

# **The Mysterious Benedict Society Study Guide**

**The Mysterious Benedict Society by Trenton Lee Stewart**

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## Plot Summary

Reclusive genius Mr. Benedict chose four children who were gifted, but without parents, to undertake a mission to save the world in the novel “The Mysterious Benedict Society” by Trenton Lee Stewart. The people of the world were being frustrated and mentally drained by subliminal messages being sent to them through television and radio broadcasts by Mr. Benedict’s lost twin brother Ledropha Curtain. Mr. Curtain had hoped to make himself the hero when he saved the world from a public panic that he created. Themes addressed in the novel include the desire to belong, confronting one’s fear and the importance of teamwork.

When his tutor, Miss Perumal, pointed out a newspaper article asking for gifted children who wanted special opportunities, Reynie Muldoon hoped he’d be able to pass the tests and earn those opportunities. He was surprised when he passed the tests and was one of four children chosen to act as special agents for Mr. Benedict. Mr. Benedict was a genius who believed subliminal messages were being sent through the television and radio from the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened. He planned for Reynie and the other children to help him find out why the messages were being sent and what the Sender hoped to accomplish with the Messages.

At the Institute, Reynie and his friends (Constance, Kate, and Sticky) quickly put together what Mr. Curtain was doing. When they passed along the information to Mr. Benedict that Mr. Curtain was in the final stages of modifying his Whisperer and was preparing to begin the Improvement stage, Mr. Benedict tried to get the children away from the Institute. He felt the children were in too much danger; but, they refused to leave until their mission was complete. The children outsmarted Mr. Curtain by getting Constance into the Whispering Gallery. Although her childishness had held up the group at some times, it was Constance’s stubborn defiance that ultimately allowed the group to overwhelm Mr. Curtain’s machine.

Once their project was finished and the children were back at Mr. Benedict’s house, the story ended happily with all of the children getting families. Reynie was adopted by his tutor; Sticky’s family came looking for him; and, Constance was kept by Mr. Benedict. When Milligan began to recover his memories, he realized Kate was his daughter.



# Pencils, Erasers and Disqualifications — Buckets and Spectacles

## Summary

In the chapter “Pencils, Erasers and Disqualifications,” Reynie arrived early for his test at the Monk Building in Stonetown. Reynie had learned about these tests from his tutor, Miss Perumal at the Stonetown Orphanage. Along with newspaper articles about the ongoing Emergency, Miss Perumal had pointed out to Reynie was an advertisement seeking gifted children who were looking for special opportunities. She drove him to his first test in an office building near Stonetown Bay. There were several unusual questions in this test including one that asked if the test taker liked to watch television and another that asked about listening to the radio. Another question was about a chess move, and the final question asked the test taker if he was brave. The tests were graded while the children waited. Reynie was the only one in the group admitted to the second phase.

As Reynie walked up to the Monk Building in preparation for taking his second test, a girl ahead of him was throwing her pencil into the air with the intentions of catching it but instead dropped it into a storm drain. The children had been told they would be disqualified if they did not bring a pencil or if they brought more than one pencil. None of the other children tried to help the girl, who introduced herself as Rhonda Kazembe. Reynie broke his pencil in half, telling her they could share it. Before they entered the test room, Rhonda instructed Reynie to sit behind her and cheat off her paper. She said she had the answers and would make a perfect score. Reynie refused. He even sat in front of her so cheating would be impossible. When Reynie received his test, he wanted to cry because he didn’t know any of the answers to the unusual questions. It was only as he read through the test that he realized the answers to the first half of the questions were hidden in the last half of the test questions. When the pencil lady called out the names of the students in that testing session who were to advance to the third level of testing, Reynie’s name was again the only one called.

In the chapter “Buckets and Spectacles,” Reynie asked if he could call Miss Perumal. The pencil lady gave him the run around saying first she had already called Miss Perumal. Then, she changed her story to say that she was about to call her. When Reynie pressed for permission to make the call himself, the lady told him she had indeed called and gave him a message from his tutor.

A boy wearing spectacles soon joined Reynie. He introduced himself as Sticky Washington. As the two boys talked, they realized they’d both been confronted by a girl who had dropped her pencil and tried to get them to cheat as repayment for their good deed. Reynie had just asked Sticky where he lived when Kate Wetherall came flying into the room. The boys asked her about the bucket she carried with her. Kate told them that the bucket and the things it held often came in handy, like when she’d helped a girl retrieve her pencil from the storm drain that morning. Kate said she didn’t know the



answers to the question on the second test and didn't realize it was a puzzle. She thought the only reason she'd been allowed to continue to the next test was because she'd helped the pencil lady when some parents had begun yelling at her. At that time the pencil lady told the three children to go to room 7-B where their next tests would be given.

## Analysis

In anticipation of special opportunities, Reynard "Reynie" Muldoon, George "Sticky" Washington, and Kate Wetherall all meet one another as they were about to enter the third stage of testing. They didn't know at the time but the quirky genius Mr. Benedict was looking for intelligent children to help him with his plan to save the world from an evil genius. The children worked together on the dangerous project and succeeded in stopping a worldwide emergency.

Some important themes are developed quickly in the novel. One of the themes important in the story is the idea that all of the children chosen by Mr. Benedict are in a position where they either are alone or feel alone. Reynie, for instance, was an orphan. Because of his intelligence and desire for knowledge, he did not fit in at the orphanage and was often teased and bullied. He wanted to find a place where he felt like he belonged. The closest he'd come to this was with his tutor, Miss Perumal. Sticky was another character who seemed to be alone. He hesitated about telling Reynie his story and was finally interrupted so he didn't have to tell it but the reader, like Reynie, gets the feeling that there was something strange in Sticky's background. Notice, for instance, that Sticky said it had taken him half the night to find the Monk Building. Reynie wondered why Sticky's parents or guardian had allowed him to wander about at night alone looking for the building.

Another idea that emerges in this section of the novel is the idea of teamwork. First, Reynie, Kate, and Sticky were all confronted with the girl who had dropped her pencil down the storm drain. In all three cases, each of these children stopped to try to help the girl even though she was a one of their competitors. In Sticky's case, he and Rhonda worked together to try to get the pencil out of the drain. In Reynie's case, he broke his pencil in half, allowing the girl to have half the pencil with which she could take her test. Kate was the only test taker who used her own skills and supplies from her bucket to successfully retrieve the girl's pencil. The idea of teamwork also surfaced when Sticky and Reynie first discussed the second round of tests they'd taken. Reynie had the ability to figure out the test was a puzzle with the answers to the first half of the questions given in the second half of the test. Sticky was smart enough to know the answers on the test. Reynie commented that the two of them would make an excellent team as they had two different abilities to bring to the table.



## Discussion Question 1

If you had been faced with the dilemma that Reynie was when the test competitor lost her pencil down the drain, how might you have reacted?

## Discussion Question 2

When the pencil lady gave directions for the second test Reynie was to take, she had a slip of the tongue and told the children that they would be “executed” for cheating. But, she corrected herself saying she meant to say “escorted” out of the building for cheating. Do you think her slip of the tongue was intentional? What effect did it have on the children?

## Discussion Question 3

Considering the types of tests that have been given thus far, for what kind of children do you think the person or group giving the tests was looking? Describe characteristics and support your description with information from the text.

## Vocabulary

deviate, acquire, peculiar, clamoring, wry, lilted, melancholy, solitude, ventured, dejection, obliged, ferocity, flailed, sympathetic, conspicuously, savage, atop, mope, intriguing, musing, scudding, consolation, unperturbed, daft, composure, inclined, skeptical

# Squares and Arrows

## Summary

In the chapter "Squares and Arrows," a man named Milligan, whose expression was profoundly sad, met the children as Kate was knocking on the door of the room they thought was 7-B. He told Sticky he was to take the test first. Sticky lingered for a moment before going into the room and closing the door. A few minutes later, it was Reynie's turn. Inside the room a sign instructed him to cross the room without setting foot on a blue or black square. Reynie saw yellow, blue, and black rectangles. He walked across the floor normally. Kate crossed the floor the first time by using her rope to make a tight rope that she walked across, the second time rolling on her bucket and the third walking on her hands. After all the children were told they had passed, they were taken through an underground corridor to their last test. When they appeared on a residential street on ground level, Milligan had transformed into a disguise making him look like a stooped old man. He told them to wait on the steps of one of the houses for Rhonda.

While they were waiting on the steps, Kate told the boys her mother had died when she was a baby and her father had disappeared when she was two. She had only one memory of him, a day when he'd taken her swimming in a mill pond. Kate said she'd been sent to an orphanage; but, she had kept running away to join the circus. So, it was agreed that she could stay with the circus. When she read about the tests, however, she'd decided to see what they were about. Sticky mentioned it must have felt awful for Kate not to have been wanted; but, Kate said she was happy with her life.

After about an hour had passed, Rhonda came from the house and told the children for their final test they had to go through the front door to a back staircase as quickly as possible. Reynie went first. Inside the house, he found he was in a maze of tiny black rooms. Reynie noticed the small wooden panels on the walls. After some thought, he realized he was supposed to follow the squiggly, yellow arrows. When Reynie found the staircase and rang the bell as directed, the pencil lady told him he'd completed the maze in just over six minutes. She had him complete the maze again to verify he'd solved it. The second time he cut his time in half. Kate finished the maze quickly and didn't have to redo it. She told Reynie she'd crossed the house through the heating system, avoiding the maze altogether. Sticky took much longer to complete the maze. It turned out he never noticed the pattern on the wooden panels. Instead, he memorized the turns he took until he found the staircase.

## Analysis

Notice in this section that the book is developing a sense of impending doom. Each time the children were faced with a new test, they feared the coming test. It was as if they were afraid someone was intent on hurting them even though most of the people they



had met so far had been friendly, though terribly strange. Even Reynie was scared when Rhonda suggested to him that the children should be able to complete the maze with their eyes closed. He was afraid that at some point while he was trying to find the staircase he was going to find himself in pitch-blackness. Notice also Milligan's choice of words when he told the children he was taking them to their "final testing place." That phrase rhymes with "final resting place," which is often a term used to refer to a cemetery.

During this chapter, the personalities of each of the three children as well as their strengths and abilities were developed. As Reynie tried to complete the maze, he showed his compassionate nature as he worried about how Sticky with his anxiety would handle the conditions of the maze. Reynie also demonstrated that his intelligence was in his ability to use hints and suggestions to figure out puzzles and tests. Just as he realized the third test was a trick because there were no black or blue squares that could be stepped on, he also figured out the key to solving the maze by remembering the hint that Rhonda had given when she said the children should be able to solve the maze in the dark. Sticky, on the other hand, used his book knowledge and ability to memorize huge chunks of information to help him through the tests. Even though he'd made more than 100 turns in the maze, he remembered them all and was able to repeat his performance the second time. Kate had a completely different kind of intelligence, as she thought outside the box in both the maze test and the test in room 7-B. Additionally, Kate had a more boisterous and pleasant personality than either of the boys. She seemed determined to enjoy herself instead of spending time mourning because her father had left her. Sticky seemed to have a secret as he became defensive every time any of the other children mentioned his parents. He also was very disturbed at the idea that Kate's father didn't want her. In fact, he was almost too disturbed not to have had something similar happen to him.

Note Kate's story about the loss of her parents. She described her father as a loving man who seemed to care for his daughter and her happiness when he took her to enjoy a day at a pond by a mill. After this day, however, Kate said he just disappeared and she was sent to an orphanage.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe each of the three children and their different kinds of intelligence. How would each child's unique kind of intelligence fit together well in a team setting?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the author go about setting an ominous yet playful tone to the novel?





## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Sticky had not yet told his story to Reynie and Kate? Why do you think he was by himself?

## Vocabulary

flax, profoundly, reluctantly, ominous, transformation, eminently, imperceptibly, brusque



# The Trouble With Children, Or, Why They Are Necessary — The Sender and the Messages

## Summary

In the chapter “The Trouble with Children, Or, Why They Are Necessary,” Reynie, Kate, and Sticky were finally served dinner. Rhonda told them the denial of food was another aspect of the tests to see how they would handle being hungry and thirsty when others were getting doughnuts. As the children were eating, they learned that both Rhonda and the pencil lady had taken the same tests in previous years. They also learned that Mr. Benedict was waiting in his study to see them. Rhonda asked about the other child and was told she had been delayed and would join them when she arrived.

The piles of books in Mr. Benedict’s office at first hid the man from the children. When he stepped out from behind these books, they saw he was a green-eyed man who wore a green plaid suit. The children noticed that Rhonda and the pencil lady followed him carefully as if they expected him to do something unusual. Rhonda and Mr. Benedict told the children that they were waiting for a girl named Constance Contraire. Constance had brought 37 pencils with her to take her test. As he read some answers from Constance’s test, Mr. Benedict laughed loudly, causing himself to go into a spell of narcolepsy. Rhonda grabbed his glasses and then asked for a chair to ease him into when he fell against the desk in his sleep. Shortly after he woke, Milligan and Number Two escorted Constance into the room.

Mr. Benedict told the children he had not until that point had a team of children that met his purposes. He said the while he did not like the idea of putting children’s lives in danger he felt he must because their lives, as well as the lives of many others, would be in greater danger if he didn’t take the risk. He asked what they thought they had in common. Their answers included that they were gifted, they were children, they’d passed the tests, and they were alone. Because of these characteristics, Mr. Benedict told the children they were the last possible hope.

In the chapter “The Sender and The Messages,” all four children agreed to join Mr. Benedict’s team. Once they all agreed, they were sent to bed. Reynie couldn’t sleep, so he returned to Mr. Benedict’s study. Reynie was told arrangements had been made with the orphanage officials so that Reynie could participate in the project. He was also told he wouldn’t be able to contact Miss Perumal until the mission was complete. Before Reynie went back to his room, Mr. Benedict questioned Reynie about his answer to the chess question.

The next morning the weather was stormy as the children had breakfast. They learned that Milligan was their bodyguard. Mr. Benedict entered the room. After he greeted the



children, he told them that if they ever heard the bell ringing in the house they were to gather on the landing. He then went on to tell them about their project. He said he believed the Emergency was being caused by coded Messages being sent to everyone's brains without people even being aware they were getting these Messages. Mr. Benedict was trying to determine who was sending the Messages and what that person was trying to accomplish. He took them to a room full of equipment and played for them a Message that was encased in a television news broadcast. A child's voice gave the Messages, which were made up of seemingly meaningless phrases. Mr. Benedict explained a child's voice was used because the voice of a child could slide into peoples' minds easily without even being noticed. He told the children they hadn't been affected by the Messages yet because they had an abnormally strong love of the truth.

