.



Egypt Invaded

Egypt Invaded Summary

After proper reverence in front of the gods Set and Isis, the children fall naturally back into their game. April decides the next move is to appease the angry gods for not being in Egypt for a long time. Further, April decides that a bloody sacrifice must be made in order to appease their gods.

The bloody sacrifice part is what scares the willies out of Marshall. April suggests that the four of them come forward and touch the crocodile stone in order to determine what they believe should be the proper sacrifice. Elizabeth's idea is to puncture fingertips with a needle and write Set a letter in their own blood. That suggestion, although a good one, is dismissed because no one has a needle.

April comes up with another idea. The sacrifice should include something dear to them. She looks at Marshall and Security and pronounces that the crocodile stone has told her that Security must be sacrificed. Marshall throws a four-year-old tantrum and this idea is also dismissed. Melanie develops the most appropriate sacrifice: pieces of hair and fingernails. Although they don't have any scissors to cut their fingernails they decide to chew them, and in a ritual the children circle the incense pot placing bits of hair and fingernails inside it.

At the end of the ceremony the four children notice something strange. Elizabeth sees it first: a huge misshapen figure teetering on the top of the fence just above Egypt. Before they can react, the figure springs forward and lands in a terrible crouch right before them.

Egypt Invaded Analysis

There is a mix of anxiety and anticipation as the children return to Egypt. Readers will find something enticing about visiting a familiar place at night, especially Halloween night. Even though the theme of isolation surrounds this group, there's still a measure of comfort in that they are returning to a familiar place. However, this theme of isolation raises its ugly head even further when an intruder throws himself into the middle of their game. Readers will be holding their breath at this point to find out who the intruder is and whether the children will get out safely.



Elizabethan Diplomacy

Elizabethan Diplomacy Summary

The four Egyptians hang onto each other in panic and desperation waiting to see what will happen after the figure gets up from jumping into the middle of the storage yard. But a second invader appears at the top of the fence also jumping into the yard. The four Egyptians learn that the intruders are Ken and Toby, who think that their intrusion is very funny, which angers April so much that she wants to punch them in the nose. Elizabeth comes up with the solution to ask them to join the game, figuring that if they join they won't rat out the Egyptians and spoil the game. She is right.

Melanie and April are surprised at Toby's enthusiasm for Egypt. Ken doesn't care less and would rather be gathering candy during trick-or-treat. In fact, Ken thinks the storage yard is better used for sports, but Toby convinces him that it is a worthwhile endeavor. The four original Egyptians and the two new recruits manage to catch up with the large trick-or-treat crowd before heading home.

April and Melanie try to figure out what to do with the two new Egyptians. They really don't want a play with the boys but Melanie doesn't think they have any other choice. The decision is either let them in or end the game.

Elizabethan Diplomacy Analysis

The tension from the end of the previous chapter is released when readers find out that the intruders into Egypt are none other than Ken and Toby. The theme of fitting in comes up in two areas. Ken and Toby must deal with rules they're unfamiliar with when they decide to join a new society; they're used to being the most popular boys in the class and now they're not. In addition, the four original Egyptians also have to deal with fitting in two new recruits. This is something that the gang hasn't dealt with before. The threat of being ratted on by Toby and Ken is too great for the original Egyptians to bear and so it is easier to let them into The Egypt Game and continue playing, rather than to risk the possibility of grown-ups finding out and shutting down the game.



Moods and Maybes

Moods and Maybes Summary

The following day at school, April and Melanie are approached by Ken and Toby, who really don't believe in talking to girls in public places, to find out when The Egypt Game will begin again. The girls still haven't been allowed outside to play on their own because of the unsolved neighborhood murder. Toby tells the girls that he got in trouble at home not for being away from the large group of trick-or-treaters, but because his costume was squashed. His father, an artist who had come up with the idea of Toby dressing like a full-size TV to symbolize the new American, was upset that the costume was damaged.

It isn't long after this conversation that the neighborhood begins to relax and April and Melanie are permitted to play outside by themselves again. The day they return to Egypt is a day of jubilee. April isn't overjoyed, however; she has other things on her mind. A letter from her mother has revealed that Dorothea has married her agent, Nick, moving into a very small apartment together, which means April cannot come home. Caroline tries to soothe April's hurt feelings.

When Ken and Toby are in Egypt on a Friday afternoon, Toby is energized. He is interested in everything about Egypt. He wants to know about the gods and goddesses, about the altars, and about the ceremonies. April and Melanie retrieve the scrolls that hold all of the ceremonies they've recorded, as well as their partially finished hieroglyphics alphabet. In fact, Toby is so interested that he asks for the names of the books April and Melanie have read so that he, too, can go to the library that night.

On the way home, Melanie says she thinks that maybe the boys will come for a week or two and then grow tired of the game. April hopes that they were just curious and won't return at all.

Moods and Maybes Analysis

There is tension in the air as the children are allowed to play outside by themselves again along with new members Ken and Toby. April's bad mood over her mother's letter, and continued abandonment isolates her, however temporarily, from the Egypt gang. When Ken and Toby do finally make an appearance, Ken feels isolated and abandoned when he sees how excited Toby is to join in the game. Probably for the first time since their friendship began, Toby goes a separate direction from Ken and it doesn't feel good.



Hieroglyphics

Hieroglyphics Summary

The next time the kids meet in Egypt, Ken and Toby show up full of ideas for the game. They also bring lots of supplies and make Set's altar much more ornate and evil. The boys bring things like a theatrical dagger, an old owl's head, rubber spiders, snakes, and bugs. The kids perch the owl's head on a shelf above Set's altar calling it Thoth, after the bird-headed god of wisdom and writing.

Toby also has decided, much to April's chagrin, that they should finish the hieroglyphic alphabet. He reasons that, once finished, the kids could use the alphabet for secret notes at school and no one would be the wiser. They also decide to give themselves Egyptian symbols so that when they sign their notes, there will be added mystery.

The hieroglyphics alphabet is completed and symbols are assigned to everyone. After everyone has chosen his or her name and symbol, Melanie makes a new scroll and records all of the information. At one point, April and Toby get into an argument over the meaning of a particular hieroglyphic, causing Ken and Toby to leave the game suddenly. This turns out to be a good thing, though, because the sixth-grade boys that Ken and Toby play basketball with are very curious as to why they have not shown up all week. Ken and Toby have lied, saying that they were involved in an after-school job. Then something tragic happens to Elizabeth: her parakeet, Petey, is killed by a neighbor's cat. Although this is a very sad event and something that Elizabeth has trouble getting over, it gives The Egypt Game another ceremony to perform.

