

The Vile Village Study Guide

The Vile Village by Lemony Snicket

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Plot Summary

The Vile Village is the seventh installment in the thirteen-part Series of Unfortunate Events, following the three Baudelaire children as they search for their missing friends in their new home, the Village of Fowl Devotees.

At the opening of the novel, the three Baudelaire children, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny, sit in their lawyer's office waiting to hear their fate. They have recently escaped the clutches of their evil uncle, Count Olaf, and are searching for a new guardian. Since there are no longer any relatives willing to take the three children in and risk Count Olaf's wrath, the children's lawyer has decided to follow the aphorism, "It takes a village to raise a child," and place the Baudelaires in the custody of an entire community. The Baudelaire children know that the V.F.D. is somehow related to the whereabouts of their missing friends, the Quagmire triplets, and do not argue when they hear they will be sent there. They hope that in addition to staying safe from their evil uncle, they will uncover the whereabouts of their friends.

As soon as the children arrive in the V.F.D., they see that it will not be a nurturing environment. The entire village is covered in crows: crows in the trees, atop every building, covering the streets. In addition, the community is run by a set of ridiculous and strict rules that govern all behavior, from when people are allowed to speak, to what machines can be used (none). In exchange for food and housing, the children are expected to do all the villagers' chores: making beds, mowing lawns, polishing doorknobs, and making ice cream sundaes. They work from sun up to sun down without complaint, and yet the villagers are still not satisfied. The only bright spot in the Baudelaire children's day is their evenings with Hector, the handyman who houses them. Although Hector is terrified of the Council of Elders and goes mute with fear around them, he silently protests their strict control by secretly collecting forbidden books and mechanical items. As the children work each day, they struggle to figure out where Count Olaf could be hiding the Quagmire triplets. Periodically, mysterious couplets written by Isabella Quagmire appear outside Hector's home, giving the Baudelaires further clues as to the triplets' hidden whereabouts.

One afternoon, the Baudelaires are given the startling news that Count Olaf has been arrested outside the V.F.D. They are overjoyed, believing that their miserable lives hiding from Olaf's evil clutches is finally over. At Olaf's trial, however, the Baudelaires are devastated to realize that the man being held in the village jail is not Count Olaf at all, but a look-alike. Despite the innocent man's pleas, the Council of Elders sentences him to death. He is to be burned at the stake the next morning. When the Council arrives to burn the man, Jacques, at the stake the next morning, they find that he is already dead, and they must hire an out-of-town detective to solve the mystery: who killed Jacques? The flashy detective who arrives on the scene is none other than Count Olaf in a ridiculous costume. Although the Baudelaires try to tell the Council the truth, the adults refuse to listen to the children. Count Olaf, in his detective disguise, announces that the Baudelaire children killed Jacques and that they, too, must be burned at the stake.



As Count Olaf drags the children to the village jail, he reveals his secret plan: two of the Baudelaire children will be killed the next morning as planned. The third, however, will be forced to live out their lives with Olaf, ensuring that he has constant access to the Baudelaire inheritance. The children are horrified and know that they must band together to escape from jail. Using their ingenuity, the children use bread and water to weaken the mortar of the jail cell's brick walls, and their wooden table as a battering ram to bust through their cell. As they work, the children also solve the mystery of the couplet clues. When they read the short poems together, they realize that Count Olaf is holding the Quagmire triplets inside the village water fountain. They run from the jail cell to the Fountain and break it open, rescuing their friends. The five children sprint to the safest place in town, Hector's house, but are stopped along the way by an angry mob still hoping to burn them at the stake.

The Quagmire children manage to escape in Hector's hot air balloon, but the Baudelaire children are not so lucky. They watch with desperation as their best friends in the world float away to safety. When the angry mob descends on the Baudelaires, they manage to reveal Count Olaf's true identity before he escapes. The Baudelaire children know they can stay in the V.F.D. no longer. They walk away from the village with a great sadness in their hearts. Their series of unfortunate events continues.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

At the opening of the novel, the three Baudelaire children, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny, read in the daily newspaper that their best friends, the Quagmire triplets, have been kidnapped by the Baudelaire's evil uncle, Count Olaf. Count Olaf has a long history of kidnapping the children of wealthy orphans in the hopes of getting his hands on their money.

The children read this terrible news while they sit in the office of Mr. Poe, the man who has been in charge of placing the Baudelaire children in care ever since their parents were killed in a terrible fire. In the past year, the Baudelaire children have lived in many different homes with a variety of terrible results, most at the hands of Count Olaf. Because of this, there are no longer any relatives, however distant, willing to take the Baudelaire children in. Mr. Poe has decided that the only option is to place an entire village in charge of the three children under the notion that, "it takes a village to raise a child" (p. 38).

Before the Quagmires were kidnapped, they discovered a terrible secret about Count Olaf, which has something to do with the initials V.F.D. Because Count Olaf kidnapped the Quagmire triplets while they were trying to help the Baudelaire children escape from his clutches, the Baudelaire children are now determined to solve that mystery, hoping it will help lead them to their missing friends. They are shocked when one of the villages on Mr. Poe's list of potential caretakers has the same initials: V.F.D. They beg him to send them there and he agrees.

Chapter One Analysis

This novel is the seventh installment in a thirteen-book series surrounding the unfortunate lives of the Baudelaire orphans who have been left to a variety of caretakers since their parents' deaths in an arsonist fire. It is important for the reader to know that in the first book, the Baudelaire children were sent to live with their distant cousin, Count Olaf, who abused the children and plotted to steal their entire inheritance. Ever since escaping Olaf's clutches, the children have spent the rest of the series dodging his horrible attempts to recapture them and steal their money. Because there are no longer any relatives willing to take in the children - many have been horrifically dispatched by the conniving and murderous Count Olaf - the Baudelaire children are being placed in the care of an entire village.

This novel, as well as the rest of the novels in this series, is written in an unusual style. The author of the series, Daniel Handler, wrote the first book as a "mock-Gothic book for adults," meaning that his books are a satire of the Gothic style. There are many allusions to famous Gothic stories - including many by Edgar Allan Poe - and a litany of



tongue-in-cheek references to pop culture written in Lemony Snicket (Handler's pen name's) trademark sarcastic style.

The entire plot of this novel surrounds the Baudelaires search to save their friends, the Quagmire triplets, who are the latest victims of Count Olaf's treachery. Isadora Quagmire, a poet, and Duncan Quagmire, a journalist, kept notebooks with them wherever they went, and the Baudelaires know that they have recorded secrets about Count Olaf in those notebooks. They only caught a glimpse of the secret one time, and they saw the initials V.F.D. When they saw the same initials as a potential village to raise them, they hoped that this village would hold clues to the Quagmires' whereabouts. For the rest of the novel, the Baudelaire children will search for clues to uncover the mystery of where Count Olaf is hiding their friends. It is interesting to note that the Quagmires are always referred to as triplets even though there are only two of them. The third triplet died, but that did not suddenly turn the surviving Quagmires into twins.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Mr. Poe drops the Baudelaire children off at the bus stop and they make their own way to the V.F.D. to meet their new caretakers. During the long bus ride, the children contemplate what the village's initials might stand for, and how the name might lead them to find the Quagmire triplets. When they finally arrive at the village, the Baudelaire children are sorely disappointed. The village is flat and dusty, covered in a strange black haze, like moving shadows. The bus driver unceremoniously kicks the children off the bus, forcing them to carry their own suitcases in the beating sun to the village entrance miles away.

When the children finally arrive at the V.F.D., they are terribly sunburned, windblown, and dusty. The closer they get to the village, they realize that the moving haze is not shadows as they had expected, by a massive murder of crows. In fact, the entire city is covered with crows: "Crows were covering all of the trees, from the very top branches to the roots poking out of the crow-covered ground...crows were covering the lampposts and flagpoles, and there were crows lying down in the gutters and resting between the fence posts" (p. 29). Steeling themselves against the fear of attack, the Baudelaires push through the swarms of crows toward Town Hall.

