

The Wide Window Study Guide

The Wide Window by Lemony Snicket

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Plot Summary

The Wide Window picks up where *The Reptile Room* left off. The Baudelaire children, Violet, Klaus and Sunny have just left their Uncle Monty's house and are on the way to meet their new guardian, Aunt Josephine. As with Uncle Monty, she is not really a close relation and in fact, not even their aunt, but she has agreed to take them in.

Aunt Josephine is a person crippled by her fears, which are numerous. Everything from doorknobs to realtors terrifies the poor woman. Her biggest fear is Lake Lachrymose, where her husband Ike met his unfortunate demise. Lachrymose is another word for sorrowful or tearful and the name is well used in this book. Her only remaining love is grammar and she continually corrects the children. Her library is filled with books on grammar and has a very large window that overlooks Lake Lachrymose.

After the children arrive at their Aunt Josephine's home, they meet someone claiming to be Captain Sham. However, the children discover his true identity immediately. It is Count Olaf, who has managed to track them down once again.

Although the children are quick to catch on to his disguise, Aunt Josephine is not. She is taken in by his charms and seems almost smitten by him. Too quickly, she realizes just how wrong she is about this man. The very evening after meeting him, the children find a suicide note left by Aunt Josephine and the wide window in her library has been smashed, indicating that Aunt Josephine jumped to her death.

The note contains the harrowing message that the Baudelaires are to be left in the care of Captain Sham. It's up to Violet, Klaus and Sunny to try to stop Count Olaf's plan before they are delivered into his clutches once more.

By working together, the children discover that their Aunt Josephine faked her death and that she left them a hidden message within the suicide note. They rush to figure out the message as a storm approaches Lake Lachrymose. The storm hits just as they finish compiling the information they need and they barely escape as Aunt Josephine's house tumbles into the lake below.

The Baudelaires rush to find their Aunt Josephine to prove that they are not to be left in the care of Count Olaf, but the storm may outwit them. It will be up to the Baudelaire children to combat the forces of nature, the fears of an adult and the wiles of Count Olaf if they are to escape his nefarious plot this time.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The Wide Window opens with the three Baudelaire children standing on Damocles Dock, about to launch on their newest adventure. They are on their way to meet their newest guardian, Aunt Josephine, who will care for them after the death of their previous guardian, Uncle Monty. Mr. Poe travels to Damocles Dock with the children and begins to tell them more about their new guardian.

He reveals that Aunt Josephine has some peculiar fears, especially regarding Lake Lachrymose and has recently lost her husband. She is not really their aunt, but their second cousin's sister-in-law. Mr. Poe also gives the children a bag of peppermints as a special treat. Even though he has known Violet, Klaus and Sunny since they were born, he never has remembered that the Baudelaires are allergic to peppermints, further illustrating his previous history of clueless behavior.

Violet's allergy to peppermints causes her to break out in hives, Klaus' tongue swells up and Sunny has never tried them to find out. Mr. Poe tells the children he will be late for work at the bank and they will have to go on to their new home without him. He also tells them that he hopes that this time they will not have the problems they had before.

The children take a taxi to Aunt Josephine's house, which is a rickety structure that overhangs Lake Lachrymose. The driver reveals to the children that a hurricane is predicted to strike in a few days, even though it is extremely odd for a hurricane to occur on a lake. The children walk up to their new home, scared that their movements will cause the dilapidated house to fall into the lake below. The door opens to reveal their new guardian.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Aunt Josephine's fears are an integral part of *The Wide Window*. Her fear of the lake is just the tip of the iceberg, as we will see in the following chapters. The Baudelaires seem to have the misfortune of being entrusted to the most unlikely guardians and Aunt Josephine does not promise to break this trend.

Mr. Poe leaves the children on their own to meet their guardian, after trying to give them a treat, to which they are allergic. Mr. Poe is, once again, well meaning but dangerous in his own way. He seems to blame the children for their previous problems instead of laying the blame where it belongs, on Count Olaf's shoulders.

The mention of a coming hurricane is sure to bring even more misfortune to the Baudelaire orphans. In reality, hurricanes do not occur over lakes. A similar weather pattern, known as a water spout, or water tornado, occur over lakes, however.

Hurricanes are tropical storms, which are confined to large bodies of water, such as oceans.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Aunt Josephine is an elderly woman, who wears her hair piled on the top of her head. She has many strange fears. For example, she keeps her house cold because she is afraid of the radiator. She does not answer the telephone because she believes it might electrocute her. Aunt Josephine does not even use doorknobs because she is afraid it will shatter and one of the pieces will end up in her eye.