Hieroglyphics Analysis

Much to April and Melanie's surprise, the boys come back to Egypt with Toby full of excitement, energy, ideas, and supplies. Their contributions are good and enhance the mood. Readers will see the theme of isolation come up for Ken and Toby with relation to their place in the after-school basketball games with their friends. They're able to diffuse a potentially difficult situation (being followed by their basketball friends) by coming up with an excuse, thus hindering that potential for isolation. Ken is torn between wanting to hang out with his best buddy and feeling ill at ease in The Egypt Game. He doesn't fit in as well as Toby.



The Ceremony for the Dead

The Ceremony for the Dead Summary

Back in Egypt, Melanie, April, and Elizabeth, with the help of Ken and Toby, come up with a ceremony for Petey (whose new Egyptian name is Prince Pete-ho-tep). It's decided that Petey had fallen in battle and was the son of Great Queen Neferbeth. The new ceremony, a procession to the temple of Anubis, god of the dead, will be called the Ceremony for the Dead.

It is decided that the procession needs to have flowers and palms, and so the kids take a break to find armloads of slightly wilted flowers, just perfect for the ceremony, behind a local florist's shop. Toby suggests that part of the ceremony should be to march around the altar sprinkling ashes over each other's heads. They do so, wailing in mourning for the dead Prince Pete-ho-tep.

The Ceremony of the Dead, it is also decided, will last five or six days. Toby's assigned the duty of giving everyone something to bring for the next day's ceremony. Prince Pete-ho-tep is to be mummified and Toby reads books that night on how to do it. The next day, the Egyptians prepare the parakeet by soaking it in brine, rinsing it off, and rearranging its feathers. They wrap the parakeet in thin strips of oil-soaked cloth and lay it to rest with a supply of seed and favorite toys.

The Egypt Game, even with the new players, is becoming second nature to the group of six kids. It's so comfortable that the children begin speaking in a normal tone of voice, rather than a whisper, about various aspects of the game. The only one not participating actively is Marshall because he's so young. He has kept an eye on the Professor's store, however, and has noticed the old man looking out his back window as they play the game.

The Ceremony for the Dead Analysis

Everyone in the group, even the new members, seem to be fitting in well. While there is still some tension between April and Toby because of strong personalities, everyone still gets along fairly well. Elizabeth's abandonment by the only pet she's ever known is being soothed by the new ceremony in Egypt. Readers will see at the end of the chapter that Marshall, bored without something to do, has been watching the Professor's back window and notices him watching them. This creates some tension but it is known only to the readers and to Marshall.



The Oracle of Thoth

The Oracle of Thoth Summary

One day in class, Toby, April, and Melanie learn about Oracles. This gives them the next ceremony to perform in The Egypt Game. By the time the six Egyptians return to the land of Egypt, Toby and April have very specific ideas about what will go into the Oracle ceremony. The kids decide that the best God for being an Oracle will be Thoth, the stuffed owl of wisdom and writing. April wants the kind of Oracle that receives messages from the gods through a high priestess, but Toby has his own idea and is set on making it work; Toby's idea is the most popular.

Toby suggests that someone pick a question, write it on a piece of paper, and place it on Thoth's beak. They will return the next day to find the answer. Naturally, there needs to be a priest or priestess who will preside over the ceremony, and because it is Toby's idea, he gets to go first.

The remaining kids draw straws to see who will be the first one to ask a question. Ken is the winner and writes his question down. Toby takes the piece of paper from Ken and begins his own version of the Oracle ceremony. In fact, everyone is so caught up in his ceremony, that April doesn't even have time to be angry that her idea isn't followed first.

After Toby finishes his ceremony, he suggests that everyone leave to give the Oracle time to answer the question. All together, the six kids look back at the temple as the sun hangs very low in the sky. This gives the temple an eerie effect and they all leave together through the opening in the fence.

The Oracle of Thoth Analysis

Up until now, the ceremonies in The Egypt Game have been completed within the course of an afternoon, except for the Ceremony for the Dead. Now, the theme of imagination jumps in full force because the kids are relying on someone or something else to finish the ceremony. The end of each ceremony is determined when a question is answered. Readers will feel the tension increase in two ways: Will the question be answered and what will the answer be?



The Oracle Speaks

The Oracle Speaks Summary

The next day, at a prearranged time, the six Egyptians meet just outside the fence to learn whether the Oracle had spoken. Toby suggests that April be the high priestess that day and perform the Ceremony of Returning to the Oracle for the Answer. In order to set the mood, April retrieves the box of costumes and asks everyone to put on one item of their costume. April prepares herself for her part of the ceremony and begins. She asks everyone to drop some twisted paper to burn in the sacred fire bowl and then lines the participants up for a procession to the grotto.

April lights the candles and incense, letting her imagination take her where it wants to, and then, asking everyone sit in a circle, April begins to chant. When she declares that the Oracle has spoken, she rises from her seated position, goes over to Thoth and takes the piece of paper from his beak. On one side is Ken's question: "Will I be a big-league star someday?" On the reverse side is the answer: "Man is his own star, and that soul who can be honest, is the only perfect man."

April immediately thinks that one of the other kids has written the answer, but no one confesses. The six Egyptians decide to draw straws again and pose another question to Thoth. This time, April is the one who draws the short straw and asks her question by writing it on a piece of paper like Ken did the day before. She presents the piece of paper to Toby for the Ceremony of Presenting the Question to the Oracle. After Toby has performed his ceremony, everyone notices that the light seems to be dimming and everything is getting dark very quickly.

As all six look outside the temple, they can see dark ominous clouds skidding across the sky and then they hear a rumble. At first, they aren't sure if this is coming from the Oracle, or if it is thunder. It turns out to be a huge rainstorm that forces the kids out of Egypt and back to their homes as quickly as possible.

The Oracle Speaks Analysis

Tension is released, but only slightly, when the answer to Ken's question is given. No one really expects an answer. Spookiness is added to the game after everyone denies they wrote the answer. Tension remains high to a certain degree because readers do not know how the answer came to be posted on the back of the piece of paper. Not letting their imaginations go, however, the kids decide to try presenting a question to the Oracle again. April asks this time. Before the six Egyptians have time to finish their ceremony, they're driven out of the land of Egypt by a large thunderstorm. This itself lends more fear to the land of Egypt.



Where is Security?

Where is Security? Summary

The rain continues into the next morning. All six Egyptians are still anxious to see if April's question has been answered. There is another issue to face, however, which is that Marshall's favorite friend, Security, is missing. The children had all left in such a rush the night before that even Marshall had forgotten to check for Security. After returning home and getting ready for bed, he told Melanie that Security was gone. She tried to reassure her little brother but he was adamant that Security was out in the rain getting cold and wet. Melanie suggested to Marshall that maybe he had left Security at nursery school, which calmed him down.