Mr. Benedict finished by telling them he was afraid these Messages were leading to something far worse but he wasn't sure what was going to happen. When Constance suggested they call the authorities, Mr. Benedict said many of the agencies he'd relied on in the past were no longer in operation and many governmental officials had disappeared entirely. He explained the fact these people were missing and no one questioned their disappearance was a sign the Messages were working. After the information, Constance asked if they were really in danger. Mr. Benedict assured her they really were. At that moment, the bell began ringing.

## Analysis

These chapters in the novel are very important as they lay out the basic information the children would need to complete the project that Mr. Benedict had in mind. He believed subliminal Messages were being sent out through television, radio, and cell phones. Although Mr. Benedict thought these Messages were the cause of what had become known as the Emergency, with the general public unhappy with the government, Mr. Benedict did not know who was sending the Messages or what that person hoped to achieve by sending out the Messages. It was these questions he apparently hoped the children could help him answer.

Notice the way in which the novel is made relevant to young readers. The young children, not even teens yet, were set to become the heroes and heroines of the novel. In the story, the adults were seeking out children to help them with a serious problem. This idea that a child could be of use to an adult is one often not considered. Children are usually brushed to the back and not called upon to help in serious situations. Constance, for instance, complained people often didn't even realize she could think because she was so tiny. Number Two, meanwhile, was still angry because of the way adults treated her as brainless when she was a child. The text of the book speaks to and celebrates the idea that children have abilities that can be useful to adults.

The idea of the children being in danger is one that is repeated often in these chapters of the book. The idea that the project was dangerous might be stressed because it also helped the children to understand it was important. Mr. Benedict and his staff had put into place a strange line of defenses in case the children were threatened. These



included a maze on the first floor of the house to befuddle those trying to enter it and a bodyguard who was a master of disguise. The children were also told that if they heard the bell ringing on the stair landing they were to gather on the landing immediately. It was ironic that just as Constance was asking Mr. Benedict if their project was really dangerous that the bell rang.

Notice that the three young heroes of the novel have been joined by the fourth member of the team. Constance Contraire was, as her name suggested, constantly contrary. She was described as being tiny but intelligent. The only thing that Constance seemed to have going for her was that she amused Mr. Benedict with the answers that she'd given on her test. She didn't answer many of the questions with real answers, brought 37 pencils when she was told to bring only one, and didn't even finish the maze. The reader must wonder why Constance had been chosen as a member of the team.

## Discussion Question 1

If you were one of these children, how would you feel about having been chosen to participate in Mr. Benedict's project? Would you have agreed to be part of it?

## Discussion Question 2

In the chapter "The Sender and The Messages," how does the author use the storm to develop the tone of the book? How would you describe the tone at this point?

## Discussion Question 3

How easy do you think it would be to send subliminal messages through television and radio? Do you think people would be as receptive to these messages as the novel makes it appear they would be?

## Vocabulary

belittle, ferocious, disheveled, narcolepsy, absurdity, felicitous, vexed, crucial, prodigious, despise, compelled, ingenuity, keen, awash, kleptomania, vexed, compelled, skeptical, compromise, apprise, befuddle, menacing, exasperation, phenomenon, oddments, agile, distorted, monotone, obfuscate, interference, opaque, attribute, preposterous



# The Men in the Maze — The Thing to Come

## Summary

In the chapter “The Men in the Maze,” Mr. Benedict went to sleep when he was surprised by the bell; so, it was Rhonda who told the children to go to the landing to meet Milligan. Constance had run off in the confusion. Milligan believed she was in the maze. To keep the children safe from the men who had come for them, Milligan took them into the maze with him. He saw the men’s flashlights, then heard a cry from Constance. Milligan led them into the room where the men were. After the men had turned on their flashlights, Milligan left. The children believed they’d been tricked. About the time the men were going to use their watches that doubled as Tasers on them, Milligan shot both of the men with a tranquilizer gun. As he left he told the children “for every exit, there is also an entrance” p. 112. Later, Mr. Benedict explained to the children the men were professional kidnappers. He said they intended to take the children to the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened. Mr. Benedict believed the Messages were coming from that school. The school was not regulated and its classes were often filled with children who were runaways or orphans, children who would not be missed. He told them they would be acting as his secret agents at the Institute.

In the chapter “Codes and Histories,” Mr. Benedict told the children they’d be admitted to the Institute the following day. He wanted them to become top students so they could learn the secrets of the school. They were to report anything they learned about the school to Mr. Benedict using a flashlight to send Morse code signals to people who would be watching the island at all times. He also schooled the students on what it meant to be a team. Sticky was the only one who knew Morse code so the others spent the day learning and studying.

As they were learning Morse code, Constance’s first coded question to Sticky asked him why he ran. He said he’d once had a happy family life until his parents realized how smart he was. They began entering him in quiz competitions to earn prize money. They wanted him to study all the time and never spend time with friends. They got angry when he missed questions. Sticky was exhausted from all the competitions and thought running away would prove a point to his parents but they only became richer because people gave them even more money to try to find Sticky. Believing his parents thought they were better off without him, Sticky left for good.

Constance also asked Milligan why he was so unhappy. He told the children he awoke one day to find himself blindfolded and tied to a hard metal chair. He couldn’t remember who he was or how he’d gotten there. He said the word Milligan was the first word that came to mind when he was asked his name. He didn’t know if it actually was his name though. When his captors moved him, Milligan realized he’d made a key for his handcuffs out of his own fingernails and toenails. He used this key to unlock himself and



then chained his captors together. He had swum to the mainland from Nomasan Island. No one but Mr. Benedict believed the story he'd told. He had lost hope of ever recovering any of the memory that he had lost. He does tell them, however, that the men who tried to kidnap them that day were the same ones with whom he had dealt with while on the island.

In the chapter "The Thing to Come," the children were given several pages of notes to study about their upcoming project. In the notes they learned a man named Ledropha Curtain was the Sender and the founder the Institute. He had been sending Messages at low power but it was suspected by Mr. Benedict that he intended to increase the power. At that point the Messages could be sent even without the aid of a television and radio. At some point, Curtain could send Messages with enough power they'd be able to hear the voices in their minds. Mr. Benedict believed the voices were a side effect of what the Sender was trying to accomplish, but he didn't yet know what it was that was coming. As Reynie listened to Mr. Benedict, he hoped he could trust the man. He wondered about himself as he considered putting himself in danger just to feel like he belonged.

## Analysis

In this section of chapters, danger was underscored when professional kidnapers broke into the house to try to kidnap the children that Mr. Benedict was preparing to send to the Institution. Also, Reynie had his doubts about Milligan and Mr. Benedict. When Milligan left Reynie and the others alone in the maze with the kidnapers, he was afraid that the whole thing had been an elaborate ploy to trap the children. He reconsidered his first impression when Milligan did return and subdue the kidnapers. Reynie also doubted both his own intentions and those of Mr. Benedict. He was still concerned that the entire project was somehow a trap. He also wondered why he would be so willing to do something that someone had described as being dangerous. He wondered if it was just because he wanted to be part of a group so badly.

Mr. Benedict's gave a lecture to the children on the importance of teamwork. When Constance turned down Sticky's offer to help her learn Morse code, Mr. Benedict chastised her for her decision. He told the children it was important for them to depend on one another and take care of one another even if they did not always agree on everything. He insisted that each one of them was an integral member of the team and that they must work together in order for their project to be successful.

The mysteries of two characters are discovered in this section of the novel. First, Sticky had run away from home because his parents were pushing him to participate in and win quiz shows so they could earn cash and prizes. Although he'd once been a member of a happy family, his parents began treating him as their cash cow instead of as a child. Sticky had once had a place that he belonged, but he had been uprooted from that place. He felt betrayed and unloved by his parents. Milligan also was convinced to tell the children his background. He had been captured by Mr. Curtain's men and had his memories wiped out. Unlike others who were believed to be on the island, Milligan had



managed to escape from his captors. Milligan worked for Mr. Benedict because Mr. Benedict had been the only one who had believed his story when he returned from the island.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the men from the Institute were trying to kidnap Reynie and his friends?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss teamwork and the importance of teamwork in a group setting. How does the importance of teamwork relate to Reynie and his friends?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Milligan's story support what Mr. Benedict had told the children about the Institute? Use examples from the book to support your answer.

## Vocabulary

defiant, addled, indignant, regulation, appalled, profound, inconsequential, venture, philanthropists, mortification, betrayal, intermittently, cleave, awhirl



# The Naming of the Crew — Traps and Nonsense

## Summary

In the chapter “The Naming of the Crew,” Constance went to bed, and the other children gathered to talk about her attitude and their concern with her being part of the team. When Reynie went to talk to Mr. Benedict about Constance, Mr. Benedict told him he believed Constance might be the key to the team’s success. After more discussion, the team members agreed with Mr. Benedict and no one dropped out because of Constance. The following morning the children were awake early because they were unable to sleep. They tried to come up with a name for themselves. It was Constance who gave them the name “The Mysterious Benedict Society.”

In the chapter “Nomansan Island,” Rhonda told the children on their way to the institute that they would be responsible for finding the best times to send their messages containing the information they had learned. She told them also they would need to keep their messages cryptic so others wouldn’t understand them easily. Once the children were checked in at the gate, they were left in a loading area to wait. Their escorts, Jackson and Jillson, arrived and took them to their rooms. Inside their room, the boys realized they could send their messages from the window as it faced the mainland. Jackson told them that the Executives could answer any questions they had. Messengers, however, were top students who were awarded special privileges. After Jackson left, Reynie and Sticky were surprised to see Kate and Constance descend from a ceiling panel in their room. They decided to go outside and explore the school grounds. Kate looked at the stone tower from which a school flag flew. She suspected whatever it was they were looking for was in that tower. On their way back to the building, Sticky noticed an unusual patch of drupe weed. As he explored it, Sticky disappeared into the ivy.

In the section “Traps and Nonsense,” Kate grabbed Sticky keeping him from falling further. Unfortunately, Constance fell off her back into the hole as well. With Reynie’s help, she was able to pull them both up. Even though the children made it back to their rooms at the time the Executives told them to be there, the Executives were thirty minutes late. When they finally arrived, they began a tour of the Institute in which they warned the children to stay on the paths when walking outside because the other parts of the ground were filled with abandoned mine shafts. During their tour they visit a classroom and the cafeteria. Jackson and Jillson told the children there were no rules but then went on to list restrictions that sounded like rules.





## Analysis

The theme of teamwork is developed in this section of chapters as the children worried that Constance would not work well as a member of their team. They saw her only as a grumpy, contrary person who might hinder their work. Mr. Benedict, however, said he had his reasons for including Constance on the team. He even suggested she might be the team's key to success. The children got a lesson in teamwork when Sticky fell through a hole covered by drupe weed on the grounds of the Institute. They worked together to save him and Constance, who fell off Kate's back when she dove to grab Sticky. This was their first real team effort and they were very proud of themselves for being able to work together so successfully and smoothly.

In the chapter "Nomansan Island," a character flaw was noted in Kate. She was inventive, friendly, and intelligent; however, since her father had left, she had felt that she needed to prove she didn't require anyone's help. She wanted to prove her independence. Kate's desire for independence becomes important later in the novel as it was difficult to be part of a team if one team member needed to prove himself. In this section, however, Kate did make an important comment about the top of the stone tower. She indicated whatever they were trying to find was probably in that tower, a guess that turned out to be correct.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you agree with the children that Constance was a bad idea for a team member? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why would it be dangerous for a team if one of the members had a desire to prove they could take care of himself on his own?

## Discussion Question 3

What do you think about the rules that were not really rules at the Institute? Discuss the way these rules were presented and the impact on the students.

## Vocabulary

gargoyles, commiserations, confounded, frenetic, treacherous, cryptic, crags, acronym, intoned, bleary, feigning, diminutive, indignant, obstinately, menacing, subtle, arduous, carnivorous, consecutive, reclusive, infirmary, barracks, dawdling



# Beware the Gemini — Logical Conclusions and Miscalculations

## Summary

In the chapter “Beware the Gemini,” the four children were left to wait in a classroom for two other new students. When the two other new arrivals were brought in the four noticed these children looked dazed and wondered if they had been kidnapped. They were introduced to Mr. Curtain who came blazing into the room on a motorized wheelchair. The members of the Benedict Society were shocked because the man looked just like Mr. Benedict, down to the green plaid suit that he wore. Even though Mr. Curtain looked just like Mr. Benedict, Reynie thought their personalities were exactly opposite one another. With this idea of everything being backward in mind, Reynie shivered when Mr. Curtain wrote out the name of the Institute on the blackboard and circled the letters of the acronym LIVE. He realized that the word spelled backwards was EVIL.

That night, the children collectively believed they had been tricked, but decided to send a message to Mr. Benedict anyway. They get back a cryptic response that they eventually translated to mean that Mr. Curtain was the twin that Mr. Benedict never knew he had.

In the chapter “Lessons Learned” the Institute was an unusual school because the cafeteria food tasted good, there were no mirrors, and classes were assigned at random. Quizzes were given each day in every class. The lessons were a mass of information given to the students that led to what the teacher called a logical conclusion that often wasn’t logical at all. Reynie and Sticky did well on their quizzes but Constance and Kate struggled with the material. One day Reynie and Sticky were asked to stay after class to talk to S.Q., an Executive. Martina Crowe, a Messenger, gave them a veiled threat on her way out the door. One they were alone, S.Q. told they boys he was surprised they were doing so well. They had Martina on edge because of their quick progress. Reynie asked S.Q. about the Special Recruits and got a bumbling answer.

In the chapter “People and Places to Be Avoided” the children gathered in the plaza to talk but couldn’t keep from staring at Mr. Curtain. The only time they were able to talk in private was in the boys’ room after lights out though sometimes they could talk in the hallway if they avoided eavesdroppers. One day while they were in the hallway, Jackson called for Corliss Danton to go to the Waiting Room. The other children reacted badly to the mention of the Waiting Room. Constance suggested they probably didn’t want to go there.