When they knock on the Town Hall front door, a grand voice calls them inside. A table of twenty-five prim faced, stern faces stare harshly at the children before the same voice claims they have been waiting for them. It immediately becomes clear that this village is full of cold-hearted, crotchety, old folks who love nothing but crows and their thousands of published rules. There are rules for everything - mostly outlawing certain behaviors - that everyone in the V.F.D. is expected to adhere to. The Baudelaire children are placed under the supervision of the village handyman, Hector, and expected to complete all the chores for the entire village in exchange for their stay. Before they have a chance to ask any questions, the Baudelaires are kicked out of the town hall meeting and Hector walks them to their new home.

Chapter Two Analysis

Everything in the Baudelaire children's lives is a struggle. This struggle is important to the theme of the entire series: overcoming adversity. Handler is an adept writer, however, who embraces the sardonic, black humor of Gothic satire. He pushes the children's suffering so far that it becomes a parody of true suffering and the reader can enjoy the novel as humorous rather than depressing. It would be too easy for the Baudelaires if the bus simply drove them to their new home. Instead, they must walk miles in the beating, dusty sun, dragging their own bags and carrying the baby without help. They arrive to V.F.D. sunburned, windswept, and filthy. Yet they are in no physical pain. The children are resilient, both physically and emotionally, which keeps the bleak



story line light and entertaining. Nearly every adult the Baudelaire children meet is a villain, but there is never any doubt that the kind-hearted, intelligent, and plucky Baudelaires will defeat them.

The setting of the novel, the V.F.D., fits perfectly into the style of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. The entire countryside surrounding the village is flat, dusty, and barren. The dark landscape is pushed into the humorously absurd with the inclusion of thousands of black crows swarming overhead. Every member of the V.F.D. council is old and crotchety, and they each wear a hat with a ghastly, stuffed crow on top. There are no other children in the village, and the elderly council members seem to despise the idea of having to care for these three orphans. As expected, life at the V.F.D. will not be easy for the Baudelaires, but there should never be any doubt that they will thrive.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

As they walk to their new home with Hector, the Baudelaire children witness the daily roosting of the town's crows as, at the exact same moment, they all fly from their perches, swirl through the air like a giant, black tornado, and come to rest on the giant tree outside Hector's house. As they walk, Hector tells them what the village's initials, V.F.D., stand for: Village of Fowl Devotees. The Baudelaires are disappointed by this answer as it gives them no further information into the Quagmire triplets' disappearance, as they had been hoping. Throughout their conversation, the Baudelaires tell Hector everything about their parents' death, their encounters with Count Olaf, and their friendship with the Quagmires. As they share their terrible past, they feel a sense of trust forming for the first time in a long time: Hector is an adult who actually wants to help, not harm, them.

When they finally reach Hector's home, which is over a mile away from Town Hall, the children are impressed by the dark shadow of Nevermore Tree, upon which every the V.F.D. crow now perches. Their amazement is short-lived when Hector finds a short poem written on a scrap of white paper in the mass of black feathers. In shaky but familiar handwriting, the poem reads, "For sapphires we are held in here. Only you can end our fear" (p. 67).

Chapter Three Analysis

Although the Baudelaire children are resourceful and resilient, they are still children and to succeed, they need an accomplice. In nearly every novel in the series, the children find one kind-hearted soul in the midst of the villains to aid them. In this novel, their accomplice will be Hector, the quiet yet rebellious handyman. Hector tells the children about the Council's many rules, some of which seem crafted specifically to depress the Baudelaire children, including the rule that no citizen of the V.F.D. is allowed to use mechanical objects, and no one is allowed to read books in which any character uses a mechanical object. This is disastrous news for Violet, an inventor, and Klaus, an avid reader. Even Sunny, a baby who loves to bite, receives bad news: "Rule #4,561 clearly states that citizens are not allowed to use their mouths for recreation" (p. 62). Despite the rules, and the fact that Hector is paralyzed with fear around council members, Hector is the perfect accomplice for the Baudelaires' plans. He has a massive garage filled with all the mechanical items and forbidden books he was asked to destroy, which will now be at the Baudelaires' disposal.

Hector also holds the answers to many of the village's secrets, such as the village's true name: The Village of Fowl Devotees. The Baudelaires are understandably upset by this explanation. They were hoping that the secret surrounding the Quagmire triplets' kidnapping would be revealed in this name. It's obvious that the villagers are devoted to

birds; they even wear hats shaped like crows! But it's clear that there is some connection to the Quagmires' disappearance, as seen with the discovery of Isadora Quagmire's couplet.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

As soon as the children read the poem, they know that Isadora Quagmire wrote it. They know that Count Olaf kidnapped the triplets to try to gain access to their huge sapphire fortune. When they read the poem, the Baudelaires are speechless and shaking, so Hector leaves them alone to discuss their thoughts. Klaus fears that Hector may have been involved in the kidnapping somehow, so he is now hesitant to entrust him with information about their search. After a short discussion, however, Violet convinces him that Hector is the only adult they can trust.

Over a dinner of homemade enchiladas, the children and Hector come up with a plan to use the poem to find the Quagmire triplets. The first thing they need to find out is how the poem made its way to Hector's front lawn. Did Isadora bring it herself? If so, why didn't she knock on the door? How did she manage to get to Hector's house without anyone seeing her? Violet wonders if Isadora is somehow being held in the massive Nevermore Tree. She wants to climb the tree that night, but Hector says it's impossible: the crows are too thick. They wouldn't be able to see anything. Fearing that Count Olaf - whom the children are sure is behind the Quagmire kidnapping - might move Isadora in the middle of the night, they take turns as sentry, watching Nevermore Tree for movement. All through the night they watch the tree. In the morning, Violet calls the other children and as they crows migrate back to their daily roost, they realize with disappointment that they've been mistaken. With the crows gone, every branch of Nevermore tree is bare. There is no sign of the Quagmire triplets, and no possible way they are hiding in the tree. They are shocked to see, however, that another tiny white scroll, another poem, has been left behind.

Chapter Four Analysis

There is no question in Baudelaires' minds that Isadora and Duncan Quagmire are hidden somewhere in the V.F.D. Initially, Klaus fears that Hector might somehow be involved in the kidnapping - he was the one to uncover the poem - but after a short discussion, the children decide that they have no choice but to trust him. He seems too nice, too interested in their well being, to be affiliated with Count Olaf. There is no way of knowing for sure whether Hector is a good guy or a bad guy, so the children take a leap of faith and decide to trust him.

Although their initial stake-out of Nevermore Tree proved fruitless, the children did uncover a second poem by Isadora. Now, the mystery becomes not only where the Quagmire triplets are being held, but how Isadora is communicating with the Baudelaires. Keen readers will likely suspect that the crows are somehow involved - they are the only living beings present at Nevermore Tree - but their involvement in the kidnapping is yet to be discovered. It is clear that each of the short poems provides a bit



more information about the location of the Quagmires' whereabouts and clues as to how the Baudelaires can find them. It is interesting to note that Nevermore Tree is a clear reference to Edgar Allen Poe's famous gothic poem "The Raven," in which a young man is haunted by a raven perched outside his window chanting "nevermore, nevermore."



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

The second poem is just as confusing as the first. It reads, "Until dawn comes we cannot speak. No words can come from these sad beaks" (p. 87). The Baudelaires simply cannot understand how the second poem arrived. They had been watching the tree all night and there was no sign of movement. There is also no way that the second poem had been missed the day before, as they had searched tirelessly around the tree for further clues. Violet is extremely frustrated: why is her friend speaking in riddles? If she has the ability to send notes to them, why not just tell the Baudelaires where they are being held?