Upon entering the land of Egypt after school, the first thing Marshall does is look for Security. Everyone looks high and low but can't find it. They continue on with the game but Marshall sits, sullen, on a box in the corner. The Ceremony of Returning to the Oracle for an Answer is repeated from the day before. April receives her answer. Her question was, "When will I go home again?" The answer is, "The best thing we can do is to make wherever we are lost in look as much like home as we can."

Everyone thinks something very strange is going on. No one has seen anyone answer that question and the five oldest Egyptians are feeling very scared at what is occurring. They all look around the temple and wonder if perhaps they should quit playing the game. When that idea is voiced, Toby is adamant that they shouldn't stop playing just because a little excitement comes up, but the others aren't so sure.

It's Marshall that insists the game should continue. After all, he still hasn't found Security and wants to ask his question. So the ceremony begins again, Melanie writes Marshall's question, gives it to Toby, and Toby places it on the beak of Thoth. Everyone, except Marshall, goes home worried that Security won't be found. Toby is the most worried of all.

Where is Security? Analysis

Something unusual is definitely occurring in the land of Egypt. There are answers to questions that don't seem to make any sense in terms of how they appear. None of the Egyptians are admitting to writing the answers, so the entire game has taken on a different and strange dimension. This creates a kind of isolation for the five big kids, which is isolation from one another. Marshall is also isolated in his excitement that Security will be found soon. This time, imagination has caused the five Egyptians to feel uncomfortable.



Confession and Confusion

Confession and Confusion Summary

That night, after Marshall asks his question about the location of Security, Toby struggles with his conscience. He calls April and tells her that he has to talk to her and Melanie the next day. At school, Toby confesses that he has been the one writing the answers on the back of the questions to Thoth. He is really worried this time, however, because he doesn't know where Security is and he is unable to provide the answer.

Toby tells them about his ability to go back to Egypt a night; he's frequently left alone at night while his parents are out doing things. There was something that really made Toby nervous, though. The last time he emerged through the fence, there was someone in the alley behind him. Not wanting to stick around to find out who it was, he lived up to his reputation as the fastest runner at Wilson School. Learning that someone had been in the alley with him causes the girls to be concerned about the murderer that it is still on the loose.

The three kids come up with an idea about how they will deal with a non-answer from the Oracle to Marshall's question. Armed and ready to go, Melanie and April pick up Marshall from nursery school and meet the others in the land of Egypt. They perform the Returning Ceremony and April retrieves the answer to Marshall's question. Just as she is about to launch into the prepared speech about Security's whereabouts, she flips the piece of paper over and finds an answer printed there: "Look under the throne of Set."

April is stunned. Marshall is thrilled when Toby reads the answer out loud. The girls look at Toby in disbelief; he swears he had nothing to do with this answer. In the meantime, Marshall looks under the throne and finds Security safe and sound. He clutches the damp octopus to his chest and pronounces that Set answered his query. Toby, April, and Melanie decide to tell Ken, Elizabeth, and Marshall what Toby had done in answering the first two questions. Who, however, wrote the answer to the third question?

Confession and Confusion Analysis

Readers will be relieved when Security is found and Marshall is happy once again. However, there's another issue that will cause readers to feel anxious: Toby does not write the answer to Marshall's question. So who did? Now the theme of isolation comes up to bind all six Egyptians against the world. They are an island unto themselves, but someone has invaded their space.



Fear Strikes

Fear Strikes Summary

Over the following days the Egyptians meet in the land of Egypt but don't conduct any ceremonies. Rather, they sit around the temple talking about what happened with the Oracle's answer to Marshall's question and how they feel about that event. They also discuss Christmas and anything else they can think of to avoid admitting to themselves that someone may be watching them. The kids wonder if the mystery of the neighborhood murder has anything to do with the mystery of the Oracle's answer but they can't come up with any reasonable explanations.

One evening, Melanie's parents decide to go to a holiday concert. Since Marshall falls asleep at concerts, April is asked to baby-sit, which she readily agrees to. As April starts working on her math homework, she realizes that her math book is nowhere to be found. She tries to think about whether or not she had left it in her room but realizes that she hasn't seen it for a day. This realization leads to Marshall and April going to the land of Egypt, at night, to find it. April thinks she remembers Ken moving her books and she is hoping that the math book is still at the temple. Initially, April doesn't want Marshall to go because he is so young, but he will not hear of it. The two of them set out for the land of Egypt in the dark with only a flashlight.

When they get to the alley April thinks she can see sinister things everywhere. None of it seems to faze Marshall, however. As a result of April's nervousness, she moves the loose board in the fence the wrong way, causing the rusty nails to let out at a great screech that scares both of them. After getting over the fright, April and Marshall enter the land of Egypt to find her math book.

The book is right where she thinks it might be and, after picking it up, she and Marshall head back for the fence. As April squeezes through into the alley she's grabbed from behind by a strong person. One hand gags her mouth and an arm around her chest forces air out of her lungs so she can't scream. She looks at Marshall for help and then sees him turn around to look over his own shoulder.

Suddenly, from inside the storage yard, April hears glass breaking and a hoarse shout yelling for help. Neighbors pull windows open asking what is wrong and April hears footsteps and shouts further down the alley. Suddenly, the arms that held her so tight are gone and she is lying on the ground.

Fear Strikes Analysis

At the start of this chapter, all of the Egyptians feel isolated from the world. They're the only ones who have experienced the answer from the Oracle and they can't explain how it happened. Tension remains high with respect to that mystery, but that isn't the only tension to be found in this chapter. Readers will feel their pulse quicken as April and



Marshall go out alone at night to the land of Egypt in order to find her math book. That tension is increased many times when April is grabbed from behind as they are leaving. Who is it? Is it the murderer? Why isn't Marshall helping?



The Hero

The Hero Summary

The next thing April knows, she and Marshall are at a police station. The doctor bandages her hands where she has scraped them on the rough fence and a policeman asks her questions. April never saw who attacked her and so she can't tell the police what he or she looked like. April's first concern is Marshall and where he is. The policeman tells her that he is asking a lot of questions but won't answer any of theirs. Marshall is brought into the room where April is lying down in the hope that he'll tell her what he saw. April gets him to say that the person who attacked her was someone that Marshall would recognize. He also apologizes to April for not being able to help her.