In the chapter “Logical Conclusions and Miscalculations” that night Kate was the only one who showed up for their late night meeting. As she complained about the useless material they were being made to learn, Reynie realized the information they were



learning was connected to the Messages being sent. They were unable to send a report to Mr. Benedict because there were Executives walking the grounds so they decided to go to bed instead. As he tried to go to sleep, Reynie thought of Miss Perumal and wrote a letter to her in his mind. As he was finishing the letter, Sticky told him the coast was clear and they sent a message.

The next day in class, Sticky was terribly sleepy from his lack of sleep the night before. He paid attention to Corliss who was well scrubbed and didn't seem any worse for his experience in the Waiting Room with the exception that his face looked dazed and there was still a look of misery in his eyes. Even without knowing it, Sticky fell asleep and woke to hear Martina making fun of him. As pay back, Kate tied the girl's shoelaces together making Martina fall when she tried to get up.

## Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that the children got their first coded message that they had to figure out in order to do their jobs as secret agents at the Institute. On their very first day at school, the children had been highly disturbed because the man who claimed to be Mr. Curtain looked exactly like Mr. Benedict. They were afraid they had been tricked. When they sent a message to Mr. Benedict and the others asking about the similarities between Curtain and Mr. Benedict, they received a cryptic message. Although it took them awhile, the children did work together to discover the answer to the riddle they'd been sent. In order to figure it out, the children had to draw from their bank of knowledge. For example, they had to know that Gemini was the sign of the twins and that a telescope was sometimes called a looking glass.

It was also in this section of the novel that Reynie realized that the load of information they were being made to memorize was in some way tied up in the Messages that were being sent out. He realized there were code words included in each lesson that he remembered from the Message that Mr. Benedict played for them. As Reynie and Sticky began to prove their possibility as outstanding students, they began to get negative attention from one of the female Messengers. Martina Crowe began a full out battle on the two boys because of their good progress. Apparently she was afraid of losing her spot as a Messenger to one of them.

Also, in this section the children learn about the Waiting Room. This room was apparently a place children were sent for punishment. It was a place so bad the children dreaded being sent there. The very name reduced some students to tears. The reader must wonder what was in this Waiting Room that was so terrible none of the children wanted to face it. Sticky noticed the one boy who'd been sent to that room was in class the following day with no bruises or broken bones; so, it appeared there was no form of corporal punishment associated with the room. The only ill effect Sticky could see was the look of misery that remained in the boy's eyes.

One final thing to note in this section of chapters is the mention of the lack of mirrors in the Institute. This becomes important later on in the novel.



## Discussion Question 1

What do you think was the purpose of the long, seemingly meaningless lectures the students were forced to hear? Do you, like Reynie, believe they were connected to the Messages? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Martina Crowe's role in the novel.

## Discussion Question 3

Consider the riddle given to the students to help them understand why Mr. Curtain looked so much like Mr. Benedict. Did you figure out the riddle before the children did? What clues helped you realize what was happening?

## Vocabulary

speculated, mayhem, commotion, esteemed, plausible, mere, pungent, pondered, constellation, zodiac, duped, consented, adjourn, rote, barrage, gist, optimism, stupors, indulging, fixated, nary, privy, menace, shun, ambushed, insistent, discreetly, sedated, wearisome, dismayed, demonic, meticulously, prohibition, speculated, dissociate, cacophony, cocked, thwarted, anvils, exemplary, impeccable, meticulously, remnant, averted, malice



# Poison Apples, Poison Worms — Tests and Invitations

## Summary

In the chapter “Poison Apples, Poison Worms” as Reynie was listening to Jillson’s lecture and realizing he was hearing another hidden message phrase he remembered from those Mr. Benedict played them, suddenly became irritated and angry. He noticed that his other three friends seemed to be reacting in the same way. After class they were able to hold a special meeting in a corner of the plaza where they realized after Constance complained of hearing voices in her head that Mr. Curtain was turning up the power on the Messages. They messaged Mr. Benedict that night to tell him that Constance was hearing voices. They received another cryptic message telling them they had to become what they were not, a response that confused the children.

In the chapter “A Surprising Suggestion” during the next meeting Reynie told the others he thought Mr. Benedict wanted them to become Messengers more quickly so they could get the secret information they were after. They decided they had to find a way for the girls to do better on their tests. Reynie finally came to the conclusion that Mr. Benedict wanted them to learn to cheat. When they sent a message asking about cheating, they were warned not to get caught. Kate learned to cheat by looking over Reynie’s shoulder while Sticky sent the answers to Constance using Morse code by tugging his ear or tapping his temples.

Meanwhile, the four learned that Charlie Peters would be graduating from the Institute. Graduates never got to say goodbye to anyone so the four took the chance when they saw him in the hallway being escorted out to try to talk to him. Kate fell which distracted his escorts while Reynie questioned the older boy. Charlie, who had been a Messenger, did not remember any special privileges. When they asked what he did as a Messenger, Charlie looked distressed and said he couldn’t say.

In the chapter “Tests and Invitations,” Jackson interrupted a class one day to post a new Messenger list. Although Kate told him the newest name on the list, Reynie felt he had to see it himself. As he watched the two new recruits, Reynie realized he felt jealous of them because they had to opportunity to be part of something. Reynie heard a voice behind him and realized Mr. Curtain was sitting there. Reynie told the man he thought it was strange his name wasn’t on the Messenger list. Mr. Curtain said both he and Sticky were showing progress but that their time had not yet come. Mr. Curtain added the he was getting impatient with Constance as she was unruly even though her quiz scores were improving. Reynie reminded Mr. Curtain he should keep Constance close, especially since he didn’t trust her. After being given that advice, Mr. Curtain asked Reynie to come to his office as there was something he wanted to talk to him about in private.



In his office, Mr. Curtain told Reynie he'd been tormented and abused as a child. His goal now was to bring happiness to people. He told Reynie that Reynie was a natural leader and that he reminded him of himself at that age. He informed Reynie he had him in mind as an Executive. He told Reynie that things were going to change for the better. After this "Improvement" messengers would no longer be needed. Reynie told his friends about the meeting that night. They passed the information they had learned along to Mr. Benedict who told them not to worry, but to hurry.

## Analysis

Significant in this section of chapters is the effect the transmissions had on the members of the Mysterious Benedict Society when the power was turned up on those transmissions. While Reynie, Kate and Sticky felt only irritated when the Messages were playing, Constance could actually hear the voices speaking. Remember that Mr. Benedict had told them that the more sensitive minds would be able to hear voices sooner. Since Constance was able to verify for the others that she was hearing voices they knew for sure their emotional disturbances were caused by the Messages and not just stress.

While Reynie had found a place of belonging with the Mysterious Benedict Society, he still couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy when he considered the excitement the newest special recruits must have been feeling when they learned they were in the Institute. He had already speculated that he believed these two were kidnapped and forced into the school. As he considered what their lives must have been like with no family and an uncertain future, he realized how exciting it must have been for them to realize they'd become part of something important.

The desire to be in control seems to be a major personality characteristic for Mr. Curtain. In fact, he thought Reynie was rather clever when Reynie told him he should keep Constance close to him, especially if he thought she was trouble. Notice that he responded that he believed Reynie's suggestion to keep the girl close would be the best way to control the situation. He then told Reynie that control was the key. For some reason, the unusual Mr. Curtain had decided to take Reynie under his wing and share with him the secret that he would soon be seeing Improvement at the school. Notice also that while Reynie waited for Mr. Curtain to talk to him, Mr. Curtain was paging through his journal. Reynie attempted to get the man to show him part of the book but Mr. Curtain did not fall for his suggestion.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Mr. Curtain decided to tell Reynie the "secret" about the upcoming Improvement at the Institute?



## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Constance was so much more sensitive to the Messages than the other children?

## Discussion Question 3

Why was Reynie jealous of the special recruits? Do you understand his feelings? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

bungled, lunatics, bafflement, resisting, excruciating, relented, evasively, exultant, appalled, adamant, query, strategies, notoriously, dishevelment, quibble, imprudent, distraught, grievous, conspicuously, impish, departure, virtue, diminutive, insolent, taunted, shrewd, contradiction, despise, constitute, belies



# Everything as it Should Be — Caught in the Act

## Summary

Reynie explored more of the campus in the chapter “Everything As It Should Be.” He recognized one of the Helpers whom the group met as Mr. Bloomberg, a man who had inspected the Stonetown Orphanage. Reynie was troubled that the Helpers didn’t know how long they’d been at the Institute. After the children apologized to the man who told them his name was Harry Harrison, they discussed their strange encounter. They noticed the same sadness in the Helpers’ eyes that they’d seen in Milligan’s eyes. Reynie realized they must have all, like Milligan, had their memories stolen. Reynie suddenly realized that Mr. Curtain had made Milligan lose his memory and that Mr. Curtain had intended to retrain him as a Helper. Even though the Helpers couldn’t specifically remember who or what it was they missed, their pain showed in their eyes. He realized also that the special recruits had been kidnapped but had their memories erased, just like Charlie had his memory erased before he left the school so that he was really incapable of telling anyone what had happened to him.

In the section “Of Families Lost and Found,” Reynie wrote another mental letter to Miss Perumal after he went to bed. In his letter, he wondered what it was like to have a family. He remembered asking Mr. Benedict on the night before they left for the Institute if Mr. Benedict had ever wanted a family. Mr. Benedict told Reynie he had acquired a family through his friends and fellow employees. Sticky interrupted Reynie’s letter writing and made a comment about laying hands on Mr. Curtain’s journal giving Reynie an idea how they might be able to get a look at that book.

In the chapter “Tactical Cactupi,” Reynie approached Mr. Curtain in the plaza with a gift, a handful of thin blue ribbons to use as bookmarks for his journal. Mr. Curtain played along and put the bookmarks in his most important parts as Reynie waited. Meanwhile, Sticky was reading the pages of Mr. Curtain’s journal using Kate’s spyglass. The three had taken cover behind a cactus in the plaza that covered some, but not all, of them.

That night, Sticky read to them from the pages he’d compiled from his memories of the notes. Through the notes they were able to verify that Mr. Curtain had erased the memories of or “brain swept” the Helpers. The result of the brain sweeping was the constant sadness. The mirrors had all been removed from the Institute as seeing one’s reflection seemed to be one of the events that triggered a memory relapse. The special recruits had only the memory of their kidnapping removed from their brains. This explained to the children why they weren’t sad like the Helpers. An entry on the day they arrived noted workers were increasing output of the turbines and the last of the shipments had been sent off. Reynie and Kate remembered seeing both of these things happening. They decided to try to find out what might have been sent in the packing crates. Then, they headed for bed.





In the next section “Caught in the Act,” Jillson caught Sticky cheating. He was sent to the Waiting Room. Reynie worried that Sticky would lose his cool and tell Mr. Curtain everything. Even though they were without Sticky that afternoon, the remaining members of the society went to check out the loading area as they had planned. They were disappointed when they reach it, however, because it was empty. They did notice that the students were milling around the gym, waiting for it to open. With Constance standing watch, Reynie decided he would stand on Kate’s shoulders to find out what the Executives were doing in the gymnasium. Before looking in the window, they braced a tree limb against a back door in case anyone decided to come out that way. Reynie wasn’t sure what the Executives were doing as they seemed to be practicing welcoming gestures. He thought it must have been some sort of practice for the coming Improvements. Before he was able to move, Reynie noticed S.Q. staring at him through the window. He and Kate ran until they were sure they hadn’t been followed. They decided to split up and met at supper. At supper, Kate told Reynie that he was safe. Even so, they were all still worried about Sticky.

## Analysis

The children made a huge leap forward in this section of the novel as they finally got a look at Mr. Curtain’s journal. They realized that the Helpers memories had been cleared, just as they had thought when Reynie met the man he believed was the inspector from the orphanage. The children had decided Mr. Curtain was taking all the people who bothered him or tried to stop his progress, as Mr. Bloomburg might have done with an unexpected inspection, and cleared their memories. The people had been retrained as workers so that Mr. Curtain could have access to free labor. Remember an earlier chapter noted the Institute was unusual because there were no mirrors anywhere. It is in the chapter “Everything As It Should Be” that the children realized the mirrors had been removed because they were causing the Helpers to remember their past when they saw their own reflection.

Notice also in this section Mr. Curtain’s obsession with fear as a motivator. In one of his earliest journal entries, he noted that few people realized how motivating fear was. Mr. Curtain apparently used the motivating quality of fear when he created the Waiting Room because the children most definitely feared that room. They were basically scared into doing as they should.

In the theme of facing one’s fears, Sticky was forced to confront his fear of the Waiting Room. Jillson noticed the strange motions Sticky was making with his hands and guessed that he was cheating in some way. Without questioning him, Sticky was sent directly to the Waiting Room. With his anxieties, Sticky had feared the Waiting Room even before he knew what it contained. As the other children in the society worry about Sticky, they agree that of all of them, he was the least apt to cope well in the Waiting Room. Reynie hoped that Sticky wouldn’t crack under the pressure and give them all away.



Reynie continued to fight with his desire to have a family or a group to which he belonged. In a mental letter to Miss Perumal, Reynie wondered if the feelings he had for Kate, Sticky, and Constance were like those that one might have for a family. He remembered Mr. Benedict telling him that friends could serve as one's family even if they weren't blood related. Reynie wondered if this was what was happening with his relationship with his friends.

## Discussion Question 1

What do you think the Executives were doing in the gym when Reynie spied on them? Why was Reynie lucky that it was S.Q. who saw him?

## Discussion Question 2

How did Mr. Curtain use fear to manipulate his students?

## Discussion Question 3

How did the information that the children gleaned from Mr. Curtain's journal help them to piece together the information they'd gathered so far? Did they learn anything new from the journal?

## Vocabulary

compelled, reciprocate, rotund, discomfited, conciliatory, vigorous, dunce, amnesia, meddlesome, hoax, vanished, empathy, conquest, polders, vanity, disheartening, precariously, pathetic, defiant, specimen, forcible, dispirited, relapse, retract, modifications, dolt, precipice, gall, labyrinth, ominous, accosted, askance, dour



# The Waiting Room — The Whisperer

## Summary

In the chapter “The Waiting Room,” Reynie was sitting in his room. Around 9 p.m. he began to smell something awful. Sticky opened the door. He was covered in stinking mud and had a look of total despair on his face. He went straight for the shower. Reynie brought him fresh clothes and soap, and then waited in the room for him to return. When Sticky did return he said he was running away. He hadn’t been able to see Mr. Curtain after waiting all day and would have to go back the following day. He was afraid he’d fall apart and tell Mr. Curtain everything. Kate and Constance joined them while Sticky was talking. She agreed they wouldn’t let Sticky go back to that place. Reynie told Sticky he had a plan.