Hector is anxious to help the children figure out the puzzle, but it is dawn and they must begin their daily chores. Certainly the riddles are more important than trimming hedges and hanging wet laundry, but Hector is too afraid of the Council of Elders to be late. He rushes the children through breakfast and they all hurry out the door. The children work tirelessly on the thousands of menial tasks the villagers order them to do, from washing windows to polishing doorknobs. The children whispered hushed theories to each other trying to solve the poem while they worked. When Hector compliments the children on their work ethic, they are surprised. The children were so engrossed in their thoughts, they had almost forgotten they were working at all! Their work is interrupted in the afternoon when two members of the Council of Elders arrive to deliver the startling message that Count Olaf has been arrested.

Chapter Five Analysis

There is little progress in the Baudelaires' search to find their friends, except that they have uncovered a second poem. This poem is just as confusing as the first, and gives no further information about the Quagmires' whereabouts. What is most confusing for the Baudelaires is that Isadora seems to be referring to herself as a bird, not a human. Most readers will immediately assume that the Quagmire children have somehow been turned into crows, but the answer will not be revealed until the end of the novel.

This chapter mostly functions to remind the reader how terrible the Baudelaires' life is in the V.F.D. They are forced to perform thousands of menial, back-breaking tasks from making beds to washing dishes to making ice cream sundaes for the entire village. No matter how hard the children work, the villagers are never satisfied. One villager even complains that there are too many nuts on her free sundae. Throughout the day, it becomes clear that the entire village runs on ridiculous rules and that the villagers relish finding rule-breakers to punish.



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

When the Baudelaire children hear the news about Count Olaf's arrest, they immediately jump to the conclusion that it must be true. They are thrilled, hoping this means they, and the Quagmire triplets, will be free of his treachery. The Elders describe the man they arrested prowling around the village, and his description matches Count Olaf's. The Council of Elders has called an emergency meeting to decide on Olaf's punishment, but they assume it will be the traditional punishment for criminals: burning at the stake. Even though the Baudelaires despise Count Olaf, they can't bear to see anyone murdered for their crimes, however terrible. Klaus tries to convince the Elders to turn Olaf in to the appropriate authorities, but they refuse. A rule is a rule.

A few hours later, the children rush to Town Hall to witness Olaf's trial. As soon as they walk through the door, they can see that the man arrested outside the village is not Count Olaf, but a look-alike. They are startled for two reasons: first, this means that the real Count Olaf is still out there, and secondly, this means that an innocent man is about to be burned at the stake for crimes he did not commit. The man on trial frantically pleads with the council, insisting that he is NOT Count Olaf, but Rule #920 clearly states that, "no one may talk while on the platform" (p. 114). Several times, the man and the Baudelaire children try to interrupt the trial to insist that they have the wrong man, but the Council will not hear their objections. It is decided that this man, who claims his name is Jacques, will be burned at the stake after breakfast the next morning. With that, the matter is closed.

Chapter Six Analysis

During "Count Olaf's" trial, it becomes clear that there are simply too many rules in the V.F.D. There is no denying that the council has arrested the wrong man - he is not Count Olaf, but an innocent man named Jacques - but rules prevent Jacques and the Baudelaires from testifying to his mistaken identity. The entire trial is a ridiculous spectacle, satirically pointing fingers at the many flaws in our modern-day justice system. The Baudelaires are particularly horrified by the trial because an innocent man is being sentenced to death. The reader can safely assume that the Baudelaires will somehow free Jacques from his execution tomorrow, but how his freedom will affect that Baudelaires future is yet to be seen.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

Chapter Seven opens with the admission that there are many terrible places to be in the world, but one of the worst places to be is in a quandary. The Baudelaire children are in a terrible quandary now: Count Olaf is on the loose, and innocent man is sentenced to die, and they are no closer to discovering the true whereabouts of the Quagmire triplets than they were yesterday. All the hope the children had has dissipated, leaving them more depressed than ever. They sit in Hector's dining room too confused and frustrated to eat. Hector encourages them to feed their bodies first, their thoughts will soon follow. Reluctantly, the children eat their huevos rancheros and almost immediately, their thoughts start flowing.

Sunny is the first to have a suggestion: she hopes that tomorrow morning, a new couplet will be waiting for them beneath Nevermore Tree. She wants to spend the night underneath the tree because she's small enough that whoever is delivering the poems probably won't spot her hiding underneath the mass of feathers, and she'll be able to find out how the couplets are getting to them. Klaus, who doesn't want to see anyone burned at the stake tomorrow morning, requests access to Hector's secret library. He knows that the only way to stop the ceremony tomorrow will be to find a rule amidst the hundreds of thousands of rules, that can save Jacques life. Violet suggests helping Hector complete his self-sustaining hot air mobile home in the hopes of creating a perfect escape vehicle should they need it during their quest to save Jacques and escape from Count Olaf's clutches. With their new plans set in motion, the Baudelaires are once again buoyed by hope.

Chapter Seven Analysis

After their disastrous efforts to save Jacques during the trial, the Baudelaire children are uncharacteristically depressed. They fear that there is nothing they can do to save Jacques and worse, to save themselves from Count Olaf who continues to hunt them tirelessly. Because the V.F.D. rules prevent any children from speaking during the trial, and prevent any accused criminal of speaking in his own defense, the entire Council of Elders believes they have captured Olaf. The children are confused and frustrated until Hector encourages them to eat their dinner. With full stomachs, the children have renewed energy to tackle their problems. Violet suggests that Olaf must have kidnapped Jacques, forced him into costume (including a matching eye tattoo on his ankle), and sent him to the V.F.D. in search of the Baudelaires. Jacques couldn't have known that Olaf was evil (he was very good at keeping this hidden), so when he arrived at the V.F.D. searching for the children, he couldn't have known he was walking into a trap. This realization, that Jacques is as much a victim of Olaf's manipulation as they are, further motivates the Baudelaires to save him.



If the Baudelaires are able to save Jacques and the Quagmires, and escape from Count Olaf, their only method of escape is on Hector's self-sustaining hot air mobile home. He has constructed a massive floating home designed to float up, never down. In short, once the Baudelaire children are aboard the flying vessel, they will never be able to return to ground. They will spend the rest of their lives floating above the earth with Hector. On some level, this is enticing since they will no longer have to run from Olaf. They will be safe for the rest of their lives. But on the other hand, they know that they will be unhappy in the floating home. They will have no other children to interact with, no access to libraries or hardware stores. Sunny is only a baby: there's so much in the world that she's never experienced and that she would have no chance of experiencing in the hot air mobile home. This decision puts the Baudelaires in another quandary. Should they escape with Hector, or should they face their fears on ground?

Finally, this chapter presents the strongest instance of foreshadowing in the novel. On page 125, Snicket writes, "By the time the Baudelaires were finishing the meal Hector had prepared for them, their ideas had grown and developed into full-fledged plans, just as Nevermore Tree had grown a long time ago from a tiny seed and Fowl Fountain had been built recently from someone's hideous blueprints" (p. 125). These references are so sudden and blunt that they are obviously foreshadowing. It should be clear that somehow, Fowl Fountain and Nevermore Tree are integral in the mystery surrounding the disappearance of the Quagmires.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

The next morning begins with a beautiful sunrise that warms the hearts of the Baudelaire children. Sunny has found a new couplet under Nevermore Tree, and both Klaus and Violet have had success with their research projects the night before. Violet found that the engine conductivity was low in the self-sustaining hot air mobile home due to problems with the electromagnetic generator Hector built. In a matter of hours, Violet reconfigured conduits and rerouted some of the aquacycling to improve water circulation. Meanwhile, Klaus has discovered some interesting rules in the V.F.D. rulebook, including Rule #2,493 which clearly states that "any person who is going to be burned at the stake has the opportunity to make a speech right before the fire is lit" (p. 138). The Baudelaires are going to make sure that Jacques has the opportunity to give his speech.