Now that her husband, Ike, is dead, the love of Aunt Josephine's life is grammar. She does her best to decipher what Sunny is trying to say, which is still unintelligible to all but Violet and Klaus. She believes that the Baudelaire children are in great need of grammar lessons.

The children are shown to their new room, which they will share. Violet and Klaus each have a bed and Sunny has a crib. In a trunk at the end of each bed are presents for the children, which they do not particularly like. Violet gets a doll, Klaus gets a model train and Sunny gets a rattle.

In the room there is a pile of tin cans. Aunt Josephine insists that these cans should be piled in front of each door to alert them if a burglar attempts to break in. Violet points out that she would not want to be awake with an angry burglar in the room, further terrifying Aunt Josephine.

The children are left alone while Aunt Josephine goes to prepare dinner. Even though they do not like their presents and their aunt seems a bit strange, they all decide to make the best of their situation. Their reverie is broken by the announcement that dinner is ready. Aunt Josephine has made soup.

Unfortunately, it is not a hot soup, because she is afraid to use the stove. Instead, the children are treated to chilled cucumber soup on a cold night, in a cold house. During their meal, Aunt Josephine tells them more about Ike, her deceased husband. He had a talent of being able to whistle with crackers in his mouth, just like their mother.

After dinner, the children are surprised to find out that Aunt Josephine has a library. Unfortunately, all of the books are about grammar. At the end of the library there is a very large window that looks out over Lake Lachrymose. This is the only place that Aunt Josephine can stand to look at the lake, even though she loved it very much before Ike's death.

Ike died after being attacked by the Lake Lachrymose leeches. Unlike regular leeches, these leeches have very sharp teeth and devour anything that smells like food. Ike did not wait the prescribed hour after eating to go swimming and was devoured by the leeches.



After the accident, Aunt Josephine couldn't bear to look at the lake and hid away all of her books that mentioned Lake Lachrymose. With the death of Ike, Aunt Josephine lost two things she loved dearly: her husband and Lake Lachrymose.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Aunt Josephine's fears are quite extensive and not well founded. Her whole life revolves around her fears and instead of enjoying what life has to offer, she remains afraid of practically everything.

The Baudelaires do not quite know what to think of their new guardian. She seems to be a very nice person, but her crippling fears will drastically change their life. The only bright side they can seem to find is that Count Olaf is not around. Sadly, this is about to change.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The Baudelaire children convince their Aunt Josephine that Hurricane Herman is looming and they should go to town for groceries. Violet and Klaus do their best to convince their aunt that they would be happy to cook for her, but she refuses. Instead, she sends Violet to look for cucumbers for another round of chilled cucumber soup.

As Violet heads out in search of the cucumbers, she bumps into a man. He has an eye-patch covering his left eye, but Violet sees right through his disguise. Count Olaf has found them again.

Aunt Josephine comes looking for Violet and meets Count Olaf, who is now using the alias of Captain Sham. He flatters Aunt Josephine and although the children do their best to tell her that it is indeed Count Olaf standing in front of her, she will not believe them. Klaus remembers the tattoo of an eye on Count Olaf's ankle and asks Captain Sham to show Aunt Josephine his left ankle. All that is visible is a wooden leg, which Captain Sham explains is due to the Lake Lachrymose leeches that attacked him after he spilled Puttanesca sauce on his leg. He also produces a business card for his sailboat business and Aunt Josephine is won over.

Aunt Josephine points out a grammatical error on the card. Instead of "Every boat has its own sail," Captain Sham made the mistake of using *it's*. Although her mention of this angers Captain Sham, he covers his emotion quickly, further charming her. The Baudelaire children and Aunt Josephine head back home, as the children try to figure out what they can do.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Once again, Count Olaf has tracked down the Baudelaire children. His new disguise is more convincing than his previous disguises, right down to the wooden leg. Aunt Josephine eats up not only his flattery, but also his story about the Lake Lachrymose leeches, due to what happened to her husband, Ike.