In the section “Punishments and Promotions,” S.Q. came for Sticky the following morning. He advised Sticky not to admit to Mr. Curtain that he had cheated. Sticky decided to go with Reynie’s advice and apologize to Mr. Curtain for cheating. He told Mr. Curtain that Martina had put pressure on him to let her cheat off him.

Later that day in the hallway Reynie, Sticky, Kate, and Constance heard Jackson and Jillson discussing a boy who’d gotten caught for spying on the activities in the gym. Meanwhile, rumors were flying about Martina. Reynie began to feel bad as his attempts to keep himself and the members of his group safe were causing problems for other students. S.Q. walked by and asked the members of the group why they were so sad. He suggested it might have something to do with the fact they hadn’t made messengers, yet. Kate asked if it was because Martina was no longer a Messenger and pointed to the girl who had been escorted into the cafeteria by Jillson and Jackson. She was wearing the uniform of an Executive.

In the chapter “Half a Riddle,” S.Q. came for Reynie and Sticky at 10:01 p.m. that night telling them that Mr. Curtain wanted to see them. Although they had believed they were in trouble, the boys soon learned they had both been made Messengers. Kate was waiting for them in their room when they returned. They sent a message to Mr. Benedict. They got half a message in return that was interrupted by Mr. Curtain’s appearance in the plaza. None of the children were able to understand any part of the message.

In the chapter “The Whisperer,” Reynie was having a bad dream when Jackson woke him and Sticky for their first round of special privileges. Inside the Whispering Galley, there was a contraption that looked like an old-fashioned hair dryer. Mr. Curtain explained the room was empty and austere so there would be no way for anyone to damage his machine. The computer system and power supply were hidden securely behind two feet of concrete.



## Analysis

Although he was devastated by his time there, Sticky did survive his punishment in the Waiting Room. When he returned to his dorm he was prepared to run away again, a response that was becoming more common when things weren't going his way. Reynie and Kate talked him into staying by trying to convince him they'd come up with a plan to keep him out of any more trouble.

The boys were successful in becoming Messengers in this section of the novel. It was a goal they had hoped to achieve; but, it also meant they would be putting themselves in more danger now that they had more access to Mr. Curtain and his secrets. Notice that they boys joked with one another that they'd never felt worse about accomplishing a goal in their lives.

Also in this section of the novel, Mr. Curtain's desire for control extends even to his Whispering Gallery. He was so protective of his machine that he would not even allow juice to be served in anything but paper cups so that he wouldn't take the chance of giving people in the room anything they could use to damage his machine. Just as Kate had predicted earlier in the novel, the Whisperer was located in the highest room in the flag tower.

## Discussion Question 1

How do you think you would respond if you were sent to the Waiting Room? Do you think it was as bad as the characters made it out to be?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Mr. Curtain was so obsessed with control? What does his need for control say about him?

## Discussion Question 3

What do you think made Mr. Curtain decide to make Martina an Executive? Does this move mean that he knew Sticky was lying about her forcing him to cheat?

## Vocabulary

impassively, rank, verge, guttering, feigned, livid, genial, manipulate, diplomatic, quibble, accomplice, vigilant, condemn, appraisingly, malevolence, recoil, rectified, urgency, stymied, baffled, resolutely, astir, candor, contraption, gizmos, austere, squander, protuberant, maladies, despise, profound, involuntary, averse, esteem, conk



# Open Sesame — Know Thine Enemy

## Summary

In the section “Open Sesame,” Kate was surprised when Sticky and Reynie told her Mr. Curtain planned to close the Institute. As they ate, a fellow Messenger invited Sticky and Reynie to eat lunch with them; but, they warned him they’d had a stomach virus they weren’t quite over yet as an excuse. Reynie and Sticky didn’t say anything to the girls, but they both were very disturbed at how the Whisperer made them feel. Constance said she was hearing Reynie talking in her mind when the next broadcast started. The children realized this meant that Mr. Curtain was able to record the sessions with the Whisperer and would soon be able to broadcast all of the time. As Reynie looked at Constance with her eyes closed, he suddenly got an idea about the last riddle sent to them by Mr. Benedict.

They went to the spot where Sticky and Reynie were blindfolded that morning and determined, by counting steps, that the entrance to the building that held the Whispering Gallery was hidden behind a boulder near one of the traps. They waited until the time of day when all the Executives were in the gym to search for the hidden entrance. They found the door but couldn’t find a way to open it until Reynie kicked it in frustration. The four walked down a hallway until they found a door locked with a numeric keypad. A note next to the keypad contained a riddle reminding users of the new code. The children figured out the riddle and were able to open the door. They worried what was behind it but are given no choice but to go inside when they heard Mr. Curtain coming.

In the chapter “Practice Makes Perfect,” the children found themselves in something that looked like a press office. Mr. Curtain entered the room right behind them. The four children hid by cramming themselves into a crate. Sticky’s glasses had fallen off on his way into the crate but Kate was able to snag them with her magnet. When Mr. Curtain finally left, they discovered he was printing out press releases about honors Mr. Curtain was yet to receive. In one release, they read that he planned to create for himself a position called the Minister And Secretary of all The Earth’s Regions. Reynie realized that what Mr. Curtain was doing was creating a public fear using his Messages. He then planned to calm the fear that he created and become a public hero. Another release addressed Curtain as the person who was best suited to handle an amnesia epidemic. Reynie suggested the Institute would become an Amnesia Sanctuary.

In the chapter “Know Thine Enemy” as the boys tried to decide how Mr. Curtain would be able to take over the entire world, Kate found an interesting room that contained long rows of machines that looked like hair dryers. In crates there were parts for those machines plus pamphlets in various languages. When they sent the information they’d learned to Mr. Benedict that night, the children were told to wait for an answer. When the answer finally came, it said only “Know thine enemy.” Sticky asked for more information three times before the children realized the coast might not be clear. Kate spotted what appeared to be a Recruiter standing near the bridge looking at them. As



Kate looked at him closer, she realized it was Milligan. They messaged back that they had recognized Milligan and were told to hurry to him. Once they reached Milligan he told them he had come to take them away from the school. He said Mr. Benedict wanted them taken away from the school for their own safety. The children, however, refused to go. When they refused, Milligan told them to remember that they were to rely on each other and that he would be there to help them as well. He explained how they could leave a written message for him in the rocks next to the culvert.

## Analysis

The story seemed to be reaching a climax as the children made their way into Mr. Curtain's private Institute Control Building. They had found the room of Whisperer machines that Mr. Curtain planned to send out across the world along with the press releases he planned to send out once he'd announced he'd found a cure to the public Emergency. Of course, he didn't plan for anyone to find out that he was the one who created this Emergency from the beginning.

When Mr. Benedict realized how close Mr. Curtain was to starting the Improvement, he sent Milligan to bring the children home. As he thought they would, however, the children refused to leave the Institute until they had done all they could to stop Mr. Curtain's plan. Even though Sticky and Reynie refused to leave the island, they have not talked to each other or any of the other members of the Benedict Society about how strongly they were affected by the Whisperer. Both are afraid that if they have to face the machine again, their friends will be betrayed.

Notice in this section that Mr. Benedict once again reminded the children that if they were going to be successful in their mission, they had to stick together as a team. Teamwork will be important up to the very end of the project.

## Discussion Question 1

What did the press releases that the children found in Curtain's printing press signify?

## Discussion Question 2

Why did the children refuse to leave the island with the project only half completed? Why did Mr. Benedict believe they would refuse to leave?

## Discussion Question 3

How did Milligan instruct the children to leave messages for him? Why do you think he choose this method instead of the Morse code they had been using?

## Vocabulary

perplexed, ruefulness, incredulously, composure, predicament, swiveled, preposterous, hieroglyphics, quarantine, interminable, counteract, adamantly, culvert



# A Chess Lesson — Sacrifices, Narrow Escapes and Something Like a Plan

## Summary

In the section “A Chess Lesson,” Kate insisted on going alone to check out the Whisperer and see if she could find its computer workings. Meanwhile, both boys fight the urge not to give her any information about the Whisperer. As he struggled with his own doubts about himself, Reynie sent a message to Mr. Benedict telling him he thought the Whisperer was too strong for him. Reynie waited so long he thought not even Mr. Benedict had no advice for him when he finally saw a response. He was told to remember the white knight.

In the chapter “The Mouse in the Culvert,” Kate worked her way into the control building as she worried about getting caught. In order to distract Jackson from his post guarding the hallway, she used her slingshot to toss a marble down the hall. When he followed the noise, she went into the room she believed he was guarding only to find it was an elevator. She climbed into the elevator shaft and up the cables but was unable to open the doors at either of the top two floors. As she watched through a vent, Kate saw and heard Martina Crowe being given a tour of the area as a new Executive. When she heard Jackson’s voice with the group, she quickly slid down the cables so she could get out of the elevator before Jackson got back downstairs.

Kate listened at the grate of the culvert as Mr. Curtain told Martina about his plans for the Improvement. He described his brain sweeping process and told her people would be happier once the Improvement was in place. Believing that someone might have been in the large pipe, Mr. Curtain dumped a pot of boiling water down the culvert but Kate managed not to cry out, even when she was hit with the water. She feared Mr. Curtain might be sending someone after her. As S.Q. and Jackson ran from the building, she dove into the water of the harbor.

In the chapter “Sacrifices, Narrow Escapes and Something Like a Plan,” Kate returned to Reynie and Sticky’s room. She was wet and cold. She brought the disappointing news that there was no way they could get into the computer room. The next morning at breakfast, Kate’s sneakers were still wet. When the girls joined the boys for breakfast, Reynie dumped a pitcher of juice on her shoes, covering up the fact they were wet. Mr. Curtain knew someone had been in the culvert and that someone had swum away from the shore to get away. Kate’s wet shoes would have given her away. In her defense, however, S.Q. had accidentally obliterated the footprints she left when she ran from the culvert to the water. So, Curtain had no way to link the footprints to an accomplice.

As they were talking, Martina and Jackson approached their table. They showed a marble to Reynie, Kate, Constance, and Sticky, and mentioned that Jackson had been chewing a piece of licorice that he spit out when he heard the marble. They have been





sent to check shoes to make sure no one had this piece of licorice on the bottom of their shoes. Kate pressed the piece of candy into Reynie's hand. He passed it to Sticky who passed it on to Constance. Constance didn't realize what it was but raised it to her eye level before she recognized it. Just before Jackson and Martina saw what she had, Constance popped it into her mouth and ate it.

The others pushed Reynie for a plan and he finally decided all four of them needed to be in the Whispering Gallery at the same time. Reynie thought perhaps during he and Sticky's next visit they could somehow push the button on Mr. Curtain's wheelchair and let the girls into the gallery. S.Q. interrupted when he came to ask if Constance was feeling all right as she was turning green. Reynie told him she was just getting over a stomach bug she'd gotten from him and Sticky. After he finally left, Kate suggested Sticky and Reynie needed some way to get their chance at using the Whisperer sooner. It was Sticky's idea that they could give everyone else stomach bugs, forcing Mr. Curtain to use them more quickly.

## Analysis

Although she hadn't seemed very bright up until this point, Constance saved the day for her friends in the Mysterious Benedict Society when she ate the remainder of the piece of licorice that had gotten stuck to the bottom of Kate's shoe. This move on Constance's part was only one of the quick moves that saved Kate from being caught during her evening excursion into the Institute's Control Building. Mr. Curtain and the other Executives had been getting reports from several people that they were hearing mice in the walls at the Institute, but they never saw any mice or any evidence of mice. While Kate was in the culvert eavesdropping on Mr. Curtain's conversation with S.Q. and Martina, he threw a pot of boiling water down the pipe, believing he'd hear if that water hit a person. Even though Kate didn't make any noise when the water was thrown, Mr. Curtain still sent S.Q. out to look for her. Kate had the forethought to dive into the harbor but she left behind footprints. Without intending to, S.Q. messed up all of the footprints she'd left giving no way for the eavesdropper to be identified based on her shoes. Reynie finished another bit of cover up the following morning when he dumped a pitcher of juice on Kate's still wet shoes.

The white knight was an important object in this section as Mr. Benedict told Reynie to remember the move made by this knight when he thought about the fear and doubt he had about facing the Whisperer again. Remember that one of the test questions on the first test had been about a chess move. When Mr. Benedict asked Reynie way the chess arrangement shown in the question, with a black pawn having advanced two spaces, was possible, Reynie said it would be possible if the white knight had changed his mind and gone back to the original spot in the second move. At that time, Reynie had told Mr. Benedict the move was a bad one because it showed self-doubt. Mr. Benedict reminded Reynie of this object at this time because Reynie was beginning to suffer with his own self-doubt.



## Discussion Question 1

Why was it significant that Mr. Benedict advised Reynie to remember the white knight when Reynie was struggling with his doubts after having experienced the Whisperer?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you think it is reasonable that Kate was really able to move as quietly and efficiently as she was described as doing even though she carried a bucket full of gear with her everywhere she went? Give reasons for your answer.

## Discussion Question 3

How did Sticky and Reynie plan to get a turn at the Whisperer more quickly? Did you think their plan would work? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

superstitious, enticing, flitted, improvised, sabotaging, tutorials, derisive, toying, eloquent, reverie, acoustic, exertions, cajoling, bungled



# Bad News and Bad News — The Great Kate Weather Machine

## Summary

In the chapter “Bad News and Bad News,” Sticky ground up wild chuck root to be put in the sweets in the cafeteria the following morning. Reynie was leaving a note for Milligan letting him know what they were planning, even though their plan was not very complete, as Constance pointed out when she questioned Reynie about the details. Among the mistakes Reynie made when he left the note for Milligan, he left part of the note uncovered by the rocks so that S.Q. spotted it when he went back to make sure he hadn’t missed any of the footprints.

As they were eating supper that evening, Jillson sat down at their table and told them S.Q. found a strange piece of paper but that it a man who claimed to have written that note ate it before S.Q. could read it. The man had been caught, Jillson told them. Reynie knew she was talking about Milligan and asked her why she was telling them about the man’s capture. She said it was because everyone had thought that Kate was the spy but the man, who had been on the island once before, said he was responsible for everything. When Milligan was paraded through the cafeteria, Reynie realized he’d allowed himself to be caught intentionally to take suspicion away from Kate, Reynie, Sticky, and Constance.