When April asks Marshall who it is that attacked her, he says that it is the man at Schmitt's variety store that carries things around. By this time, the Professor has also shown up at the police station, and she asks Marshall if it was the Professor who had hurt her. He emphatically says no. He tells April that the Professor was the man who watched them all this time and helped by yelling for help.

Marshall describes the man who hurt her as someone with red hair and spots. Upon hearing this information, two of the policeman who had been overhearing their conversation go off quickly. April asks Marshall about the Professor watching them and he says that the Professor has done that for a while. The policeman asking April questions reassure her that everything is fine now and that Marshall has been a real detective. The Professor is a suspect because of his inability to give an alibi for other things happening in the neighborhood, like the murder of the neighborhood child.

Marshall spends the night with April and her grandmother. Instead of going to school the next day, April goes down to the police station with Marshall to take a look at men in a lineup. Marshall immediately picks out the stock boy from Schmitt's variety store as the man who hurt April. The redheaded man admits everything and, instead of a trial, is sentenced to a facility for the criminally insane. The man is Mr. Schmitt's cousin; Mr. Schmitt had always hired him when he was down on his luck. Marshall becomes the hero of the neighborhood but is very humble about it. Shortly after this, Marshall begins to leave Security behind in his bedroom more and more.

The Hero Analysis

The tension has now been released and almost the entire story has come full circle. Readers will have their belief restored in the Professor and relief will abound that the neighborhood murderer has been apprehended. Marshall has now fit in with the bigger kids and the neighborhood. There is still one part of this story that will cause readers to wonder, however. Who is the Professor and why did he watch the kids play The Egypt Game?



Gains and Losses

Gains and Losses Summary

Not long after April's rescue, Christmas vacation comes to the neighborhood and kids are out on break. Toby goes to check on the land of Egypt and finds the loose board in the fence replaced with a new one with very long nails. The kids cannot return to their game.

Not long after Christmas vacation begins, April visits the Professor, whose real name is Dr. Huddleston, to thank him for helping her. She thinks it would be easy to have a quiet moment with him but when she walks into the store she can see how busy it is. There are lots of people milling about and Elizabeth's mother, Mrs. Chung, is now employed there. In fact, both the store and the Professor look different, brighter and cleaner.

When April thanks him he graciously accepts but feels that he is not the only one who helped to save her. He feels certain that Marshall would have found his voice eventually and yelled along with him. He shows April a very special package, which includes two objects that had once belonged to his late wife, Anne. April hopes the Professor will return their things from the land of Egypt, but that doesn't happen. April starts to call him Dr. Huddleston, but he corrects her; he says he would rather be called the Professor and that's what they agree upon.

By the time she returns to her apartment, April has received a Christmas card from her mother and stepfather. The card invites her to Palm Springs for a few days over Christmas break and April is unsure how she feels about that. In the end, she decides to thank her mother for the invitation but declines to go as she and her grandmother have already made plans for Christmas. April calls Caroline "Grandma" now instead of by her first name.

Gains and Losses Analysis

The theme of isolation is fleshed out with the Professor's brief story to April. In fact, it is the unintentional abandonment by his wife through her death that causes him to isolate himself from everyone around him. The kids of The Egypt Game and their interest in artifacts and anthropology give him a purpose again. Now with newfound popularity in the neighborhood, the Professor has come out of his shell and is living life again. The six kids of The Egypt Game have been isolated from their world because the loose board in the fence has been repaired. Although this has happened, readers will clearly understand that the friendship the six kids share will not dissipate just because of the loss of the game.



Christmas Keys

Christmas Keys Summary

On Christmas Eve morning, Caroline gets a phone call from the Professor asking to have the kids from The Egypt Game gather at Caroline's apartment after dinner that day so that he can see them. The Professor tells the Egypt gang the story of his life, how he lost his wife, that he couldn't bear to live in the house they shared, and how he eventually came to live in the store that Anne had bought just prior to her death.

The Professor tells the kids that, after he had been suspected of the neighborhood girl's murderer, he had fewer and fewer customers, which gave him more time to watch their game. He apologizes for spying on them but found the game most interesting. Then the Professor makes a startling admission. He is the one who wrote the answer to the last question put to the Oracle about Security. After the kids left the storage yard in the pouring rain, the Professor saw Security lying outside. He went out to the storage yard, tucked Security underneath the altar of Set to stay dry, and wrote the answer to Marshall's question.

The Professor says that he was reading when he heard the commotion in the storage yard the night that April was hurt. He wasn't sure he should get involved, but when Marshall looked at him so alarmed and unable to speak, he knew he had to do something.

Anxious to learn about the Christmas part of his story, Marshall pushes the Professor to say more. The Professor then takes out six gold keys, each one on a long chain with each child's name engraved on it. The Professor tells the kids that he has put a brand-new padlock on the storage yard door, one that has only six keys. The Professor give the kids back their imaginations.

The next afternoon, as April and Melanie sit in April's bedroom thinking about The Egypt Game, they realize that, although the land of Egypt and the ceremonies were fascinating and fun at the time they played them, they are pretty worn out. April looks at Melanie and suggests the topic for their new game: gypsies.

Christmas Keys Analysis

All of the themes, abandonment, isolation, fitting in, and imagination, have been resolved. April has found a place and a new life with her grandmother. Melanie has found friends who appreciate her for her strong qualities. Elizabeth fits in well to this group even though she's two-years younger. Marshall will always play an important role, especially after helping April. Toby and Ken allow themselves to fit in with something they never thought would be important and let their imaginations run wild.



Characters

April Hall

April is a sixth-grader at Wilson School, a friend of Melanie Ross, and granddaughter of Caroline Hall. April is sent to live with her grandmother in August, just before the start of sixth grade. April hopes that this visit will be temporary but knows in her heart that it probably is not.

April is different, having grown up in Hollywood. She uses what Melanie calls the "Hollywood Act" to avoid caring about anything or anyone. She is a child who, in the past, has been forced to act like an adult by her mother, Dorothea.

Once April meets Melanie and they form a friendship based on shared imagination, April can be herself. She fits in at school and even makes new friends. Two important turning points occur for April: she seeks the comfort of her grandmother after she's been hurt and she summons the strength to say no to her mother's invitation to visit over Christmas, preferring to keep the plans she's made with her grandmother.

The Professor (Dr. Huddleston)

The Professor plays an important role in this story. His eccentricity, which exists in his lack of communication with people as well as his hibernation in a dusty and musty old store filled with what some may characterize as "junk," isolates him from the world and catapults him into The Egypt Game. It's only Marshall who regularly notices the Professor watching.