Sunny has also had a successful evening: she found a new couplet. This third poem reads, "The first thing you read contains the clue: An initial way to speak to you" (p. 142). The third couplet is just as confusing as its predecessors, but the Baudelaires now know one thing: there is no person delivering the poems, so the crows must be involved. Boldly, the Baudelaires decide that they will shirk their daily chores and head straight to the jail to save Jacques. Once they have Jacques, they can all work together to find the Quagmires. In the distance, the children see an angry mob forming with torches of fire heading toward the jail. They rush to Jacques' jail cell, hoping to hear his speech before the angry mob lights his pyre, but they are too late: Jacques is dead. He hasn't been burned at the stake, but he has mysteriously died in his cell.

Chapter Eight Analysis

While he was researching in the library, Klaus also read a psychology book discussing mob psychology, or the study of a group of people. Mob psychology suggests that when a few people scattered in a crowd begin shouting their opinions, soon the whole mob will agree with them. When they get to the jail, Klaus hopes that if he, Sunny, Hector, and Violet all begin shouting that Jacques is innocent, hopefully the entire mob will agree with them before the fire is lit.

The clues from Isabella Quagmire are continually confusing, but the Baudelaires are eking out a clearer picture of how the clues are being delivered. They know the crows are somehow involved and they imagine the crows must be acting as carrier pigeons for the Quagmires, which means that they are being held nearby. The V.F.D. crows only fly from the fountain to Nevermore Tree, so the Quagmires must be held somewhere between these two landmarks. The second couplet, "Until dawn comes we cannot speak" suggests that the Quagmires are attaching the poems in the morning, when the crows roost uptown.



The news that Jacques is dead is devastating to the Baudelaire children. All their work has been for nothing. They were unable to save this innocent man. Before Jacques was thrown in his jail cell, he had tried to tell Violet something about her parents, but he was cut short. Now that he is dead, the Baudelaire children will never know the secrets he held, nor how those secrets affected their understanding of their parents' death and the Quagmires' kidnapping.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

Because the villagers all believe that Jacques is Count Olaf, they now believe that Olaf is dead and that the world has been rid of one more villain. The children, of course, know that this all must have been part of Count Olaf's plan. Officer Luciana claims that she locked "Count Olaf" in his cell last night and that she is the only person in the V.F.D. with a key. His death is a complete mystery, Luciana continues, but she's hired the famous Detective Dupin to solve the case. As Detective Dupin arrives, community members are ordering the Baudelaire children away from the crime scene and back to their chores. "It isn't cool," Dupin's voice rings out from the crowd, "to dismiss suspects from the scene of the crime until Detective Dupin gives the okay" (p. 157). Immediately, the children recognize the wheezy, scratchy voice. It belongs to none other than Count Olaf. Violet shouts that Count Olaf isn't dead and that he's standing there in a disguise, but once again Officer Luciana dismisses her. The crowd doesn't bat an eyelid: to them, Count Olaf is dead!

Detective Dupin continues his presentation, convincing the crowd that the Baudelaire children are actually Jacques' murderers. He presents the crowd with a long, pink hair ribbon decorated with plastic daisies, arguing that it's the same type of ribbon Violet Baudelaire uses to tie back her hair. He also presents a lens from eyeglasses, claiming that it belongs to Klaus (even though his eyeglasses are not missing a lens) and bite marks on Jacques body. He claims that Violet and Klaus were simply accomplices to the murder, but it was Sunny's sharp bite that killed Jacques. The Baudelaire children are flabbergasted and turn to Hector for help. They were with him all night, and they need him to admit this and secure their alibi, but as usual, Hector is silent. He's too afraid of the crowd's backlash to speak at all.

Without a proper alibi, the crowd goes wild. Surely the Baudelaires - who, in their minds, were untrustworthy from the beginning - killed "Count Olaf." They demand that the children be burnt at the stake the next morning. As Detective Dupin drags the children to their jail cell, he whispers his true plan to the children: only two of them will be killed the next morning, but one will "miraculously escape" to live a horrible existence with him, ensuring that he inherits the great Baudelaire fortune. He leaves them with a horrific decision: "I'll let you three decide who gets the honor of spending the rest of their puny life with me, and who gets to burn at the stake. I'll be back at lunchtime for your decision" (p. 169).

Chapter Nine Analysis

Count Olaf must have known that eventually, the world would have found out that Jacques was not him. Perhaps he even knew that the Baudelaire children were plotting to set Jacques free that very day. He must have known that the only way to call of all



searches for him would be to appear dead. With the villagers sure that the world was rid of him, Count Olaf would be free to terrorize the Baudelaire children without consequence.

No one has ever heard of Detective Dupin, but officer Luciana assures them all that he is very famous and that he's doing the village a great favor by agreeing to work on the case. Only Violet seems to question what truly happened in Jacques cell last night. If Luciana had the only key, how could a murderer have gotten in? Why wasn't anyone guarding Jacques? How was he killed? Why aren't the basics of the crime scene being documented? Through Violet's questions, if it wasn't clear to the reader already, it is obvious that Officer Luciana is somehow involved, and when Detective Dupin arrives, there should be no question that he, too, was somehow involved in Jacques' death.

Detective Dupin does his best to convince the villagers that the Baudelaire children were responsible for Jacques' ("Count Olaf") death. He plants ridiculous evidence that the villagers are too simple-minded to question. This theme, that children are much smarter than adults, is prevalent throughout the Series of Unfortunate Events books. One of the main ways Snicket appeals to his young audience is by giving them the feeling that they are smarter than the characters. Most readers will suspect that Count Olaf and Officer Luciana truly killed Jacques, but the adults have no idea. This not only creates a sense of excitement for the reader, it also creates a strong bond between the reader and that Baudelaire children. They feel united in their crusade against Olaf and his conniving, evil tricks.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

The children absolutely refuse to entertain the notion that two of them will be burned at the stake the next morning. No matter what Count Olaf / Detective Dupin says, they will never choose which among them will live and which among them will die. The children are terrified and emotional, but it is Violet, the consummate inventor, who insists that there must be some way out of the cell. Her voice shakes as she speaks, but she is determined. She walks slowly around the tiny cell running her hands along the brick walls. Surely there must be a weak brick here! The Baudelaires are being held in the "Deluxe Cell," an ironic because it is actually the dirtiest, most disgusting cell in the village jail. It is a small, damp cell with barred windows and only a wooden bench as furniture, so the children don't have many tools to work with. Klaus pleads that they need "Deus ex machina" or "the god from the machine" to get out of this mess (p. 177). At just that moment, Officer Luciana arrives with their dinner: bread and water.

As they eat their measly meal, Klaus begins to cry. Today is his thirteenth birthday. It has been less than a year since their parents died, and remembering the family together at Klaus' last birthday is too much for all of them. They all begin to cry but their emotions make them stronger. They need to rely on each other now, and they need to make a plan. Suddenly, Violet breaks into a wide grin. "Happy birthday, Klaus," she says. "Officer Luciana brought us deus ex machina" (p. 182). Using the wooden bench as a ramp, Violet pours the water down the ramp so it hits the wall, weakening the mortar between the bricks. She uses the bread as a sponge to soak up the water so it can be re-poured into the jug and the cycle can continue again.

The children pour and wipe and squeeze and pour for hours into the night, hoping that the water is slowly breaking down the strong mortar. As they work, they repeat Isabella's couplets, searching for new insight into the clues. There's something about the phrase "the initial way to speak to you" that intrigues Sunny, but she can't understand what the clue means. Suddenly, a voice shouts to the children from outside their window, interrupting their work. It's Hector coming to deliver their final clue. He apologizes for his inability to speak up at the hearing, and tells them that the self-sustaining hot air mobile home is up and running. If the children manage to escape their fate at the stakes tomorrow, he'll be waiting at his home with their escape vehicle. The children are deeply disappointed that Hector cannot do more to help them, but that disappointment quickly fades when Klaus reads the final clue. He knows exactly where the Quagmire triplets are being held.