In the chapter “Sticky’s Discovery” when the children finally got a response from their message that Milligan had been captured they were told only that “laughter is the best medicine” (p 412). Reynie knew it was a riddle, but he and the others were getting frustrated with riddles. They decided they needed a break before they could solve the riddle.

Just before dawn, Reynie finally began to get an idea what Mr. Benedict might have been suggesting with his message. Before he could tell Sticky, however, S.Q. came to get them, telling them they were needed in the Whispering Gallery. Reynie wrote something on his hand before he left their dorm room. The boys were left to wait a few minutes alone and Reynie had time to tell Sticky he had to volunteer to go first in the Whisperer so Reynie could have time to signal Kate and Constance. Before he could answer, they were interrupted by Martina Crowe leaving the Whispering Gallery.

When Reynie and Sticky entered the gallery, they were told by Mr. Curtain that he intended to finish up his project with their sessions. He told Sticky that he was hoping Sticky and Reynie would continue at the Institute as Executives even after the school was closed. Although he doubted himself, Sticky asked Mr. Curtain for permission to go first in the Whisperer. Mr. Curtain allowed his request. As Sticky settled into the machine, Reynie pressed his hand, with the message written on it, to the window. He



hoped one of Mr. Benedict's workers would read the message that they needed Kate and Constance in the Whispering Gallery as soon as possible.

In the chapter "The Great Kate Weather Machine," Kate was awakened by alternating long and short blasts from the foghorn. When she realized it was a message being given in Morse code she was suddenly awake. She finally decoded the message and realized the boys were already in the flag tower and needed their help. Constance grumbled when Kate tried to wake and Kate briefly considered leaving Constance there, but knew all of them were needed to get the job done. Once Kate had Constance on her back, she ran for the secret entrance to the Institute's Control Building and ran right into Martina Crowe who was on guard. Kate ran back out but Martina thought there was something suspicious about their actions and told Jillson, who'd come to relieve her, so. The two girls suddenly realized the foghorn was honking a Morse code message. They went in search of a book Jillson had seen on Morse code to decode the message.

Kate stole a ladder from a Helper, and was chased by two Executives as she tried to make her way up the hill to the flag tower with Constance on her back and the ladder dragging behind her. Kate used the ladder to climb up a wall to higher ground where the flag tower was located. She filled the bucket with water from a brook and dropped it onto Jillson and Jackson who were starting up the ladder. This bought her enough time to lasso the flag pole, tie Constance to the rope and climb up the rope. She'd intended to pull Constance up but realizing she wouldn't have time she instead unhooked the rope from the flagpole and dropped to the ground, pulling Constance up.

## Analysis

The novel continues to work toward a climax in these chapters as Sticky and Reynie learn they have no time left to disable the Whisperer. Mr. Curtain planned to finish his project with their session. Because the boys were gotten up so early in the morning to go to the Whispering Gallery, they did not have time to signal Kate or Constance what was happening. Milligan had been caught and jailed the day before when S.Q. had almost discovered the note that Reynie had left for Milligan. Not even Mr. Benedict and his workers know why Reynie and Sticky were awakened so early and taken to the control building. Reynie had written a note on his hand in hopes it would be seen.

Apparently the need not to be caught was outweighed by the need of the situation as Mr. Benedict and his friends signaled Kate and Constance using a foghorn to send a Morse code message. Unfortunately, Kate and Constance weren't the only ones who figured out the message. Jillson and Martina figured it out as well and knew to be on the lookout for the girls causing problems.

It was in this section of the novel that Sticky and Reynie both faced their worst fears as they stood to spend time with the Whisperer again. Both boys were concerned they would betray their friends once they got in the machine. Sticky was afraid he'd make the wrong choice and put his friends in danger. When put under pressure, however, Sticky stepped up and volunteered to work in the Whisperer first. He even gave the machine



wrong answers to the questions it was asking, as he knew this would confuse it and frustrate Mr. Curtain.

Kate almost made a major mistake in the project as she considered leaving Constance behind when she went to help the boys in the flag tower. In her own mind she thought the small cranky girl would only impede her progress. She considered just for a minute not waking her up but remembered Mr. Benedict's stern warnings that all of them would be needed to stop Mr. Curtain.

## Discussion Question 1

If you had been in Kate's situation, do you think you would have taken Constance along to the flag tower even though she was grouchy? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

What do you think of Reynie's idea of writing a message on his hand and hoping that Mr. Benedict and his helpers would see it? Did you think it would work? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Mr. Benedict's helpers sent a message using a foghorn when it was possible Mr. Curtain's workers could also decode the message?

## Vocabulary

emetic, vigorously, clandestine, melancholy, roiled, condescending, rectified, simplicity, flummox, clarity, quibble, erratic, obnoxious, decipher, belligerent, maraca, nimbly, aw whirl, infernal, unwieldy, locomotion, ruckus, jutt ed, invincibility, vengeful



# Stands and Falls — Escapes and Returns

## Summary

In the section “Stands and Falls,” S.Q. interrupted Mr. Curtain just as Sticky had given up resisting the Whisperer. S.Q. told Mr. Curtain that two students were trying to break into the tower. After sending S.Q. away to take care of the problem, Mr. Curtain told Sticky he was not happy with his session. He decided it was time for Reynie to take over. As Reynie waited for Mr. Curtain to finish his juice, he argued with himself about his thoughts about the Whisperer. When the session began, the machine asked what Reynie feared most. Then, it told him he was not in danger of betraying his friends. With the help of the Whisperer, Reynie realized that he was brave enough to resist the machine. He heard Constance’s voice from outside the window. Mr. Curtain sent Reynie to deal with the disruption. He was told by Mr. Curtain to pull the child up. Mr. Curtain was not surprised when the child trying to break into the tower turned out to be Constance. In fact, he told her he would have gotten rid of her long ago if it had not been for Reynie.

Meanwhile, Kate had been jumped on by all three Executives. They beat her badly until she heard an unfamiliar voice and the sound of a tranquilizer gun. Milligan was mud covered but had a joyous smile. He apologized for it taking so long to get to her and called her “Katie-Cat.” Milligan was her father.

In the section “The Best Machine,” Mr. Curtain accused the children of betraying him. When he noticed Reynie looking at him strangely, he asked what was wrong. Reynie said he was trying to figure out what it was in Mr. Curtain that triggered his narcolepsy. When Reynie accused him of being afraid of children, Mr. Curtain got angry and then dropped into a pile on the floor. Reynie and Sticky tied Mr. Curtain up with their sashes; but, once he was awake, he was able to get free easily. Constance put Mr. Curtain back to sleep with another fit of anger. The children were looking for something else to tie him up with when Kate jumped through the window with her rope.

After Mr. Curtain was tied securely, Reynie told the others that he thought maybe they could trick Mr. Curtain’s Whisperer so badly that it would shut down. They tried to activate the Whisperer on their own but Mr. Curtain told them it would only activate if he were wearing the red helmet. Reynie noticed a flicker when Mr. Curtain began working the machine. He was horrified when Mr. Curtain told him he could now send messages to people in the room even if they weren’t wearing the blue helmet. Reynie, Sticky and Kate fought against Mr. Curtain’s attempts to brain sweep them until they received a sudden relief. Constance had sat down below the blue helmet. She resisted the machine and answered all of the questions incorrectly. The brain sweeping stopped because Mr. Curtain had to focus all of his attention on Constance. The children’s admiration of Constance grew as she put her focus into resisting the machine.



Just as Mr. Curtain felt Constance's resistance fading and he thought he could overcome her, there was a loud boom and Milligan's voice from the other side of the wall. Reynie used his powers of deduction to figure out which button to push on the wheelchair to open the panel to the Whispering Gallery. Once it was pushed, however, a keypad popped up for which they needed a code. Reynie deduced the code for the keypad was the word "control." When that didn't work, he tried the Dutch version of that word. Milligan grabbed for Kate as Sticky and Reynie went to Constance. They were surprised to hear the voices of Rhonda and Number Two behind them telling them they'd get Constance out. Mr. Benedict was there, too. He told Constance she'd done her job and completely confused the machine. When Mr. Benedict told her to climb down out of the machine, she surprised everyone by just sliding her wrists from the still buckled cuffs. Rhonda ushered the children toward the secret exit while Mr. Benedict took his brother's place at the machine. He asked Milligan to take Mr. Curtain and keep his brother away from the machine.

In the chapter "Escapes and Returns," Mr. Curtain escaped when Milligan laid him down on the sand. Milligan had no time to go after him as he said his mission was to get the children off the island safely. Milligan planned to go back to the island for Mr. Benedict once they reached the bridge gate. But, as he was preparing to get out of the car, Reynie stopped him. A figure that appeared to be Mr. Curtain was racing toward them in a wheelchair. Milligan tried to order Number Two to drive the children quickly away as he told Kate she couldn't come with him, but Reynie told them to all stop. He told them they had to wait to see what happened. The man they believed to be Mr. Curtain told the recruiters that surrounded him that the people in the car were decoys and their real enemies must still be on the island. He commanded all of the recruiters back on the island to search it. Meanwhile Mr. Curtain got out of the wheelchair and walked toward them. Milligan prepared his dart gun, but Reynie exclaimed that it was Mr. Benedict.

## Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that the members of the Mysterious Benedict Society learned why it was so important for them to work together as a team. It is also in this section they learned why Constance was believed by Mr. Benedict to be such an integral part of the team. It was Constance with her stubbornness that she confused the Whisperer so that Mr. Benedict was able to force it to shut down. The machine had not been built to withstand a child fighting against it. In the past it had dealt only with the minds of children that had been open and willing to work with the machine. The machine knew the answers Constance was giving it were false but didn't know how to handle these untrue answers.

Another important thing that happened in this section of the novel is that Milligan got his memory back. He remembered that Kate was his daughter. Although he'd already sworn to die for the children if he had to, the realization that he was now fighting for his own child made Milligan even more intent on saving them.



Meanwhile, in the control tower Reynie realized just how different Mr. Benedict and Mr. Curtain were. While Mr. Benedict enjoyed laughing and loved children, Mr. Curtain appeared to be afraid of children. He was also afraid of showing his weakness, his narcolepsy. He was so afraid someone would find out about his sleeping spells that he lived strapped in a motorized wheelchair so that the children would not see him slump over when he went to sleep. He also kept his eyes covered with reflective glasses so the students could not see that his eyes were closed in sleep.

Reynie and the others used this weakness in Mr. Curtain to get him to a position where they could tie him up and keep him from doing them harm. They also used the information they had gathered about him, like his love of control, in order to guess the correct code word to open his escape door from the Whispering Gallery.

## Discussion Question 1

How did Reynie discover the trigger for Mr. Curtain's narcolepsy? How did he suspect that Mr. Curtain had narcolepsy?

## Discussion Question 2

How did the members of the Mysterious Benedict Society work together to destruct Mr. Curtain's machine?

## Discussion Question 3

How did Kate get Constance to the top of the flag tower? Why did Kate decide to go back down and face the Executives?

## Vocabulary

apprehend, cahoots, savor, exultation, cusp, vouch, perceptive, conjured, plummeting, rebuffed, fainted, infuriated, petrified, pathetic, blathering, throttled, obstinate, valiant, shackled, goaded, inconspicuous, consternation, tousling, bravado, disoriented, gunwale, capsized, chafed, incapacitating, ferocity, retorted, fiend





# For Every Exit, an Entrance

## Summary

In the final chapter "For Every Exit, an Entrance," Milligan's memory returned. He knew several top secret government passwords. Since Kate had swiped some of Mr. Curtain's pamphlets and his journal, government officials were persuaded by Mr. Benedict to raid the Institute. The officials hoped to be able to arrest Mr. Curtain, but Mr. Benedict said that children were the only ones who could outfox him. Mr. Benedict was busy modifying the Whisperer so that those who had their brains swept could regain their memories.

Kate was happy to be reunited with her father. Milligan now seemed like the happiest man on earth instead of the saddest. To make things even better, Miss Perumal had decided to adopt Reynie. Sticky, who had not yet been reunited with his family, asked Mr. Benedict how he was able to disable the Whisperer. He responded that Constance had confused it enough that he was able to give it commands that finished the process and made it shut off entirely. Pointing out that Constance was the main reason the whole process had worked, Mr. Benedict sent her into the kitchen for a small box. While she was gone, Rhonda pulled a birthday cake out of a cabinet. When Constance returned, she reminded Mr. Benedict her birthday wasn't until the following month. Mr. Benedict said they should celebrate now and took the box from her. He put three candles on the cake. The children suddenly realized why Constance had acted as she had. She was only two years old.

The next day, Mr. Benedict met with Sticky privately and told him that his parents were there. He told Sticky that his parents had looked for him only halfheartedly because they were afraid of him. They were worried they couldn't give the boy a proper home and felt he might be better off without them. Mr. Benedict argued Sticky's parents were also being affected by the Messages telling them that the missing were only departed. However, Sticky's parents had begun searching for him even before the Whisperer was disabled, showing their resolve to find him by fighting against the messages they were getting. Sticky ran down to meet his parents and soon all those in the house, including a few government officials, joined in the reunion party.

As Kate and Reynie talked as they prepared for a snowball fight, Kate mentioned that Mr. Benedict would be adopting Constance. Constance would have two sisters, with Mr. Benedict having adopted Number Two and Rhonda also.

## Analysis

The other children in the Benedict society learned some significant information about Constance when they learned that even though she was intellectually advanced, she was only two years old. They realized this explained why Constance was so stubborn, cranky, sleepy and so small.



After Milligan regained his memory, he and Mr. Benedict were able to convince government officials to raid the Institute. Mr. Benedict doubted that his brother would ever be captured but was happy to be able to help some of the people who'd had their brains swept by Mr. Curtain's creation get their memories back.

Significant also in this section is that Sticky got to learn the truth about his parents and their feelings about him. They loved him and actually had thought he would be better off without them. Despite the fact the Whisperer was telling them the missing weren't really missing — a Message meant for those who had family members who disappeared because they'd been brain swept— Sticky's parents had loved him enough they'd gone out in search of him.

Sticky had been reunited with his parents and Kate with her father, but the other two members of the Mysterious Benedict Society got new families as well. In this final chapter. Miss Perumal announced her decision to adopt Reynie. Constance, meanwhile, had been adopted by Mr. Benedict.

## Discussion Question 1

What do the other children learn about Constance during this section of the novel? How does this discovery explain her strange behavior?