The Professor's pastime quickly turns from his store into watching the kids play, but readers have only the barest hint of this throughout the novel. When a neighborhood child is found dead, the Professor is suspected because of his oddness. This problem is resolved when he sees April being hurt and yells for help. The Professor resists the tug of anonymity and forces himself out into a dangerous situation. He helps save the day and this, in turn, saves him. He becomes a part of the kids' world and this brings him back to life.

Melanie Ross

Melanie is a sixth-grader at Wilson School. She is also the downstairs neighbor and best friend of April Hall and one of the original Egyptians. Melanie comes into April's life at a time when she's desperately needed. It's Melanie who sees through April's "Hollywood Act" and it's Melanie who helps her fit in to a new school. Melanie even takes the chance that her old school friends may reject her because they may not like April. Guilt by association can be powerful and isolating.



Melanie also takes care of her little brother, Marshall, because her parents work so much. Fortunately, Marshall is a likeable enough four-year-old and manages to amuse himself when Melanie and April are playing. Melanie proves to be the cool head in the heat of April's emotions. Although Melanie comes from a family where both parents are still married to each other, she can empathize with April's feelings of abandonment and isolation. That's part of what draws the two girls together.

Marshall Ross/"Marshamosis"

Marshall is the four-year-old brother of Melanie Ross and April Hall's savior.

Caroline Hall

Caroline is the paternal grandmother of April Hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Ross

Mr. and Mrs. Ross are the parents of Melanie and Marshall Ross.

Mrs. Chung

Mrs. Chung is the mother of Elizabeth Chung; she eventually becomes a worker in the Professor's store.

Elizabeth Chung/"Neferbeth"

Elizabeth is a nine-year-old fourth-grader at Wilson School. She lives in a basement apartment at Casa Rosada and joins The Egypt Game.

Mr. Bodler

Mr. Bodler is a live-in janitor at Casa Rosada.

Dorothea Dawn

Dorothea is the mother of April Hall

Toby Alvillar/"Ramose"

Toby is a classmate of April and Melanie.



Ken Kumata/"Horemheb"

Ken is a classmate of April and Melanie.

Nefertiti/Isis

Nefertiti and Isis are goddesses of ancient Egypt.

Nick

Nick is Dorothea's agent and new husband.

Set

Set is the evil god in The Egypt Game.

Mr. Kamata

Mr. Kamata is Ken's father.

Mr. Alvillar

Mr. Alvillar is Toby's father.

Mrs. Granger

Mrs. Granger is the sixth-grade teacher at Wilson School.

Anne Huddleston

Anne is the Professor's late wife.

Man with orange hair

This man attacked April in the alley and is Mr. Schmitt's cousin.

Police Officers

Police officers investigate the attack on April.

Mr. Schmitt

Mr. Schmitt owns a variety store on Orchard Avenue. He led people to ostracize the Professor after neighborhood girl was found dead.



Objects/Places

Egypt

Egypt is a land where anything can happen. It's housed in a storage yard in back of the Professor's shop, *A-Z Antiques, Curios, and Used Merchandise*. A lean-to provides the basis for the "temple" where ceremonies and chants are conducted in *The Egypt Game*.

In the lean-to are altars and offerings to the gods: Isis, Nefertiti, Set, and Thoth. Each altar is decorated with jewels, flowers, and incense. Just about anything one of the Egyptians can get their hands on is used to its fullest advantage.

Costumes are also stored there, as well as the secret scrolls upon which all of the rites and ceremonies are written down. Also stored is the list of special Egyptian names with corresponding symbols for all of the Egyptians including the special hieroglyphic alphabet constructed by them.

After the attack on April, the land of Egypt - once entered through a loose board in a wooden fence - is closed off. The Professor, however, presents six keys to the new padlock as a Christmas present to the kids so they can resume their game.

A-Z Antiques Curios Used Merchandise

A-Z Antiques Curios Used Merchandise is the Professor's store.

Casa Rosada

Casa Rosada is the apartment building where the Rosses, Chungs, April, and Caroline live.

Wilson School

Wilson School is the school attended by Melanie, Elizabeth, April, Ken, and Toby.

Schmitt's Variety

Schmitt's Variety is a neighborhood variety store.

Orchard Avenue

Orchard Avenue is the street where Casa Rosada is located.



Set

Set is an evil god.

Isis/Nefertiti

Isis/Nefertiti is the goddess of beauty.

Crocodile Stone

A stone found by April, Melanie, and Elizabeth on their way to school; it becomes a symbol for the evil god, Set.

Thoth

Thoth is the god of writing and wisdom, and takes the form of an old stuffed owl Toby brings to the game.

Pete-ho-tep

Pete-ho-tep is the body of Elizabeth's pet parakeet Petey.

Temple

The temple is the lean-to where The Egypt game is played.

Alley

The alleyway next to the storage yard is where The Egypt Game is played.

Egypt Game Hieroglyphics

The Egyptians make up an alphabet to communicate in code with one another.

Egypt Game Scrolls

The Egypt Game Scrolls are the documents that have all of the ceremonies and rites recorded on them.

Setting

The book is set in California in the mid-1960s on Orchard Avenue in a large university town. The area around Orchard Avenue is residential, consisting of apartment houses, modest homes, and small shops. The people of the area represent a wide variety of ethnic groups, and many of them work or study at the university.

April Hall has come to live with Caroline, her father's mother. Her father died in the Korean War when she was very young, and her mother, a singer and would-be actress, is currently on tour.

Caroline lives in the Casa Rosada, a Spanish-style apartment house built in the 1920s, where the apartments are large but relatively inexpensive.

Caroline works in the library at the university and has moved to the Casa Rosada so she will have room for April.

Among several small shops near the Casa Rosada, the A-Z shop sells antiques, curios, and used merchandise.

This shop and its strange owner figure prominently in the novel. On her first day at the apartment April walks to the 5 & 10 store to buy fake eyelashes. On the way back, she stops at the A-Z, investigates the shop, and talks to the owner, who seems quite uninterested in April and her questions.

Most of the activity in the novel takes place in the boarded up storage yard behind the A-Z shop. When April and her friend Melanie find a movable board in the fence, they enter the storage yard and discover the land of Egypt.

Social Sensitivity

Set in an urban university community in California, *The Egypt Game* features ethnically diverse characters. While neither age nor race seem to enter the children's minds, the adults maintain some prejudices about anyone who seems "different." Snyder clearly espouses the children's attitude when they turn out to be right about the innocence of the Professor. Indeed, the adults learn from the children and take measures to make amends with the Professor, whom they unjustly accuse of murder.