Chapter Ten Analysis

Despite the fact that the children are sentenced to death in the morning, they stick together to come up with a plan for their escape. The children momentarily lapse into



blame: Klaus blames Violet, saying that if she didn't wear hair ribbons they wouldn't be in this mess, while Violet blames Klaus, saying that if he didn't wear eyeglasses they wouldn't be in this mess. The blame game lasts for only a few moments before they decide that fighting won't get them anywhere. They need to work together, to unite as a team, to get out of this mess alive. What they need, Klaus reasons, is *deus ex machina*: the god in the machine. This term simply means that out of nowhere, the answer to a problem appears, as if God has dropped it from Heaven. As Klaus explains this term, Officer Luciana appears with bread and water, what will turn out to be precisely the tools needed to break out of the jail cell. Snicket frequently describes a literary technique, such as foreshadowing or *deus ex machina*, and immediately follows up that description with an example in the text. Just as he does with the italicized vocabulary words, this is an excellent way to teach readers about literature while employing the tactics within the story. Snicket's choice to cast water, a very gentle substance, to destroy the strong brick wall is hugely symbolic. The Baudelaire children are gentle, kind children, but they must battle against must stronger

It is also interesting to note that today is Klaus' thirteenth birthday. When Officer Luciana delivers the bread and water, he remembers the last birthday when his mother burnt his bread pudding. Last year he had been so disappointed that his parents had promised to make him something extra special for his birthday this year. The thought of that promise, and of his selfish disappointment in the ruined cake, sends Klaus into tears. The memory reminds him of what's truly important, however. His family.



Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven Summary

Klaus reads the final couplet in Isabella Quagmire's clue: "Inside these letters, the eye will see. Nearby are your friends, and V.F.D." He lays out all four clues and reads them side-by-side:

For sapphires we are held in here.

Only you can end our fear.

Until dawn comes we cannot speak.

No words can come from this sad beak.

The first thing you read contains the clue:

An initial way to speak to you.

Inside these letters the eye will see.

Nearby are your friends, and V.F.D.

When he lays them out next to each other, Klaus sees that the "initial" is the first letter of the first word in each line. These initials spell out the true clue: FOUNTAIN. Klaus knows that the Quagmire triplets are being held in Fowl Fountain. At the same time, the children gleefully discover that their mortar-dissolving system has begun to work. The mortar around a few of the bricks has gone mushy. With a newfound determination, the Baudelaires pick up the wooden bench and begin ram it against the weakened bricks. With a loud crack, the wall smashes to bits around them and the children see the beautiful sight of sunlight peeking through the shattered bricks.

As soon as they are free, the Baudelaires rush to Fowl Fountain. Even though they spent an entire afternoon cleaning every nook and cranny of the fountain, they're sure they must have missed something. Climbing atop each other's shoulders, with Violet on the bottom and Sunny on top, the children peer into the flowing fountain mouth. Before Sunny can get a good look, Violet slips on the wet marble and topples out from under her. Violet and Klaus hit the ground hard, but using her super strong teeth, Sunny grips down on the fountain's sharp beak. As she flails wildly for help, her hand punches the fountain's eye, releasing a secret switch. With a loud creak, the fountain splits in half, opening like a giant book, revealing the soaking, shivering Quagmire triplets huddled inside.

Chapter Eleven Analysis

The Baudelaires' plan to free themselves from the village cell is quite silly. The idea of bread and water weakening brick and mortar so severely that the children can escape, and in a single night, is ludicrous, but Snicket has so charmed his reader with the melodrama of the novel that nearly any plot twist is accepted. Snicket continues to sardonically comment on the ridiculousness of gothic novels - where *deus ex machina* is commonplace - by utilizing the most basic tools to free our heroes. In this case, persistence has won out over strength, much to the reader's satisfaction.



Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve Summary

Just as he did in the opening of the novel, Lemony Snicket urges the reader to stop reading now. There will be no happy ending for the Baudelaires. As much as he wishes that he could change the ending of their story, he cannot.

Once the Baudelaires have freed the Quagmires, the children look around to see an angry mob of villagers approaching with fiery stakes ready to set them alight. Isabelle and Duncan Quagmire announce that they know everything that's going on. They've been listening to all the gossip around the fountain, and they've been keeping notes about their discoveries in their trusty notebooks. They claim to have groundbreaking information about Count Olaf, the Baudelaires' parents' deaths, and the V.F.D. Before they can share their information, however, the mob descends on them, shouting for their execution. The children decide to make a run to Hector's house. He's their last hope. They race through the streets of the village, carefully peeking around each corner, but a few moments after their escape, the mob descends on them once again. They know that now, there is no escape.

Chapter Twelve Analysis

This chapter serves solely as a way to tie up the mysterious plot. The Baudelaire children have solved the couplet mystery and have found their friends. They set their friends free and rush to escape the angry mob bent on killing them. Aside from this action, the chapter functions to explain how the couplets were written and delivered, and to set up the mysteries that will be revealed in the series' final novels.

Isabelle and Duncan Quagmire are obsessive researchers and journalists. They did everything in their power to keep their most prized possessions, their notebooks, dry during their confinement so they could record useful information. They claim to have earth-shattering information about the Baudelaires' parents, but they are in too much of a rush to reveal that information now. They managed to send the couplets to the Baudelaires by wetting the poems, reaching through the fountain's mouth, and sticking them to a crow's leg. By the time the crows had flown to Nevermore Tree in the afternoon, the sun had dried the poem and it dislodged it from the crow's leg so it would land in Hector's yard. Isabelle felt it would be too dangerous to simply write out where they were being held - in case the notes fell into the wrong hands - so she wrote in cryptic poems, trusting that the Baudelaires would be clever enough to crack the riddle.



Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen Summary

The mob descends on the children chanting, "Burn the orphans! Burn the orphans!" Officer Luciana leads the pack as they stalk toward the children, eyes glittering with torchlight. Once again, deus ex machina comes to the children's rescue when Hector appears floating through the sky in his self-sustaining hot air mobile home. The Baudelaires have never seen such a beautiful sight: safety hovering above their heads. Despite the floating home's size and heft, it soars gracefully, silently, through the air. Because Hector's creation is only designed to float up, never down, he is unable to lower the baskets for the children to climb in, but he unfurls a long rope ladder, shouting for the children to hurry up. When the villagers see the hot air mobile home, they are outraged. They trusted Hector to destroy banned mechanical items but he has created a spectacular one! In a moment of bold defiance, Hector raises his voice to the elders for the first time in his life. He says that he no longer wants to live in a place with so many rules and that he's taking the Baudelaire children with him: "The aphorism is 'It takes a village to raise a child,' not 'Three children should clean up after a village'" (p. 234).

With huge smiles, the Quagmires and Baudelaires begin to climb Hector's ladder. "You're not the only one with mechanical devices," Officer Luciana sneers as she pulls out a loaded handgun. The villagers are outraged: another machine; how dare she! Members of the mob begin looking at each other in confusion. If their officers are breaking the village laws, who can be trusted? Luciana ignores the villagers' protests and begins shooting wildly at Hector's contraption. The Quagmires safely tumble into one of the large floating baskets, but the Baudelaires struggle on the long rope. As Luciana fires away, Detective Dupin arrives at the scene and demands that the Baudelaire children be returned to their cell. Luciana continues to shoot her gun and eventually, she strikes her target. One of her bullets grazes the rope ladder and it begins to fray. As the Baudelaire children climb frantically, the ladder weakens and weakens until it is impossible to climb. Knowing that they will never make it to the top, Violet says goodbye to her friends and tells her siblings to turn back around. She promises to do her best to meet up with the Quagmires again one day, but even she knows it is a hollow promise. Before they float away forever, the Quagmires toss their notebooks overboard, hoping the information penned inside will help the Baudelaires survive amidst Olaf's evil plans.