## Discussion Question 2

Why was it significant that Sticky's parents began looking for him before the Whisperer stopped sending its Messages?

## Discussion Question 3

What do you think will happen to Reynie now that the project is over?

## Vocabulary

skepticism, unbeknownst, hapless, valiantly, discombobulated, bemusedly, pernicious, morose, uproarious, spontaneous, gumption, ignominious, barrage, melee, prolonged, victuals



# Characters

## Reynard “Reynie” Muldoon

Reynie Muldoon is the main character and hero of the novel. He was one of the four children chosen by Mr. Benedict to save the world from an evil mastermind who had created widespread panic known as the Emergency by using subliminal messages delivered through television and radio. Reynie, who was only eleven, was the one who acted as the leader of the group.

Reynie was living at Stonetown Orphanage when his tutor, Miss Perumal, pointed out an article in the newspaper seeking gifted children. Reynie took the tests and was accepted into the program run by a reclusive genius named Mr. Benedict. One of Reynie’s strengths was that he was extremely good at figuring out riddles and puzzles. This talent came in handy for him as the messages sent to the children by Mr. Benedict and his staff were often sent in the form of riddles.

As an orphan, Reynie wanted a family and wondered if the way he felt for the four friends that made up the Mysterious Benedict Society was the way one would feel about his family. Miss Perumal was the only person with whom Reynie felt close. At the orphanage he was considered an oddball because he was smart and liked to read the newspaper and study. Reynie’s desire for a family as well acceptance often made him wonder if he was motivated by the proper force. As Mr. Benedict tried to convince Reynie to participate in his project, Reynie agreed to do so, but wondered if he had agreed only because he wanted so badly to be a part of a group doing something important. When Reynie was introduced to the Whisperer, he was afraid of it after his initial session because the machine made his fears fade and gave him the positive feedback he felt he was missing.

Ironically it was the Whisperer itself that calmed Reynie’s fears that he betray his friends when he was under the influence of that machine. It sensed Reynie was afraid he would betray them and told him that he would never do so and that he was brave. In the end of the novel, Reynie got his wish for a family as he was adopted by Miss Perumal.

## George “Sticky” Washington

George “Sticky” Washington was one of the two boys chosen to participate in Mr. Benedict’s project. Sticky wore glasses and had a nervous habit of taking them off and polishing them. He was described as being shy, anxious, and thin. He had a bald head and skin the color of tea. He earned the nickname “Sticky” because he said that everything he read stuck in his head. Sticky had run away from home after his parents began pushing him to participate in quiz shows so they could win prizes. He’d only pretended to run away at first but after he’d hidden from his parents for a week, they got more money to help find him than they had through the quiz shows for which they



signed him up. Sticky believed he'd heard his parents saying they were better off without him, so he decided to run away for good. In the end of the novel Sticky was reunited with his parents as they came looking for him and tracked him down at Mr. Benedict's house. It turned out they were afraid of him because he was so intelligent while they were only average. They had really believed he was probably better off without them.

One of Sticky's talents that helped the group out best was his ability to remember everything he saw or heard paired with his ability to read very quickly. This ability came in handy when the members of the group decided they needed to trick Mr. Curtain so they could see what was in his journal. Sticky, however, was plagued by the fear that he would not live up to other people's expectations. He didn't like to be called by his given name, the same name as the first president of the United States, because he didn't think that he could live up to that person's reputation. He was constantly afraid he would mess up and let his friends down.

## **Kate Wetherall**

Kate Wetherall is one of the two girls who were chosen to participate in Mr. Benedict's special project. She always carried around with her a bucket of tools she might need in any circumstance in which she found herself. Her name was a representation of herself as she truly weathered all that life had sent her way. She'd lost her mother when she was only an infant then her father had abandoned her when she was just two. Despite her hard life, she took it all in stride and smiled even though she was hurting.

Kate's talents included her ability to think outside the box as well as her ability to move stealthily around where another person might have been caught. Kate's shortcoming was her need to prove that she didn't need anyone and could do everything by herself. She wanted to be the hero. It was only at the point that there was no one around to help her that Kate finally realized she was not self-sufficient.

Mr. Benedict's project hit closer to home for Kate than any of the other children. Her father was one of the government officials that Mr. Benedict had brain swept using his Whisperer. Her father hadn't abandoned her he simply couldn't remember her. It was at the point that Kate desperately needed someone to save her that her father regained him memory and reached her just as the three Executives were beating her.

## **Constance Contraire**

Constance Contraire was one of the two girls chosen by Mr. Benedict to participate in his team of undercover operatives to be sent to the Institute. True to her name, Constance was constantly contrary. The other three members of the team noticed Constance was tiny but didn't give her size any real thought until after their project was finished and Mr. Benedict threw a party for Constance's third birthday. Looking back, the other members of the group realized that Constance's behavior was typical of a two year old. She was a two year old with exceptional intelligence. Although she seemed to



be a drag on the team during much of their time at the Institute, it was Constance who saved the day when Mr. Curtain attempted to brain sweep Reynie, Kate and Sticky during the final showdown in the Whispering Gallery. Constance strapped herself into the machine and redirected Mr. Curtain's attention with her ability to resist giving into the machine. By the time she was finished, Constance had befuddled the machine badly enough that Mr. Benedict was able to quickly shut it down.

## Milligan

Milligan was a 007-type character who was capable of disguising himself cleverly. He had been hired as the bodyguard for Mr. Benedict's operation after Mr. Benedict was the only one to believe Milligan's story about having his memory wiped out by Mr. Curtain. After he was kidnapped and his memory erased, Milligan was able to escape by using a key he'd fashioned out of his own toe and fingernails to open his shackles and put them on the arms and legs of his captors. He later told the children he was willing to die for them. He took his job seriously as he took credit for the note left in the rocks next to the harbor even though it was a note that Reynie had left for Milligan to find. Once he was caught, Milligan ate the note to keep Curtain and his men from knowing what it said. Milligan was put in the Waiting Room but dug his way out from the mud through the bottom of the room in time to save Kate, whom he remembered was his daughter. It turned out he'd given his name based on the last promise that he'd made to his daughter; that they would go to the mill again. Thus, he had believed his name was Milligan.

## Ledroptha Curtain

Ledroptha Curtain was the twin brother of Mr. Benedict from whom he was separated at birth. Mr. Curtain was the founder of the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened. He hoped to control people using the machine he called the Whisperer. People who got in his way or did not do as he wished had their brains swept, or their memories erased. He retrained these people whose memories were erased as Helpers, those who did the menial tasks around the Institute. Curtain also had his operatives kidnap orphans and runaways to bring to his school as special recruits. These students had the memories of the kidnapping erased so they did not remember the distress they were put under when they were brought to the school. Curtain was the creator of the Whisperer. He'd already used the machine to spread subliminal messages and create a sense of panic known as the Emergency. He ultimately planned to be a hero in the eyes of the world by coming up with a way to end the Emergency, a panic he had created.

## S.Q. Pedalian

S.Q. Pedalian was an Executive at the Institute. He was described as a gangly teen with huge feet. Notice that his surname is a derivative of pede, the Latin word for foot. His bumbling nature and lack of intelligence caused Kate to suspect the S.Q. stood for



Sasquatch. Because he didn't pay good attention to what was going on around him S.Q. allowed Reynie and Kate to get away with spying on Mr. Curtain and his Executives twice. The first time he was unable to give the Institute leaders a good description of the man who was spying on the Executives' training in the gymnasium. The second time when he followed Kate to the harbor, he accidentally demolished the footprints that she left behind in the sand keeping the Institute officials from being able to recognize she was the one spying on the meeting by matching her shoes to the footprints. He has a habit of trying to use common catch phrases but not being able to remember the correct wording and messing them up.

## Mr. Benedict

Mr. Benedict was a reclusive genius who had discovered that subliminal messages were being sent from the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened. He had been working for years to put together a group of children who could work as a team of undercover agents to find out who was sending the messages and what the purpose of the messages was. Mr. Benedict suffered from narcolepsy brought on by strong emotions. In his case the strong emotion was laughter. He said he wore the green suit because it calmed him, bringing on fewer of the episodes, but thought there was no use in life without laughter. After the children helped him to shut down the Whisperer and end the Emergency, Mr. Benedict went to work modifying the Whisperer so he could bring the memories back to people who had been brain swept by Mr. Curtain.

## Number Two

Number Two was the lady who proctored the tests that Reynie, Kate, Sticky, and Constance took. The lady was described as looking like a number two pencil as she was tall and thin, and often dressed completely in yellow. Mr. Benedict said the woman preferred being called Number Two to her given name. As a child, Number Two had taken Mr. Benedict's tests and had done well on them. Although he didn't have a team of children who could work with Number Two, Mr. Benedict decided to adopt her and put her to work on his project. Number Two had the habit of eating constantly because she rarely slept. After the second round of testing, Number Two was helped out of a tight spot with angry parents by Kate. At that point, Number Two made an executive decision to include Kate in the final phase of testing.

## Martina Crowe

Martina Crowe was a Messenger at the time that Reynie and the others became students at the Institute. Martina was jealous of Sticky and Reynie because they were passing their quizzes so easily and were promised they could move up as Messengers soon. Martina threatened the boys and made fun of them because of her jealousy. When Sticky was caught cheating, he told Mr. Curtain it was Martina who convinced him to cheat. Mr. Curtain, however, learned otherwise and promoted Martina to Executive.



She was the last Messenger to be made an Executive. Like many of the other characters in this novel, Martina Crowe is aptly named as her attitude resembles that of the bird that tends to be cocky and over confident.

## **Miss Perumal**

Miss Perumal was the lady hired by Stonetown Orphanage to tutor Reynie. She encouraged him to respond to the newspaper advertisement seeking intelligent children. After Reynie completed his task with Mr. Benedict, Miss Perumal decided to adopt Reynie. During his time in the Institute when Reynie was unable to sleep, he would compose letters to Miss Perumal.

## **Rhonda Kazembe**

Rhonda Kazembe was an adopted daughter of Mr. Benedict. She had been adopted by him after she took and passed the tests as a young girl. Rhonda tested the other children's willingness to help others and their willingness to cheat by losing her pencil before the test, then offering cheating as a reward for helping her get her pencil back.

## **Jackson and Jillson**

This pair were the two who led Reynie and the others on their first tour of the Institute. They were Executives who appeared often teaching classes and taking care of the students. At the end of the novel, the author played on the nursery rhyme of Jack and Jill as Kate dropped a bucket of water on the pair as they tried to climb a ladder after her. The bucket of water hit both of the Executives knocking them down the ladder and a hill.

## **Harry Harrison**

Harry Harrison was the Helper that Reynie questioned believing he was Mr. Bloomburg who had at one time worked as inspector of the Stonetown Orphanage. Reynie determined that Mr. Bloomburg had probably showed up at the Institute intending to perform an inspection. He assumed Mr. Curtain had the man brain swept and retrained as a Helper because he didn't want him reporting on the institute.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Kate's Bucket

Kate's bucket was a good, solid metal bucket filled with all sorts of things she might need. This bucket was painted fire engine red. The bucket was a symbol of Kate and her need to always be prepared to get herself out of any situation in which she found herself. The bucket contained things like a Swiss Army knife, a flashlight, a penlight, a bottle of glue, a bag of marbles, a slingshot, a spool of clear fishing twine, one pencil and one eraser, a kaleidoscope, and a horseshoe magnet.

## Kate's Kaleidoscope

Kate's kaleidoscope was a spyglass in disguise. It was a symbol of its owner as the toy was described by several people as being not only useless, but also a bad toy. People probably thought the same thing of Kate when they first met her. They didn't realize how many talents she had hidden under the surface, just as the kaleidoscope was a spyglass under the surface of the kaleidoscope lens.

## Mr. Curtain's Journal

Mr. Curtain's journal was a symbol of all of the information that Reynie and his friends needed to tell Mr. Benedict in order for him to learn what Mr. Curtain had planned. It was only through tricking Mr. Curtain that Reynie was able to get Sticky to look at the journal. Reynie convinced Mr. Curtain to put the bookmarks he'd given Mr. Curtain into the journal.

## The Violets

The violets, one in Mr. Benedict's office and the other in Mr. Curtain's office, are symbols of how different and how similar the twins were. Mr. Benedict's violet was a live violet but was in bad shape because he was so consumed with his project he didn't have time to care for it properly. Mr. Curtain's violet, however, was a fake plant. It required no care to look beautiful.

## A Fistful of Thin Blue Ribbons

Reynie used these blue ribbons to trick Mr. Curtain into opening his journal. He presented them to Mr. Curtain as a gift and insisted that he use them to mark the important places in his book right away. The ribbons are a symbol of Reynie's ability to manipulate people and circumstances to get what he needed from them.





## The Whisperer

The Whisperer was the name of the machine that Mr. Curtain used both to extract Messages from students' brains as well as to brain sweep people so they would lose their memories. Although Jackson believed the Whisperer was what the school was all about and was a positive symbol, Reynie and his friends were aware of all of the bad things the machine could do to people.

## A Brown Package

Mr. Curtain used this brown package to symbolize the way that his Whisperer sent a variety of messages in one single package. He asked the boys how many items they saw when they looked at the box. When they said one, he was able to surprise them by dumping out the many pieces of paper he had stored in the box.

## The White Knight

Mr. Benedict used the white knight, the item that he and Reynie had talked about during one of their conversations and was included on one of the tests, to show Reynie what he should do in his predicament where he believed the Whisperer was too strong and he would fall to its encouragement.

## Kate's Marble

While Kate was trying to break into the tower where the Whisperer was kept, she threw a marble to distract Jackson who was standing guard. Jackson later showed this marble as evidence that someone had been in the building with him other than a mouse. Luckily, Kate had the forethought to discard the rest of her marbles and her slingshot after she escaped from the tower.

## Sticky's Spectacles

Sticky's spectacles and his habit of polishing them are outward signs of his inward anxiety and fear.



# Settings

## The Monk Building

The Monk Building was the building in the city of Stonetown to which Reynie had to report to take his second round of tests for Mr. Benedict's project. It was at this building that he met Kate and Sticky, who became his team members.

## Mr. Benedict's House

Milligan took Kate, Reynie and Sticky to this house after they passed their third round of testing. The entrance to house and most of the first floor was a maze through which the children had to work their way in order to pass the final test. Once they completed the maze the children were fed dinner and introduced to Mr. Benedict. It was in this house they were introduced to their final team member, Constance, and where they prepared for the project. The four children returned to this house after they completed their mission at the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened.