Parents and teachers might want to reinforce with younger readers the risks of being too trusting of adults, particularly strangers, but the inclusion of the murders in the plot makes this point as well. Snyder uses the murders to bring an element of realism to her depiction of urban childhood in the 1960s and uses the violence to make a thematic point. The narrative gives no details about the murders, and the reader never meets the victims, lessening the emotional impact of the incident.

Literary Qualities

The structure of *The Egypt Game* reflects Snyder's thematic emphasis on the encroachment of the adult world upon childhood. The book begins with what seems to be the opening sentence of a fairy-tale, "Not long ago ..."

Yet in the tradition of Hans Christian Andersen, the fairy-tale opening has dark overtones and quickly becomes an introduction to a strange man who spies on the little girls playing in his yard and who has aroused the fear and distrust of his neighbors. Hence, although the novel is seemingly about children, for children, the adult world imposes its viewpoint from the beginning of the story, in keeping with Snyder's theme.

The first chapter focuses exclusively on the perceptions and opinions of adults, from the Professor to the neighbors. The reader's first glimpse of childhood in the story comes from the eyes of the mysterious, unnamed Professor. Only after Snyder establishes this hovering, unnerving adult presence, does she present the child characters, beginning with April.

Snyder also employs symbolism to explore her theme. By naming April after the stormy month of spring, she emphasizes April's tempestuous upbringing and forceful personality; the name also highlights April's disguised vulnerability, suggesting the beauty and new growth of springtime. Snyder symbolically situates the *Egypt Game* in the storage yard of a shop owned by a Professor and significantly named the A-Z shop. In the same way that young children begin their formal use of language at the basic level of the alphabet, so do April and her friends learn a new language of friendship, creativity, and survival through the game they play at the A-Z property.

Even Marshall's stuffed octopus, Security, plays an obviously symbolic role in the novel. In making Security a multi-tentacled octopus rather than a soft blanket or a cuddly teddy bear, Snyder replaces the conventional sign of childhood security with a more ominous figure, one that illustrates her notion that children in contemporary urban society cannot be completely protected from the complex world around them.

Even the imaginary land of Egypt, the haven the children create for themselves, is not secure from danger, and Security can do nothing for four-yearold Marshall when he witnesses the attack on April in Egypt.

Snyder's ultimate view is realistic, not bleak, and the initially threatening Professor comes to represent true security. He watches over the children, saves April from the murderer, and encourages a new feeling of community in the neighborhood. At the end of the novel, April is not safe from all pain and fear, or ready to live happily ever after, but Snyder shows that she has the security of a home and a group of people who love her as a result of her experience with the *Egypt Game*. Like Marshall— who leaves Security in his room at the novel's end, showing that he can face the world by himself— April learns to accept the stability that her newfound friends supply.



Themes

Abandonment

Abandonment is seen through the eyes of many characters. April Hall is the character that experiences this theme most acutely from the very beginning of the novel. Readers learn that April's mother, Dorothea, has sent April to live with her paternal grandmother, Caroline Hall. It's uncertain why Dorothea doesn't want to have her daughter living with her, other than inconvenience. April tries to take this abandonment in stride by acting far older than her eleven years.

Caroline Hall also suffers from abandonment. Not only does she feel empathy for her granddaughter's abandonment by her mother, it has been years since she has heard from or seen her former daughter-in-law. Caroline's son, April's father, had been married to Dorothea but was killed in the Vietnam War. In some ways, readers may feel that Caroline's emotions run a bit deeper because not only was she abandoned by her former daughter-in-law and presumably not permitted to see her granddaughter, but she was unintentionally abandoned by her son when he was killed.

The theme of abandonment is also intertwined with that of isolation. This is because readers will rarely see one without the other. Even though Melanie Ross is growing up in an intact family, she feels a sense of abandonment by friends who no longer share her interests. She plays with her younger brother Marshall but doesn't really feel the camaraderie of a girlfriend until she discovers April Hall.

The Professor is also the victim of abandonment. He is unintentionally abandoned by his wife when she's killed overseas. His eccentricity has caused him to be left alone and isolated by his own peers and by the neighborhood. This theme is heightened when a neighborhood child is murdered and the Professor is the prime suspect.

Isolation

Isolation is the twin theme of abandonment. There are two types of isolation: self-imposed isolation and the kind that is brought on by others. In Melanie's case, it appears that her old friends abandon her after she finds their games boring. The Professor, on the other hand, appears to suffer more from self-imposed isolation.

April Hall experiences isolation and could become victim to it, but she doesn't quite allow this to happen. Although she puts on an act, the "Hollywood Act," as Melanie refers it to, in order to cover up her deep hurt, she has the ability to let go of the isolation even in the face of abandonment by her mother. April is an excellent example of how resilient children can be. Readers will see clearly through the Hollywood Act and feel nothing but empathy for this child who misses her former life. However, they will also see that the life she now has is a much healthier one; it is better than living in Hollywood with her mother, who wants to be a star.



Caroline Hall has felt isolated for a long time. After her son is killed in the Vietnam War, there is very little interaction between she, her former daughter-in-law, and her granddaughter. When Caroline agrees to let April live with her, it allows her to leave from the deep pool of isolation and gives her back, even for a moment, some of her son.

At the end of the novel, readers will see that the Professor's isolation was, at the onset, self-imposed. After losing his wife, he got rid of everyone and everything close to him that reminded him of his late wife. Later, self-imposed isolation grew into isolation by others when the eccentricity of his shop became something to fear rather than something to be curious about. When a neighborhood child is murdered, the Professor is suspected, which increases his isolation. It isn't until The Egypt Game that the Professor comes out of his shell and, in saving April, becomes a neighborhood hero.

Fitting In

Fitting in is a theme that winds its way through abandonment and isolation. Fitting in is a very difficult thing for anyone to do, but particularly difficult for a child. At the beginning of the book April makes a comment about going to "another new school," which will lead the reader to believe that she has switched from school district to school district. If this is true, April has had to try to fit in to many situations. This may be why she developed the Hollywood Act so that she could cover the hurt she felt at trying to fit in with a new situation.

Melanie also has to fit in to a certain extent. She wants to have April as a friend and, fortunately, was able to get her to relax enough to drop the Hollywood Act. When they find that their imaginations take off on the same wavelength, Melanie and April follow the friendship that allows them to fit in with each other. It isn't long after school starts that April -- thanks to Melanie's help -- fits in with her new friends at Wilson school.

Fitting in also touches the lives of Elizabeth Chung, Ken Kamata, and Toby Alvillar. Elizabeth Chung is a nine-year-old fourth-grader who has moved into a new apartment building after the death of her father. Although she has two younger sisters, there's no one in the building who is her age. Fortunately, she becomes friends with Melanie and April and fits into the Egypt gang.