Meanwhile, Detective Dupin has made his way through the confused mob and has snatched the children back into his grasp. As the crowd parts to give Dupin room to return the criminals to their jail cell, a villager is horrified to see that one of Luciana's bullets has killed a crow. Detective Dupin removes his sunglasses for a better look at the dead animal, and that same villager exclaims that Dupin, like Count Olaf, has only one eyebrow! Perhaps the children were telling the truth. The angry mob descends on Detective Dupin and demands that he remove his shoes. When he does, the unique tattoo on his ankle is revealed. The villagers can no longer deny that they've been



duped. Violet Baudelaire was telling the truth all along: Count Olaf is alive and imitating a police officer. Detective Dupin is just a disguise. Before he can be arrested for his crimes, however, Officer Luciana charges through the crowd on her motorcycle and rushes Olaf away. It is revealed that Luciana, too, was living in disguise. She is actually Esme Squalor, a villain from a previous novel in the series. In the excitement of Olaf's escape, the Baudelaire children creep into the city's shadows and continue their journey away from the village, searching for a safe home.

Chapter Thirteen Analysis

The novel comes to a close with Count Olaf's true identity being revealed. Once the villagers see a dead crow, it is as if they wake from a stupor that had clouded their vision for the past few weeks. They realize almost immediately that Detective Dupin is a fake and that the Baudelaire children had been telling them the truth all along. It is interesting to note, however, that even when they find out the truth, the villagers are more concerned with the plight of the injured bird than with the wellbeing of the three young children they had been abusing. Snicket is making very clear that while the truth was revealed, the evil characters remain evil and the good characters remain good. In the Baudelaire children's world, not much has changed. They remain parentless, lonely, and hunted by a man who wishes them dead. These conflicts will carry on through the rest of the series and will not conclude until the Series of Unfortunate Events comes to an end.

At the end of the novel, only Hector's story comes to a close. He has finally mustered enough courage to confront the Council of Elders and make his escape to happiness in the self-sustaining hot air mobile home. Unfortunately for the Baudelaires, all the friends they have left in the world, Hector and the Quagmire triplets, have escaped in that floating home, so they are once again alone in the world. They do have the Quagmires' research in the notebooks, however, containing information that will no doubt affect the final books in the series. Snicket ends this seventh book with enough closure to give the reader a sense of satisfaction, but enough momentum to ensure that they will pick up the eighth book and continue through the series.



Characters

Violet Baudelaire

Violet Baudelaire is the eldest child in the Baudelaire family. She is described as being a very pretty fourteen-year-old girl who is a genius when it comes to inventing. Brett Helquist's illustrations suggest that she has wavy, dark brown hair. When thinking, she ties her hair in a ribbon, in order to keep it out of her face. After her parents' deaths last year, Violet has taken over the leadership role in her family, but insists that all three children must work together to overcome their obstacles. When working together, each of the Baudelaire children has a skill they are particularly good at and Violet is particularly skilled at inventing devices. She often invents devices to help herself and her siblings in dangerous situations, using only simple objects such as everyday food items, rubber bands, and tin cans. She is an amazing inventor, constructing various items throughout the series, such as the battering ram made from a wooden bench, and mortar-dissolver made from bread and water, in this novel.

Violet, like the rest of the characters in Snicket's collection, is relatively two-dimensional. She does not undergo much character development and is the same character at the beginning of the series as she is in the end. This construction is typical in the Gothic, melodramatic style which focuses on plot rather than character. In this installment of the series, Violet must help her siblings overcome a murder charge, while searching for her friends, the Quagmire triplets, who have been kidnapped by the Baudelaire's evil uncle, Count Olaf.

Klaus Baudelaire

Klaus Baudelaire is the middle child in the Baudelaire family. He is described as a bookish twelve-year-old who is a genius when it comes to researching. He remembers virtually everything he reads, retaining information that helps the Baudelaire's to escape from situations Count Olaf places them in. Since he is a voracious reader, Klaus also speaks a variety of languages and knows the definitions to many of the difficult words used through the series' narration. Brett Helquist's illustrations suggest that he has wavy brown hair and large, round glasses. Although Klaus is an excellent team player, working with his two sisters to overcome the various obstacles in their lives, he is the most pessimistic about the outcome of their conflicts.

Klaus, like the rest of the characters in Snicket's collection, is relatively two-dimensional. He does not undergo much character development and is the same character at the beginning of the series as she is in the end. This construction is typical in the Gothic, melodramatic style which focuses on plot rather than character. In this installment of the series, Klaus must help his siblings overcome a murder charge, while searching for his friends, the Quagmire triplets, who have been kidnapped by the Baudelaire's evil uncle, Count Olaf.



Sunny Baudelaire

Sunny Baudelaire is the youngest Baudelaire child, depicted as an infant throughout much of the series. Although she is just a baby, who cannot yet walk and who speaks in monosyllabic baby talk, Sunny demonstrates advanced problem solving skills and adult intelligence. She is best known for her four sharp teeth and her biting skills often help the Baudelaires escape from Count Olaf's clutches.

Count Olaf / Detective Dupin

Count Olaf / Detective Dupin is the villain of the Series of Unfortunate Events novels. Olaf is described as elderly and thin, with a unibrow, wheezing voice, and an eye tattoo on his left ankle. Under the disguise of Detective Dupin, Olaf wears large sunglasses to hide his eyebrow and huge plastic shoes to cover up his tattoo. Olaf is an evil man first entrusted with the Baudelaire children after their parents' deaths. He proved to be a horrific guardian, only interested in the fortune the Baudelaires left behind. Throughout the series, he doggedly chases the Baudelaire children with a series of heinous attempts to get his hands on the children's inheritance.

Hector

Hector is the handyman at the Village of Fowl Devotees and the Baudelaire children's guardian while living in the village. Hector is a quiet, kind man who is too skittish to speak up when the Council abuses him or the Baudelaire children. As a result, Hector and the Baudelaires are forced to perform all of the villagers' chores, no matter how menial. Hector does rebel against the system, however, by housing a variety of banned mechanical objects and books in his barn, such as his self-sustaining hot air mobile home, which he uses to escape from the village at the end of the novel.

Mr. Poe

Mr. Poe is the Baudelaire children's main guardian after their parents' death. Mr. Poe's main job is to find caretakers for the children, but after a string of unfortunate events, there are no longer any relatives, however distant, willing to risk Count Olaf's wrath by taking in the children. Therefore Mr. Poe has decided to follow the aphorism "It takes a village to raise a child" and sends the Baudelaires to the Village of Fowl Devotees.

Officer Luciana / Esme Squalor

Officer Luciana is the sole policewoman in the V.F.D. She is described as a very tall woman, always wearing black boots, red lipstick, and a motorcycle helmet with the visor pulled down to cover her eyes. Later in the novel, it is revealed that Luciana always wears this outfit to disguise the fact that she is actually Esme Squalor, the villain from a



previous installment of the series. In "The Vile Village," Officer Luciana aides Count Olaf in Jacques' murder and helps Olaf escape at the end of the novel.

The Quagmire Triplets

The Quagmire Triplets are the Baudelaire children's best friends. Isabella Quagmire is a poet and Duncan Quagmire is a journalist. Together, the triplets collect information about Count Olaf and the V.F.D., which they record in their trusty notebooks. The Quagmires are always referred to as triplets even though there are only two of them. The third triplet died, but that did not suddenly turn the surviving Quagmires into twins. In this novel, the Quagmire Triplets are the latest victims of Count Olaf's greed. He has kidnapped them and hidden them in Fowl Fountain with the hopes of getting his hands on their fortune. The Vile Village focuses on the Baudelaires' search to find and free their best friends.

Jacques

Jacques is an unfortunate innocent man who is somehow captured by Count Olaf, forced into costume, and sent to the V.F.D. in search of the Baudelaire children. When he arrive at the village, the council mistakenly arrest him as Count Olaf and sentence him to death. Before the Baudelaire children can save him, the real Count Olaf murders him in his cell so the world will think that Count Olaf is dead. With the world thinking that they are rid of him, Count Olaf is free to commit heinous crimes without incriminating himself.