## The Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened

The Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened was the school created and funded by Mr. Curtain. He used the school and its students as subjects for his experiments. The four members of the Benedict Society became students at this school in order to help Mr. Benedict determine what Mr. Curtain was planning with his messages. While there, the students did manage to discover Mr. Curtain's plan and foil it.

## Nomansan Island

Nomansan Island was the Island on which the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened was located.

## The Waiting Room

The Waiting Room was the room that Sticky was sent to when he was caught cheating. The dark room was filled with smelly mud and crawling insects. After Milligan was taken to this room, he dug down through the mud and managed to escape from it in order to help his daughter.



## **The Whispering Gallery**

The Whispering Gallery was the place where Mr. Curtain kept his machine, the Whisperer. It was here that Messengers were taken to take advantage of their special privileges. It was in this gallery that Mr. Curtain's machine was disoriented by Constance then completely discombobulated by Mr. Benedict and forced to shut down.

## **Sticky and Reynie's Dorm Room**

It was in Sticky's and Reynie's dorm room that the Mysterious Benedict Society had their secret, after dark meetings. It was also from this room that they sent their messages in Morse code using a flashlight to Mr. Benedict and his helpers.



# Themes and Motifs

## The Importance of Teamwork

The importance of working together as a team is a major theme in this novel. Mr. Benedict told the children before they left on their mission that in order to be successful, they would have to work together. They remembered this advice even when their personalities clashed and they considered trying to work alone. In the end, it was only with each of their own unique abilities that they were able to help Mr. Benedict successfully thwart Mr. Curtain's plan.

Even in the first pages of the book, teamwork is mentioned when Reynie and Sticky first met. They discussed their performance on the tests. Reynie had figured out the test was a puzzle with the answers to the first half of the questions given in the last half of the questions. Sticky didn't notice the answers hidden in the test questions, but he did well on the test because he actually knew the answers to the questions. Reynie told Sticky he believed they would make a good team as they each had unique abilities that complimented the abilities of the other.

It was these unique abilities that Mr. Benedict hoped would come into play when he sent the four children to the Institute. Reynie had the ability to figure out riddles and puzzles. This ability came in handy when the children had to decode messages, usually sent in the form of riddles, from Mr. Benedict giving them instructions about their next steps in their mission. Additionally, Reynie also had leadership abilities. These abilities helped him to keep his team of workers focused and working together.

Sticky's special talent was his ability to read quickly and remember what he had read. This talent came in handy not only when Sticky was faced with the daily quizzes he needed to pass in order to become a Messenger, it also helped out the team when they needed to see what Mr. Curtain had written in his journal. Even though Sticky was able to get only glimpses of the pages of the journal for a few seconds while Mr. Curtain inserted bookmarks that he'd had specially made for the man, Sticky remembered what he saw and was able to report it later to his friends.

Kate was strong, willful, and adventurous. She had the ability to sneak around without people noticing her. Her unusual way of thinking outside the box helped her to come up with unique ways to solve problems. Even though she couldn't find a way into the Whispering Gallery through the building, Kate figured a way to enter through a window. Although she seemed to slow down the team for a good deal of their time together, Even Constance had an importance place on the team. She was ultimately the one who used her stubborn resistance to befuddle the Whisperer, leaving it in a condition that Mr. Benedict could easily force it to shut itself down.



## Belonging/Acceptance

The need to belong and feel accepted by a group is an important theme in this novel. Because Mr. Benedict's group was comprised of orphans and runaways, the children felt they didn't have a place where they felt accepted or belonged. The novel addressed both this need to be accepted as well as the human nature to do whatever it took to feel part of a larger group.

Although the need to belong didn't seem to be as important to Kate and Constance, it was never a thought far from Sticky's and Reynie's minds. Reynie had always felt like he was out of place in the orphanage where he grew up. He was an intelligent, studious boy in a home filled with other boys who mocked him and made fun of the fact he liked to study and learn. Reynie had always dreamed of having a family. He wondered throughout the novel if the way he felt for Sticky, Kate, and Constance was the way one felt about his family members. This strong desire to be part of a group, however, gave Reynie a moment of distraction when he first agreed to work with Mr. Benedict on his project. Reynie wondered if he was agreeing to work on the project because he wanted to put himself into a dangerous position or if he just wanted to be part of a group so badly he didn't care what consequences it might bring.

Sticky also struggled with his own feelings of being an oddball. He'd run away from his family because he felt his intelligence was being manipulated by his parents. He was being used to earn them money by competing in quiz shows. Before he left home for good, he believed he'd heard his father say that they were better off without Sticky. At the end of the novel, Sticky learned that he'd actually misunderstood what his parents had said. They had actually believed that Sticky would be better off without them because he was so smart and they were so average. Sticky, like Reynie, found himself drawn to join groups just because he wanted to feel he belonged to something. For instance, when he and Reynie became Messengers, they were invited to sit with the other Messengers. Reynie had turned down the invitation, preferring to sit with his own friends. Sticky was close to getting up and joining the Messengers. He later chided himself for being so easily manipulated and lured away from his friends just because he wanted to be part of something considered important by the other students at the school.

## Confronting Fear

Confronting one's fear is a major theme in the novel. Each of the children who made up the Mysterious Benedict Society confronted and overcame a fear during the course of the story. For Reynie, he was confronted by the fear that he would betray his friends. Sticky was afraid of everything, especially the unknown. Kate feared that she would be put into a situation that she could not be self-sufficient. Even though Constance never mentioned her fear, it can be implied that she was fearful of taking her place in the Whisperer, but did so to save her friends.



Reynie's fear did not fully mature until the first time he encountered the Whisperer. After he realized how comfortable and free of fear the machine made him, Reynie was afraid that he would betray Mr. Benedict and his friends just to enjoy the feeling. Reynie's fear was so strong that he was afraid to go forward with the project because he felt he was so weak when it came to the Whisperer that he would give up his friends too easily. Ironically, it was this machine that made Reynie realize that he was strong enough to fight the machine and keep his friends safe. As soon as the machine's helmet was on his head, the Whisperer picked up Reynie's fear that he would betray his friends. The machine did not know why Reynie had this fear; but, just as it had been programmed to do, it calmed Reynie's fear by telling him that he was brave and that he would not betray his friends.

Sticky was scared of most everything, particularly the unknown. He was forced to face his fear of the unknown when he was sent to the Waiting Room after he was caught cheating. Although he didn't overcome all of his fears with that experience, he seemed to have more confidence. Just like Reynie, Sticky was afraid of the Whisperer once he experienced the soothing feelings it provided. One of his more specific fears was that he would not live up to other people's expectations. When Reynie asked Sticky to take his turn in the Whisperer first during their second trip to the Whispering Gallery, Sticky hesitated because he was afraid he'd mess up Reynie's plans. Even though he was scared, Sticky stepped forward and went in the machine first, allowing Reynie to try to get the attention of Mr. Benedict and his workers.

More than anything, Kate wanted to be independent. She was the type of person who wanted to prove that she didn't need anyone's help to take care of herself. Although this desire for independence may seem healthy, in Kate it covered up a fear of needing help and having no one be there for her. Because Kate knew she was better equipped than Constance to face the Executives when the girls were trying to break into the flag tower, she sent Constance up and dropped to the ground to face the Executives. Even at the point that Kate thought she was most alone, Kate was not aware that help was coming in the form of her father.

Constance didn't talk much about her fears but as her actions in the Whispering Gallery were described before she took her place in the Whisperer, it was clear she was afraid of what she was about to do. Her friends were on the brink of being brain swept by Mr. Curtain. It was noted she had retreated to a corner where she looked more "frightened, stubborn, and miserable than ever" (p. 455). Constance must have been frightened because she realized that she had to be the one to take her place in the machine in order to save her friends.

## Control

The need to have control was a major concern for Ledroptia Curtain. His need for control was shown by his act of strapping himself into a wheelchair as well as the ironfisted way in which he ran the Institute. Mr. Curtain's love of being in control was ultimately what allowed the children to get the best of him.



Mr. Curtain once lectured Reynie on the importance of control. He told him that control was the key. Even if one could not achieve perfect control, he said that one could achieve the illusion of perfect control, which was just as good. When Reynie and Sticky were first taken to visit the Whispering Gallery, Mr. Curtain again bragged about the way he had the Whisperer and its conditions perfectly controlled.

Although Mr. Curtain liked the illusion of control, Reynie realized that he was far from having himself under control. Reynie suspected that Mr. Curtain suffered from narcolepsy just as his brother did. Reynie thought that Mr. Curtain strapped himself into his wheelchair and wore reflective glasses because he did not want his students to know when he had his attacks of narcolepsy. It took Reynie only a short time to realize that it was extreme anger that caused Mr. Curtain to go to sleep.

It was ultimately Mr. Curtain's love of control that was his downfall when all four members of the Mysterious Benedict Society confronted him in the Whispering Gallery. Kate's father had found his way into the flag tower through Mr. Curtain's escape route. He called for the children to let him into the Whispering Galley, but they needed a code to open the door. They guessed the code was the word "control." When that didn't work they used the Danish word for control. It was this code that worked.

## Riddles

It was Reynie's ability to figure out riddles and puzzles that got him included in the Mysterious Benedict Society. This ability came in handy for him when Mr. Benedict and his friends sent Morse code messages in riddle form for the children to figure out. Reynie was instrumental in thinking over the messages and coming up with the answers.

Reynie was the only one of the three children who discussed their tests who discovered that the second test was a puzzle. As he read through the questions, he realized the answers to the first set of questions were included in the second set of questions. It was also Reynie who figured out from clue that Rhonda gave him that he was to follow the squiggly arrows in order to solve the maze that was the last test he was given in preparation for Mr. Benedict's project.

Being able to figure out riddles was important for the children once they arrived on the island. Information from Mr. Benedict was sent in the form of riddles so that if someone else were to catch onto the messages, they would not be able to figure out what they were discussing. These riddles were given in Morse code so the students first had to determine what the message said. Once they had the message, they had to try to determine what Mr. Benedict was talking about. In the first riddle they solved, the students had to know that Gemini was a sign of twins, meaning that Mr. Curtain and Mr. Benedict were twins.

# Styles

## Point of View

This story is told from the third person point of view of an omniscient narrator. The narration focuses most closely on Reynie, the boy who acted as leader of the Mysterious Benedict Society. While the story could have been told from the first person point of view of Reynie, it would not have been as effective because the thoughts and emotions of other characters could not have been demonstrated. Also, if the novel were told from the first person point of view, any action that Reynie was not a part of —Kate’s spying on Mr. Curtain’s conversation with S.Q. and Martina, for instance — could have been included in the novel only if Kate were to have described the entire situation to him. This third person omniscient narration works well for the book as it allows the reader to focus on Reynie and his story, but the narration also acknowledges the importance of the other three children who worked with him to bring Mr. Curtain’s project to an end.

## Language and Meaning

While the book is tagged as being for children, the vocabulary used in the novel is very advanced. In some cases, the meanings of the words that might be unfamiliar to a preteen or early teen are given by characters in the novel. In other cases, however, meanings to words that might be unfamiliar are not given. The reader would have to rely on context clues or look the words up in a dictionary. Additionally, common items are often called by colloquial terms. For instance, Sticky was not described as wearing glasses but as wearing spectacles. Also, Kate referred to her telescope disguised as a kaleidoscope as a spyglass. Throughout the novel, pants are called trousers. These word choices give the novel a foreign feel almost as if were taking place in England.

## Structure

This 487-page novel is divided into 39 chapters. Each chapter is given a label as a title, but is not numbered. These label titles generally refer to the central idea in that chapter. For instance, in the chapter “The Naming of the Crew” the four children sit down together the night before they are to go to the Institute and come up with a name for themselves. Notice also in this case that the title plays on the name of a play by William Shakespeare “The Taming of the Shrew.” Chapter breaks are noted with an illustration that captures some aspect of the coming chapter. These illustrations also have the label title for the chapter incorporated into it.

The story is told in a linear fashion with no flashbacks. Any background information needed is given by one character to another through dialogue. A good deal of the story is told through dialogue with probably more than half the text devoted to dialogue with



the other half devoted to descriptions of the unique characters and places that are included in the story.



## Quotes

If he happened to be late, or bring two pencils, or forget his eraser, or in any other way deviate from the instructions, he would not be allowed to take the test, and that would be that.

-- Narrator (Pencils, Erasers and Disqualifications paragraph 1)

**Importance:** For the second test that Reynie was to take in hopes of being allowed into a program that would offer him special opportunities, Reynie had a list of specific rules he was to follow or else he would be disqualified. He later learned that Constance was allowed to take the test even though she brought 37 pencils with her.

Reynie did, but he had always been alone in this, had always been considered an oddball.

-- Narrator (Pencils, Erasers and Disqualification paragraph 6)

**Importance:** This quote points out one of the strange characteristics of Reynie's personality. Even though he was a young boy, he always read the newspaper, a habit that caused the other children in the orphanage to make fun of him.

It's all part of the test, you know. Being hungry and irritable. It's important to see how you behave when other children are getting doughnuts and you're getting nothing, and how well your mind works despite being tired and thirsty.

-- Rhonda (The Trouble With Children, Or, Why They Are Necessary paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Rhonda apologized to the children because they had been made to wait so long with no food. They were told that their strange situation was a condition of their testing because Mr. Benedict needed to know how they would act if they were made to wait, especially if they were hungry and thirsty.

She was very little indeed, and very pudgy, too, which made her almost exactly the size and shape of a fire hydrant (a resemblance strengthened by her red raincoat and rosy red cheeks). Reynie's first impulse was to feel sorry for her — it must be difficult to be so much smaller than other children — but then Constance gave him a cross look, as if she positively disliked him, and Reynie's sympathy diminished."

-- Narrator (The Trouble With Children, Or, Why They Are Necessary paragraph 79)

**Importance:** The smallest, and it turned out the youngest member of the group, and her contrary personality is described in this quote. At first, Constance appeared to be the least appropriate member of the group; however, it turned out that her stubborn personality saved the entire group.

For years now,' Mr. Benedict went on, 'I have conducted these tests in hopes of forming a team of children to help me on an urgent project.'"

-- Mr. Benedict (The Trouble With Children, Or, Why They Are Necessary paragraph 88)



**Importance:** When Mr. Benedict told the children about the project he wanted them to undertake, he explained to them that he'd been trying for years to put together an ideal team of children to help him with his project. The team made up of Reynie, Sticky, Kate and Constance was the first he thought would be capable of completing his project.