For Ken and Toby, two of the most popular boys in school, fitting in becomes very important to them when they join The Egypt Game. Suddenly, they have to adjust themselves to someone else's rules, and they become an integral part of the game.

Imagination

Imagination appears throughout the novel and is a cornerstone in the relationship between Melanie and April. Imagination is the thing that initially attracts the girls to each other as friends and it is the thing that continues to help their friendship grow. As kids, imagination is something that is unleashed with natural abandon. Nothing is considered silly; everything is fair game. It's only when children turn into adults that imagination is



reined in as being a childish pursuit. Imagination, however, can be found behind all great accomplishments.

The Egypt Game is a wonderful testament to the imagination all of six children. At first, imagination is something explored only between April and Melanie, but Toby gets in the act and lets his imagination run wild as well. Ken has not yet stepped up to the plate as far as contributing ideas to The Egypt Game, but he still has an imagination or he would not be part of the group. Elizabeth, on the other hand, as one of the youngest members, has contributed a number of wonderful and imaginative ideas.

A vivid imagination is the stuff of dreamers. It could be said that the Professor has a great imagination because he stocks his store with things from the past; things that draw customers in and make them wonder where the pieces came from. Imagination, though, can also lead to isolation. Since imagination in adults is occasionally frowned upon, the Professor is isolated because he may share a childlike imagination with neighborhood children. It is supposed to be unseemly for the Professor to participate in The Egypt Game, so he merely observes it in his own store yard.



Themes/Characters

Snyder develops a theme of unconditional friendship in the novel, demonstrating the unique ability of children to form communities that compensate for a lack of family structure and affection. Although April tries to hide her longing for the father she never knew, her hurt at her mother's neglect, and her insecurity in her new surroundings, she finds an extended family through the friendships of the Egypt group. Melanie Ross, a black eleven-year-old, accepts her friendship despite April's bragging, lying, strange manner of dress, and eccentric behavior. They soon become as close as sisters. April accepts Melanie's four-year-old brother, Marshall, as one of the gang on equal terms. The girls add a newcomer of Chinese descent, nine-year-old Elizabeth Chung, to their gang almost from the minute they meet her, and they even accept two eleven-year-old boys, Ken Alvillar and Toby Kamataj into the Egypt Game. April and Toby vie for the leadership of the group, but each is able to make concessions to the other.

Because the children are willing to compromise and listen to different points of view, few conflicts arise among members of the group.

The Egypt group, however, cannot completely substitute for a family, and Snyder addresses the need for children to have some type of familial stability.

Dumped on her grandmother while her mother is on the road, April glamorizes her mother's activities, looks, and behavior to try to comfort herself but is angered by her mother's absence. April has had a rather difficult life up to this point, and lacks a sense of belonging.

She has been in and out of dozens of schools, has never had playmates her own age, and has depended on her imagination to make life more tolerable.

April's relationship with her grandmother moves from one of defiance and antagonism to one of love, acceptance, and a recognition of her own need for stability.

Another theme concerns people's willingness to think the worst about someone who is different, mysterious, and private. Not only do the adults suspect that the Professor has murdered a child in the neighborhood, but the children also fear him. April visits and talks to the Professor before becoming aware of the neighborhood attitudes. When a second child is murdered, only April speaks up for the Professor.

April's loyalty to the Professor also stems from the fact that she, Melanie, and Marshall develop the Egypt Game using odds and ends they find in the Professor's storage yard. Unlike many adults, the children value the different and the foreign. They research Egypt, invent their own hieroglyphic alphabet, and act out rituals for the good goddess Isis and the evil god Set.

The murders contrast with the children's simple fantasy game of good versus evil and put an end to the Egypt Game for awhile. The killer remains at large, but gradually



things return to normal until April is attacked in the storage yard. The Professor saves April, and the killer is soon apprehended. The neighborhood adults try to make up for their behavior toward the Professor, who in turn becomes a friendly, helpful neighbor to them.

Because the land of Egypt has been a place where the children share privacy and secrecy with best friends, April and Melanie realize that the presence of adults and violence has spoiled their enchanted land. Although they know they can't go back to Egypt again, the novel ends with April saying "Melanie ...

what do you know about gypsies?" The children begin a new game with enthusiasm, demonstrating their resilience and optimism.

Snyder's underlying theme addresses the nature of childhood in urban contemporary America. The Egypt Game seems to represent the creativity and hopefulness of childhood, as opposed to the unpredictably violent and suspicious world of adults. April, who has experienced emotional violence in the loss of her father and the callousness of her starstruck mother, seems to demand her right to childhood, using the Egypt Game as a way of rejecting the pain that the adult world thrusts upon her. In Egypt she creates a world where she does not have to feel abandoned or hurt. Yet as the murders and the attack on April show, children cannot be protected or isolated from the often painful world around them. Snyder's point is ultimately hopeful; she shows that April's imagination, her love of learning, and her close relationship with her grandmother and friends will enable her to survive—and to enjoy—growing up.



Style

Point of View

The Egypt Game is told in a straightforward, third person point of view. There isn't one person who takes center stage and from whom readers watch the story unravel. Rather, the cast of *The Egypt Game* is an ensemble that fits together quite nicely.

The third person point of view has readers peering over the fence into the land of Egypt to watch the game being played. While no one character plays the narrator in this story, readers still get an intimate sense of who the characters are. For instance, readers will feel April's fear intensely when she is attacked. When Marshall's favorite toy, Security, is missing readers will understand and empathize with his loss. Zilpha Keatley Snyder has built the premise for a wonderful game, one in which young readers and adults alike will be swept up.

Setting

The setting for *The Egypt Game* might be considered a character in itself. The neighborhood of Orchard Avenue is in a town near a bay. While it's possible it could be San Francisco, the author never explicitly states it. The Egypt Game itself takes place in an abandoned storage yard of a junk shop owned by the Professor. The walls of his building and a wooden fence surround it. The temple is a converted lean-to that was once a place where broken pieces of pottery and other items were stored.

As the kids transform the storage yard into a place to play, the setting of *The Egypt Game* transforms as well. Readers will see this transformation in the form of a major children's holiday, Halloween, and the changing seasons. What starts as a game filled with bright sunlight ends as a game of shadows.

Language and meaning

The language and meaning in *The Egypt Game* are, for the most part, fairly straight forward. The novel is somewhat dated with slang from the 1960s but there aren't any secret words other than the special hieroglyphic alphabet and Egyptian names created by the Egypt gang.