Objects/Places

The Daily Punctilio

The Daily Punctilio is the newspaper that delivers all the news in the novel. Although the newspaper is widely read by all the characters, it is best known for printing glaring errors of fact, misspelled words, and misprinted names.

The Village of Fowl Devotees (V.F.D.)

The Village of Fowl Devotees (V.F.D.) is the village chosen to raise the Baudelaire children. The entire countryside surrounding the village is flat, dusty, and barren. When the children look around after stepping off the bus, they can't even see any buildings. All they see is a black haze shimmering above the horizon. As they approach the village, however, they realize that the black haze is not shadows, as they had expected, by a massive murder of crows: "Crows were covering all of the trees, from the very top branches to the roots poking out of the crow-covered ground...crows were covering the lampposts and flagpoles, and there were crows lying down in the gutters and resting between the fence posts" (p. 29).

Town Hall

Town Hall is the massive building at the center of the V.F.D. It is a gorgeous and ornate marble building, but no one can see its beauty because it's constantly covered in crows. The Council of Elders regularly meets in Town Hall to discuss the thousands of rules they've put in place for all the V.F.D. residents.

Nevermore Tree

Nevermore Tree is the massive tree outside Hector's home where the V.F.D. crows roost at night. This is also where the Baudelaire children find Isabella Quagmire's couplets each morning.

The Council of Elders

The Council of Elders is the group of elderly villagers in charge of making and monitoring the thousands of rules that dictate behavior in the V.F.D.



Fowl Fountain

Fowl Fountain is a massive statue in the shape of an enormous crow in the center of the V.F.D. The statue is composed of a giant metal body that requires constant polishing (by the Baudelaire children), and a metal head facing straight up, spitting a steady stream of water from its mouth. This statue is not only a horrific eyesore, but also the place where Count Olaf hides the Quagmire triplets.

The Barn

The Barn is where Hector houses all the illegal mechanisms and banned books from the V.F.D. When the Council of Elders imposed their censorship rules, they asked Hector to destroy all the forbidden items but he chose to hide them in his barn instead. Now, the Baudelaire children have complete access to all the tools they'll need to defeat Count Olaf as long as they keep the items hidden from the Council.

The Self-Sustaining Hot Air Mobile Home

The Self-Sustaining Hot Air Mobile Home is Hector's greatest invention. It is a hot air balloon large enough to live in for the rest of one's life, never having to come back to earth. It consists of twelve enormous baskets each the size of a small room, connected by pipes, wires, buttons, switches, gears, and bags. The hot air mobile home has enough food and drink to sustain an entire family for the rest of their lives and is designed to only float up, never back down to earth. Once one climbs aboard the hot air mobile home, they are committing to floating for the rest of their lives.

The Deluxe Cell

The Deluxe Cell is the cell where the Baudelaire children are held while being accused of Jacques' murder. The cell name is ironic because it is actually the dirtiest, most disgusting cell in the village jail. It is a small, damp cell with barred windows and only a wooden bench as furniture. The Baudelaire children manage to escape by moistening the mortar between the bricks and bashing their way through the wall using that wooden bench as a battering ram.

Deus Ex Machina

Deus Ex Machina or "the god from the machine" is a literary device used when heroic characters are trapped in tricky situations. The term simply means that out of nowhere, the answer to a problem appears, as if God has dropped it from Heaven.

Themes

Unity

Perhaps the strongest theme throughout the Series of Unfortunate Events is that of unity. No matter what horrific events are thrown at the Baudelaire children, they unite against the evil to overcome their obstacles. Throughout the novel, the children are very good about working together, highlighting each of their strengths to form an unbeatable team. The reader first sees this unity when the children arrive at Hector's house in chapter seven. Sunny suggests spending the night underneath the Nevermore Tree because she's small enough to underneath the mass of feathers, and she'll be able to find out how the couplets are getting there. Klaus, the penultimate researcher, accesses Hector's secret library to discover forgotten V.F.D. rules that might free Jacques. Meanwhile, Violet, the inventor, works on Hector's self-sustaining hot air mobile home in the hopes of creating a perfect escape vehicle. Although this plan does not save Jacques' life, it shows the reader that the Baudelaire children are a formidable force, and that when they are working together, they never give up.

Throughout the hardships of the novel, from their indentured servitude to their murder arrest, the children lean on each other for strength, pushing themselves to overcome the great evils of the world and search for the truth. They lapse in their unity only once, when they are sentenced to death for the murder of "Count Olaf" in chapter nine. Klaus blames Violet for their arrest, saying that if she didn't wear hair ribbons they wouldn't be in this mess, while Violet blames Klaus, saying that if he didn't wear eyeglasses they wouldn't be in this mess. The blame game lasts for only a few moments before they decide that fighting won't get them anywhere. They need to work together, to unite as a team, to get out of this mess alive. When they reunite, they come up with their best and silliest escape plan: the mortar dissolver made of water and bread. Although the Baudelaire children do not find ultimate happiness at the end of the novel, the reader can safely assume that as long as the children stick together, they will find peace at the end of the series.

Imagination

The Series of Unfortunate Events novels strive tirelessly to ignite the imagination of its young readers. Lemony Snicket creates a cast of ridiculous and entertaining characters sure to delight dark-humored readers. The series is imaginative from its premise of three orphans courageously battling against their evil uncle despite the circumstances to its construction employing a sardonic, melodramatic and Gothic style of commentary. Snicket's creation of the town completely covered in crows, to the ludicrously strict rules of the Council show his unique imagination and writing style. Young readers are especially drawn to novels that highlight young protagonists overcoming obstacles, particularly when those youthful characters are smarter, stronger, or cleverer than the



adults. Snicket's imaginative plot is sure to lure readers into the thirteen-book long series.

This novel also highlights the theme of imagination within the text. The Baudelaire children are incredibly imaginative, particularly in their plans to battle Count Olaf. The reader sees the children's imagination most clearly in their escape from the Deluxe Cell. Violet's genius plan to use simple bread and water as mortar-dissolvers showcases her insight and imagination as an inventor, and encourages the reader to think outside the box, imagining different ways that everyday objects could change the course of their lives.

Melodrama

This novel, as well as the rest of the novels in this series, is written in an unusual style. The author of the series, Daniel Handler, wrote the first book as a "mock-Gothic book for adults," meaning that his books are a satire of the Gothic style. There are many allusions to famous Gothic stories - including many by Edgar Allen Poe - and a litany of tongue-in-cheek references to pop culture written in Lemony Snicket (Handler's pen name's) trademark sarcastic style. The term melodrama refers to a dramatic work that exaggerates plot and characters in order to appeal to the emotions. To fit into this genre, the Series of Unfortunate Events books place the characters in ridiculous, extreme situations: the terrifying moments are exceedingly terrifying; the sad moments are comically sad; the happy moments are almost nonexistent to highlight the character's struggles. The setting of the novel, the V.F.D., fits perfectly into the style of A Series of Unfortunate Events. The entire countryside surrounding the village is flat, dusty, and barren. The dark landscape is pushed into the humorously absurd with the inclusion of thousands of black crows swarming overhead. Every member of the V.F.D. council is old, crotchety and wears a hat with a ghastly, stuffed crow on top. There are no other children in the village and the elderly council members seem to despise the idea of having to care for these three orphans.

The setting of the novel is bleak and dark, directly highlighting the overall tone of the novel. Snicket is a consummate professional when it comes to utilizing literary symbolism. The tone of the novel is inarguably melodramatic, so it makes sense to have weather reflecting emotion and shadows creeping into the streets as danger approaches. Snicket also seems to be commenting on the Gothic genre by inserting obvious references to the style in the story: the appearance of Deus ex Machina on page 177, for example, is a clear reference to the style. However, it is unclear whether Snicket is embracing the style or poking fun at it.