And yet, although in an important part of every mind this child's messages are being heard, understood, and taken seriously, in another part — the part that is aware of itself — the messages remain undetected.

-- Mr. Benedict (The Sender and the Messages paragraph 119)

**Importance:** Mr. Benedict explained to the four children who were to participate in his program how the Messages were absorbed by the brain but not really registering because they were being sent using the voice of a child.

Of course, it's possible you enjoy watching an occasional TV show, or listening to the radio every now and then, but in general you find you don't like it. This is because your minds, so unwilling to be deceived, are avoiding exposure to the messages."

-- Mr. Benedict (The Sender and the Messages paragraph 141)

**Importance:** Mr. Benedict told the children they generally didn't watch television or listen to the radio because even though they didn't realize it, their unconscious minds were picking up on the messages being sent through these devices.

But to the Institute you must certainly go. You are to be my secret agents."

-- Mr. Benedict (The Men in the Maze paragraph 72)

**Importance:** The four children learned they would be sent to the Institute where they would work as spies or secret agents for Mr. Benedict. Mr. Benedict hoped they'd be able to find out who was sending the Messages and why those Messages were being sent.

One of the few things we know about the Institute is that certain privileges are granted only to top students. No doubt it is these children the Sender uses to send his hidden messages."

-- Mr. Benedict (Codes and Histories paragraph 4)

**Importance:** One of the goals for the four children was to become top students at the Institute so they could earn the special privileges given to top students. Mr. Benedict hoped that access to these special privileges would help him to understand what the Sender was trying to accomplish.

Why I was there I can't say, but Mr. Benedict is convinced I was a secret agent, an employee of a government agency long since dismantled.

-- Milligan (Codes and Histories paragraph 84)

**Importance:** Although Milligan couldn't remember anything about his past, Mr. Benedict believed he was a government agent who had his brain washed by the Sender. Milligan,



unlike the others who had their memories erased, had been able to escape from the island on which the Institute was located. When he told others about his experience, he discovered that Mr. Benedict was the only one who believed him.

Nothing else, only a sense of duty. I know the Sender is out to do harm. I feel obliged to stop him. Or at the very least, to try.”

-- Milligan (Codes and Histories paragraph 94)

**Importance:** Milligan told the children the only reason he was working with Mr. Benedict was to keep others from being hurt in the same way that he was.

The voices aren't the point. They are the side effect, the unintended consequence of a dark and ambitious undertaking.

-- Mr. Benedict (The Thing to Come paragraph 29)

**Importance:** Mr. Benedict told the children that when the Sender turned up the power all the way on the transmitters, they would probably be able to hear voices in their heads. Although the children were concerned they would feel they were going crazy, Mr. Benedict said he felt hearing the voices wouldn't be the worst part of what the Sender had planned.

And so the question was not whether Reynie could trust Mr. Benedict, but whether he could trust himself. Who in his right mind would actually want to be put in danger just because that let him be a part of something?”

-- Narrator (The Thing to Come paragraph 38)

**Importance:** As an orphan who had always felt out of place, Reynie wondered if he was agreeing to undertake Mr. Benedict's project only because he wanted to be a part of something.

There was some kind of truth hidden in there, Reynie thought, but it was camouflaged with nonsense.

-- Narrator (Lessons Learned paragraph 10)

**Importance:** As Reynie contemplated the lessons he was learning at the Institute, he thought there might have been a hint of truth in them, but it was hidden inside of a great deal of information that didn't make any sense.

What's more, they shelter more than one wicked official — like poison worms in that poison apple.

-- Jillson (Poison Apples, Poison Worms paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This statement by Jillson included one of the catch phrases that the children heard in the recorded messages that Mr. Benedict played when they first arrived at his house. Reynie remembered the catch phrase when Jillson repeated it in one of her lectures.



Mr. Curtain's boosting the power," Reynie said gravely, and when Kate and Sticky looked at him, still not comprehending, he said, "It's the hidden messages. Our minds are reacting to them."

-- Reynie (Poison Apples, Poison Worms paragraph 22)

**Importance:** At first, Reynie, Kate and Sticky didn't understand what was happening to them when they began to feel grouchy and hostile. When Constance told them she could hear voices, Reynie realized Mr. Curtain was increasing the power on the Messages, causing their irritability.

Her insolent behavior contradicts her quiz scores. I don't understand her motivations, and when I don't understand something, Reynard, it is natural that I don't trust it."

-- Mr. Curtain (Tests and Invitations paragraph 28)

**Importance:** During a meeting with Reynie, Mr. Curtain confided in the boy that he didn't trust Constance. Reynie was half joking when he told Mr. Curtain the best way to handle Constance was to treat her like an enemy by keeping her close.

How strangely similar the two men were, Reynie thought, and yet how utterly different.

-- Narrator (Tests and Invitations paragraph 40)

**Importance:** Although Mr. Benedict and Mr. Curtain showed some distinct similarities, their goals, motivations and attitudes toward life were totally different.

Everything is just as it should be."

-- Two Helpers (Everything As It Should Be paragraph 34)

**Importance:** The Helpers were evidently taught to repeat this phrase to anyone who asked them any questions about their lives or their roles as Helpers. Reynie figured out that it was these people who had gone against Mr. Curtain in some way and had had their brains swept so that they remembered nothing of their past.

Oh, no, Reynie, you don't grow out of it. It's just that once you acquire a family, you no longer need to wish for one."

-- Mr. Benedict (Of Families Lost and Found paragraph 26)

**Importance:** Reynie remembered that when he asked Mr. Benedict, who was also an orphan, if he ever thought about having a family, Mr. Benedict said that he had acquired a family through his friends. He argued that friends could take the place of a blood-related family.

For all his caution and wits, he was turning out to be a dangerous person to be close to.

-- Narrator (Punishments and Promotions paragraph 67 )

**Importance:** Reynie, who doesn't like to cause anyone pain or trouble, was disturbed because as he worked to help Mr. Benedict find out what Mr. Curtain had in his plans for the world, he was inadvertently causing trouble for other people by his actions.



Control, boys! Control is key. The Whispering Gallery is perfectly controlled.”  
-- Mr. Curtain (The Whisperer paragraph 25)

**Importance:** As Mr. Curtain told Reynie and Sticky about the Whispering Gallery, he told them the area was perfectly controlled. It was in this perfectly controlled area that Mr. Curtain was at his happiest.

The Whisperer requires the assistance of unsophisticated minds. Children’s minds. You see, though my machine is stunningly complex, its mental processes still pale in comparison to my own. For the Whisperer to do, well, certain things I wish it to do — I will not waste time explaining details you cannot comprehend — my thoughts must first pass through a less sophisticated mind. This is where my Messengers come in.  
-- Mr. Curtain (The Whisperer paragraph 37)

**Importance:** Mr. Curtain dumbed down his explanation of how the Whisperer worked when he explained it to Reynie and Sticky. His cockiness and attitude of self-importance was apparent in the way he described his own intelligence as well as the capabilities of his machine.

If you have mastered the material, then the proper phrase will conjure it — like the magic words that coax a genie from a bottle. Do you see?”  
-- Mr. Curtain (The Whisperer paragraph 55)

**Importance:** Mr. Curtain indicated just what the children had suspected about the catch phrases. These phrases carried with them all of the information from the lectures that they had been hearing during their time at the Institute.

Was that all it took to sway him — being asked? Did he want so much to be wanted that he would do, well, anything?  
-- Narrator (Open Sesame paragraph 21)

**Importance:** When the other Messengers asked Sticky and Reynie to eat lunch with them, Sticky was surprised how easy it was for him to almost be swayed to leave his friends because he wanted so much to be part of what he thought was a more prestigious group.

Mr. Curtain thinks fear is the most important element in human personality, remember? It’s why the Whisperer has so much appeal to Messengers — it soothes their fears, and Mr. Curtain uses that to motivate them.  
-- Reynie (Practice Makes Perfect paragraph 26)

**Importance:** In this quote, Reynie described how Mr. Curtain was manipulating people’s fear so that Mr. Curtain could present a solution that would soothe their fears and make him a hero for solving the problem he created.

The Institute will become the Amnesia Sanctuary — he needs a place to put all the people who resist him!”



-- Reynie (Practice Makes Perfect paragraph 40)

**Importance:** Reynie suddenly realized that Mr. Curtain planned to announce that there was an outbreak of amnesia as a way to cover up all the people who were losing their memory because of his procedures.

He was worried, deeply worried, that the Whisperer had revealed to him who he truly was.

-- Narrator (Know Thine Enemy paragraph 26)

**Importance:** Because the Whisperer made him feel so comfortable, Reynie worried that he would give into its desire to get the truth from him. He was afraid it would make him betray Mr. Benedict and his friends. Reynie also doubted that he had the strength to hold out against the machine.

How was he supposed to resist the Whisperer when it was the one thing that offered relief? What he needed was help — some encouragement, some guidance, anything to bolster his resolve. The others all looked to him. Who was he supposed to look to?

-- Narrator (A Chess Lesson paragraph 30)

**Importance:** Reynie realized how much pressure was on him as the unofficial leader of the group when he received the bit of support and relief that the Whisperer offered him. In this quote, he tried to justify his desire for this support

Not only would she be regarded as a hero, she would prove once and for all that she could do everything alone — that she needed no one's help.

-- Narrator (The Mouse in the Culvert paragraph 16)

**Importance:** Although Mr. Benedict had told the members of the group from the beginning that success in their project deepened on teamwork, Kate continued to want to be a hero and solve the project by herself.

The only way fears truly disappear is if you confront them. But who in the world wishes to confront his or her worst fears?"

-- Mr. Curtain (The Mouse in the Culvert paragraph 57)

**Importance:** In this quote, Mr. Curtain acknowledged both that the only way to get rid of a fear was to confront it and that few people wanted to confront their own fears.

Didn't Mr. Benedict tell us that we must rely upon one another in all things? That every single one of us is essential to the success of the team? We have to take into account that we need each other.

-- Reynie (Sacrifices, Narrow Escapes and Something Like a Plan paragraph 79)

**Importance:** Reynie told his group members that he thought they would need to focus on working together against the Whisperer in order to overcome it. Reynie felt that by working together, it would take the pressure off him.



It's a riddle of some kind — important advice. We just have to figure out what it means.”  
-- Reynie (Sticky's Advice paragraph 14)

**Importance:** When the children get a message stating “laughter is the best medicine” they were forced once again to figure out the meaning of the riddle that Mr. Benedict had sent.

He'd never understood this tendency of his — he knew only that he rarely lived up to expectation, and for this reason had clung so fiercely to his nickname. Any boy with a name like George Washington must surely have great things expected of him.  
-- Narrator (Sticky's Advice paragraph 91)

**Importance:** One of the fears that Sticky had to face during his time at the Institute was his fear that he would not live up to the expectations of other people.

The plan had called for all four of them. That was what Mr. Benedict had said mattered most, and it was what they'd agreed upon only yesterday. All four of them. That was the plan. No way would she be the one to mess it up. In a flash Kate was at the bedside, shaking Constance like a maraca. “Wake up, Constance! It's an emergency!”  
-- Kate (The Great Kate Weather Machine paragraph 13)

**Importance:** Although Kate was tempted to leave Constance behind when she went to help Reynie and Sticky in the flag tower, she remembered Mr. Benedict instructing them that it would take all four of them to succeed in their mission.

He had confronted his worst fear, and now it was gone. No need for the Whisperer to deny it — there was nothing left to deny!  
-- Narrator (Stands and Falls paragraph 43)

**Importance:** Ironically, it was the Whisperer that gave Reynie the reassurance that he would not betray his friends to take that machine on and stand firm in his beliefs.

The bitter irony wasn't lost on Kate: The moment she finally admitted to herself she needed help, there was no help to be found.  
-- Narrator (Stands and Falls paragraph 82)

**Importance:** Although she'd always wanted to be a hero on her own, Kate suddenly realized that at the very minute she needed help the most, she was alone.

This was Constance's great gift — the gift of stubborn independence — and she was bringing it to bear with all her might.  
-- Narrator (The Best Medicine paragraph 86)

**Importance:** It turned out that although she'd seemed to drag down the rest of the operation, Constance became the queen of the Mysterious Benedict Society when she was able to successfully befuddle the Whisperer with her stubbornness.





Daddy, may we come to the mill again?' To which I replied, 'Of course, Katie-Cat. Of course we'll come to the mill again.

-- Milligan (Escapes and Returns paragraph 18)

**Importance:** Once Milligan discovered his background, he knew why he had chosen the name Milligan. Even though his memory was gone, his subconscious remembered the last promise he had given his daughter; that they could go to the mill again.

It was a tense moment. And a curious one, too — for every person in the car, adult and child alike, realized just then that they trusted this eleven-year-old boy quite without reservation. If Reynie Muldoon asked them to do something, if he promised them something, they would do what he asked and believe every word.

-- Narrator (Escapes and Returns paragraph 28)

**Importance:** Although he was only eleven, it was clear that Reynie had made an impression on both the children and adults with which he worked because they stopped and waited when he told them to instead of running from the man whom they believed was Mr. Curtain coming toward them on his motorized wheelchair.

Their mind-muddying effects were daily diminishing, the Emergency was fading, and minds long closed to truth were opening again, like flowers craving sunlight.

-- Narrator (For Every Exit, an Entrance paragraph 2)

**Importance:** It was noted that as soon as Mr. Curtain's Messages were stopped, everyone in general began to feel better with their feelings of paranoia fading. Even those whose minds had been exposed to these Messages for years began to open to the truth again.

A toddler,' Sticky murmured to himself. 'No wonder she was always so sleepy, so cranky, so stubborn. She's two!'"

-- Sticky (For Every Exit, an Entrance paragraph 39)

**Importance:** After they returned from their project, the other children in the Mysterious Benedict Society learned that Constance's strange stature and behavior was normal for her because she was only two years old.

It may also interest you to know,' Mr. Benedict continued, 'that your parents began their search before we disabled the Whisperer. So determined were they to bring you back, you see, their minds began to resist the broadcasts. Only a powerful love could have mounted such a resistance.'"

-- Mr. Benedict (For Every Exit, an Entrance paragraph 55)

**Importance:** Although Sticky had thought that his parents truly did not love him and did not want him around, he learned differently when he found they had come looking for him even before he and the group had successfully disabled the Whisperer.