A middle grade audience should be able to easily understand the language used by the author. Themes of abandonment, isolation, fitting in, and imagination are all presented in a way that children and adults will understand and appreciate. Perhaps one of the most attractive characters is Marshall Ross because he says what he thinks and means what he says.



Kids reading this book will also come to have an appreciation for the isolation and abandonment felt by adults, especially for that of the Professor. This novel may well reveal to children that adults feel the same kinds of things they do and may help spark a more open line of communication.

Structure

The Egypt Game is broken into 23 bite-size chunks. Each chunk is a chapter with a heading but no chapter number. Even though time goes by fairly quickly (at the beginning of the novel it's August and by the end of the novel it's Christmas), readers won't feel at a loss because the chapter breaks make sense in terms of timing and events. Each chapter has some kind of action and reaction in at least one of the characters. This helps to move the story along and keeps the information sorted in an orderly fashion.

Although the entire book revolves around four sixth-graders, a fourth-grader, and a four-year-old, not much time is spent actually at a school. Instead, the location where most of the action occurs is in the land of Egypt, the Professor's storage yard. This helps to bind the characters to the structure of the book as well as to the setting.



Quotes

"You know what? I never did call them that before, but imagining games are just about all I ever play because most of the time I never have anybody to play with." (Enter Melanie -- And Marshall, page 32 to 33)

"Am I supposed to care what the kids at a little old place like Wilson School wear?" (The Egypt Girls, page 39)

"But a bright and beautiful blur, no matter how distant, was better than a reality that was dull and gray." (The Egypt Girls, page 51)

"Dad says the reason Marshall needs Security is that he had such a hard time being a baby. Dad says being a baby offended Marshall's dignity." (Eyelashes and Ceremony, page 58)

"Elizabeth turned out to be just what The Egypt Game needed to make perfect." (Prisoners of Fear, page 67)

"But although fear made a great silence out-of-doors, inside the homes in stores and apartments it had a different sound - it talked and it talked and talked." (Prisoners of Fear, page 71)

"Ken Kamata and Toby Alvillar were just about the most disgusting boys in the sixth grade, in a fascinating sort of way." (Summoned by the Mighty Ones, page 92)

"If the secret and mysterious land of Egypt was fascinating in the daytime, it was doubly so at night. Dimly lit by a distant streetlight, two flashlights, and a jack-o'-lantern, it was almost too fascinating to bear." (Summoned by the Mighty Ones, page 96)

"He had watched the other Egyptians writing and planning and arguing, he had watched an ant hole in the corner of the storage yard, and every once in a while he had watched the little window in one of the walls of the land of Egypt." (Moods and Maybes, page 131)

"Man is his own star, and that soul who can be honest, is the only perfect man." (The Oracle of Thoth, page 155)

"The best thing we can do is to make wherever we are lost in look as much like home as we can." (The Oracle Speaks, page 163)

"Did my folks know?" Toby said. Girls could ask the dumbest questions at times. "Fat chance! They never bother me in the evenings. They're usually working late in my dad's studio or off at some blast somewheres. It was a cinch." (Where is Security?, page 168)

"In one terrible moment April found that the shock of certain danger is almost always a battle call." (Fear Strikes, page 183)



"That's how I should have ended my story - if I could've explained it - with your gift to me. That would have been the Christmas part. That's what makes it a Christmas story."
(Christmas Keys, pages 213-214)



Topics for Discussion

1. April exhibits strange behavior during her first few days at the Casa Rosada. Why do you suppose she dresses the way she does and says such outrageous things?

2. What impresses April about the Professor? Is she a good judge of character?

Give examples.

3. What is Melanie's family background and how does it influence her behavior and the sorts of games she invents?

4. How does the Egypt Game begin?

What is there about April and Melanie that would lead to such an elaborate game? What part does Marshall play in all this?

5. Why do you suppose the girls find it necessary not only to have an altar for a good god but also one for an evil god?

Describe both altars and gods.

6. April remembers her mother now as only a blur. What do you suppose Snyder means by, "But a bright and beautiful blur, no matter how distant, was better than a reality that was dull and gray." What has her relationship with her mother been like?

7. How does the appearance of Elizabeth at the Casa Rosada change the Egypt Game?

8. When the second neighborhood child is found murdered, why do you suppose the neighborhood immediately assumes that the Professor did it? Why does April think he is innocent? Why does the rest of the gang want to believe her?

9. How do Toby and Ken change the game? What makes the game so interesting to the boys?

10. What ends the Egypt Game? Do you think it is possible that the game went on for so long without anyone except the Professor and the two boys finding out?

11. Instead of losing their private play space at the novel's end, each member of the group is given a key to the storage area. How will this change the game?

What lets you know April and Melanie are still full of ideas?

12. April's indifferent attitude toward her grandmother changes to one of love and dependence. How has her relationship with her mother changed? Cite examples.



Essay Topics

What is it about Egypt that made it so appealing to April and Melanie as a game?

Why does Dorothea send April to live with her grandmother?

Why does April call her grandmother by her first name?

What does April do to fit in?

What's the "Hollywood Act" and why is it used?

Compare and contrast April's abandonment and isolation to the Professor's.

Who is Security and why is he important?

How is Toby isolated?

What does Ken do to fit in to the Egypt gang?

What do April and Elizabeth have in common?

What changes the Professor?

Will April stay with her grandmother? If so, why? If not, why not?

Will the Egypt gang stay together? If so, why? If not, why not?

Describe what imagination is and how it plays a part in each character's life.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Write a character sketch of April at the beginning of the book and again at the end of the book. How has she changed? What brings about these changes?
2. What role do the adults play in this novel? How are they important to the movement of the action?
3. How does the introduction of the death of a child move the plot along?

How does Snyder use it to expand on the theme of prejudice against those who are different?

4. Make a list of all the things you learned about ancient Egypt from this novel. Research one item that interests you most, and write a report as if you were explaining your findings to a member of the Egypt Game group.
5. April has not had a normal childhood up to the beginning of the novel.

How is this demonstrated in her relationship with her grandmother, with other adults, with her peers?

6. All the children in the novel except April seem to have good parent/child relationships. Describe each member of the Egypt gang's relationship with his or her parents. How does April's failed relationship with her mother affect her behavior? Caroline is trying to take over the nurturing role. What clues are there that she will be successful?
7. Look at the neighborhood adults' behavior toward the Professor throughout the novel. How does it change by the end? Do you think this is believable? Why or why not?

Further Study

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something about the Author*. Vol. 28. Detroit: Gale Research, 1982. Brief biographical information on Snyder.

Gunton, Sharon R., ed. *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 17. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981. Excerpts of criticism.



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