Style

Point of View

This novel is recounted in the third-person and omniscient narrative voice from the perspective of Lemony Snicket, the fictional author of the series. Although the entire events are filtered through the consciousness of Lemony Snicket, he has perfect access into the thoughts and emotions of the Baudelaire children. This access is important because it highlights the special bond and unity between the siblings. Through this, the reader sees the children's unique ability to overcome obstacles and love each other in an increasingly dark, depressing world.

The point of view of this novel is unique because the "author" himself is a character. The true author of this series is Daniel Handler, but he has created a failed detective / journalist, Lemony Snicket, to narrate his tales. According to Wikipedia, Snicket is, "a harried, troubled writer" obsessed with the Baudelaire family. This novel, alongside the rest in the series, explain that as a teenager, Snicket fell in love with a woman named Beatrice, to whom he eventually became engaged. After a series of unfortunate events (after which the real-world series is in some ways named), he was falsely accused of a variety of crimes, including arson. While he was being held for these crimes, *The Daily Punctilio* falsely reported his death. Beatrice, although devastated, moved on and married a man named Bertrand Baudelaire. Later, she would give birth to three children: Violet, Klaus, and Sunny, the protagonists of this series. When Beatrice and Bertrand were murdered in a fire, Snicket embarked on a quest to chronicle the lives of their surviving children as a way of honoring the woman he loved. It's a somewhat silly premise, but it works with the series' sarcastic, sardonic tone.

Setting

This novel is set in the Village of Fowl Devotees (V.F.D.), the village chosen to raise the Baudelaire children. The entire countryside surrounding the village is flat, dusty, and barren. When the children look around after stepping off the bus, they can't even see any buildings. All they see is a black haze shimmering above the horizon. As they approach the village, however, they realize that the black haze is not shadows, as they had expected, by a massive murder of crows: "Crows were covering all of the trees, from the very top branches to the roots poking out of the crow-covered ground...crows were covering the lampposts and flagpoles, and there were crows lying down in the gutters and resting between the fence posts" (p. 29).

The setting of the novel is bleak and dark, directly highlighting the overall tone of the novel. Handler is a consummate pro when it comes to utilizing literary symbolism. The tone of the novel is inarguably melodramatic, so it makes sense to have weather reflecting emotion and shadows creeping into the streets as danger approaches. The Baudelaire children are absolutely miserable in the wake of the parents' death, so it



makes sense that they would continue their journey in, arguably, the most miserable village in the world.

Language and Meaning

As the novel is written for young readers, the language tends to be very conversational and easy to follow. The sentences are constructed in a way that is not only easy to follow, but also gains momentum as the reader reads on. The sentences are constructed to entice the reader to turn the next page, and often this structure works. Occasionally, there are passages utilizing artistic words and phrases that may be a hindrance to some readers. Additionally, the narrator, Lemony Snicket, often uses big vocabulary words in his descriptions, but defines them immediately in the text. Violet also uses scientific words and phrases, typically when she is inventing something, but readers should be able to deduce contextually what these phrases mean. This language adds a depth to the novel that allows the reader a glimpse into a world that is made believable through the language used by not only the characters but by the narrator as well. Most of the novel is told in exposition so there is not a lot of dialogue to distinguish secondary characters - although the reader does learn a lot about the Baudelaire children, the large cast of village members have very little - aside from one unique characteristic (plaid pants and bright lipstick etc.) - to define them individually.

The narrator's language is ironic and snarky. There have been multiple arguments made as to whether or not young readers will understand the layers of humor, or if these books should have been marketed to an adult audience. Indeed, there are innumerable literary references and allusions and moments of complex foreshadowing, but there should be no denying that on the surface, Handler (Snicket) presents a series of stories about pluck and perseverance that will resonate with readers of all ages.

Structure

The Vile Village is comprised of thirteen chapters averaging twenty pages in length. The chapters are simply numbered at the top of the page, without titles or headings to distract from the action of the story. The chapters tend to be short to engage the reader in the immediate suspense and action of the tale. As many readers find themselves wading through lengthy chapters, Snicket creates many small problems and resolutions to maintain the novel's quick pace from beginning to end - adult readers should have no trouble finishing the book in one sitting, or a single afternoon. The addition of black-and-white pencil sketches also shortens the chapters and gives the reader's eye a break from the text.

The plot of the novel is fairly simple: the Baudelaire children search for their kidnapped friends while avoiding capture by their evil uncle, Count Olaf. There are few subplots in the story, simply roadblocks that stand in the way of the Baudelaire children's success: the Council of Elders, the rules, Jacques murder, Olaf's evil accusations, and the puzzling poetry couplets. The story line is linear without any flashbacks or long sections

of back-story to contend with. Even though this is the seventh installation in a thirteen-book series, *The Vile Village* can easily be read as a self-standing, fully understandable novel as it is easy to read and entertaining in its entirety.

Quotes

"No matter who you are, no matter where you live, and no matter how many people are chasing you, what you don't read is often as important as what you do read" (p. 1).

"It takes a village to raise a child" (p. 38).

"And as the Baudelaires told Hector their long story, they began to feel as if the handyman was carrying more than their suitcases. They felt as if he was carrying each word they said, as if each unfortunate event was a burden the Hector was helping them with" (p. 53).

"For sapphires we are held in here. Only you can end our fear" (p. 67).

"It is true, of course, that there is no way of knowing for sure whether or not you can trust someone, for the simple reason that circumstances change all of the time" (p. 73).

"Until dawn we cannot speak. No words can come from this sad beak" (p. 87).

"No matter how lovely the morning was, or how confident the Baudelaires felt about what they had discovered over the course of the night, there isn't a happy ending on the horizon of this story" (p. 136).

"The first thing you read contains the clue: An initial way to speak to you" (p. 143).

"You bratty orphans are too stupid to realize it, but a genius like me knows that it may take a village to raise a child, but it only takes one child to inherit a fortune" (Page 168-69).

"I don't think you should break the rules in order to capture people who have broken the rules. It doesn't make sense" (p. 238).

"It seemed to the Baudelaires that every creature in the world was being taken care of by others - every creature except for themselves" (p. 256).



Topics for Discussion

Describe the writing style of *The Vile Village*. What is unique about the narration and style of this novel? Does Lemony Snicket's narration distract or add to the novel's charm? How does his narration affect the plot of the novel? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does it feel to read the seventh book in a series without reading the earlier books first? Do you think *The Vile Village* works as a stand-alone novel? Why or why not? How does Snicket incorporate useful information about the previous novels? Does this style work or is it heavy-handed? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

How does *The Vile Village* exemplify a melodramatic and Gothic literary style? Do you think Lemony Snicket is sincerely writing within the genre or poking fun at it? How can you tell? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the bond between the Baudelaire children. How do they work together to overcome the obstacles in their lives? Is their relationship realistic or believable? Why or why not? What does their relationship teach the reader about teamwork and unity? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Is Count Olaf a truly evil character? What elements from his past or character development complicate him as a villain? Is there anything redeemable about his character? How does this portrayal of evil affect your emotional investment in the story? Do you wish Count Olaf were more complicated? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe the Baudelaire children's relationship with Hector. How does Hector positively impact the children's lives when they are sent to live with the V.F.D. How does Hector negatively impact the children's lives? Do you think Hector should be forgiven for his inability to speak in front of the Council? Why or why not? Why do you think Snicket chose to give Hector such a strange disability? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Why do you think the Council of Elders has created such a long list of rules? How do these rules affect the behaviors and relationships of the village citizens? Aside from Hector, do you think the villagers are happy living in the constraints of their rules? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

What do you think of the line, "I don't think you should break the rules in order to capture people who have broken the rules. It doesn't make sense?" (p. 238). What moral message can be found in this quote? How might this quote be seen as social commentary in a modern society? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.