The mention of the puttanesca sauce refers to the dish that the orphans fixed him in the first book, *The Bad Beginning*. The children had told their Aunt Josephine about their ability to cook this dish, but she does not make the connection. Count Olaf's smothered anger when Aunt Josephine points out his mistake, foreshadows what will take place in the following chapters.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

During another frigid dinner, the Baudelaire children do their best to convince their aunt that Captain Sham is truly Count Olaf, but do not have any luck. In the middle of their meal, which the Baudelaires do not eat, the phone rings. Since Aunt Josephine is terrified of the phone, Violet answers the call. It is Captain Sham and Violet hangs up on him immediately.

Violet returns to the table and tells her aunt that it was a wrong number. Aunt Josephine praises her bravery and begins to think she might be able to answer her own phone one day. She doesn't have to wait long to try it out, as the phone rings again. Once more, it is Captain Sham and he begins weaving his web around Aunt Josephine.

She asks the children to leave the room, stating that Captain Sham has a surprise for the children and she does not want them to overhear.

The Baudelaires go back to their bedroom, where they try to figure out how to get out of their predicament. Hours go by and the children are no closer to solving their problem when their brainstorming is interrupted by a loud crash.

Violet, Klaus and Sunny go out in the hall to investigate. They call for their aunt, but do not get an answer. As they search the house, Klaus finds a note tacked to the door of the library. It appears to be a suicide note from their aunt. Cautiously, Violet opens the door to the library. A cold gust of air hits the children. It appears that Aunt Josephine has jumped out of the Wide Window to her death.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Suicide is not an easy subject to deal with, especially for children and so this particular chapter is very disturbing. Aunt Josephine allowed herself to be charmed by Captain Sham and it now seems that she has paid for this action with her life.

As the children were doing their best to figure out how to save themselves and their aunt, Captain Sham was working overtime to ensnare them. The analogy of "locking the barn door after the horse is out" is used in this chapter to illustrate what has happened to Aunt Josephine. Although the children had the best intentions to try to figure out Count Olaf's plan, they were too late.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter Five opens with Klaus carefully reading Aunt Josephine's suicide note again and again. Violet snaps at him, since she cannot bear to think about what has happened to Aunt Josephine. In the letter, Aunt Josephine leaves the three children in the care of Captain Sham, which has increased their peril significantly. They consider destroying the note, but unfortunately, Violet has already telephoned Mr. Poe to tell him what happened and told him that their aunt left the note.

Desperate to find a solution to that will allow them to avoid being sent to Captain Sham, Klaus begins to notice that there are several grammatical and spelling mistakes in the letter and points this out to Violet. They quarrel briefly, but Sunny quickly breaks up the argument. Klaus begins to hypothesize that Count Olaf may have forged the note.

Mr. Poe arrives and Violet rushes to tell him what they think may have happened. However, when she opens the door, her emotions get the better of her and she begins to cry. Klaus and Sunny also break down in tears, leaving Mr. Poe to comfort them. At this point, the author breaks into the narrative to reveal that Aunt Josephine is not dead, at least not yet.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Once again, Klaus' inquisitive mind begins to work on a way to remove the Baudelaire children from the clutches of Count Olaf. He immediately spots the errors in Aunt Josephine's note, but isn't quite sure what they all mean yet.

The children squabble, which is uncommon for the Baudelaire children and further illustrates the stress that they are under at this point. With Mr. Poe on the way and Aunt Josephine's note leaving them in the care of Captain Sham, their future looks very bleak.

The released emotions of the Baudelaire children contrast sharply with the way that Captain Sham smother his emotions. The children are not able to contain their sorrow at what has taken place, while Count Olaf is a master at disguising not only himself, but his emotions as well.

The revelation that Aunt Josephine is not dead is interesting, particularly when weighed with the two last words of this chapter: "Not yet." This is yet another foreshadowing of what is in store for poor Aunt Josephine.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Violet, Klaus and Sunny try to convince Mr. Poe that Aunt Josephine's note is really a forgery. However, he is not buying into this theory and asks the children to provide a sample of Aunt Josephine's writing for comparison. The children remember that Aunt Josephine had written a grocery list the previous day and they find it in the kitchen.

The writing is a perfect match and Mr. Poe reveals that it is indeed a legal document and the children have no choice but to go to the care of Captain Sham. Once again, the children try to tell Mr. Poe that Captain Sham is really Count Olaf in disguise but he does not believe them.

Mr. Poe schedules a lunch meeting with Captain Sham and asks the children to get ready to go with him. Klaus looks at the letter once more and begins to get an idea. Violet notices the look on his face and asks him what he's thinking. He responds that he has almost figured it out, but needs more time. Unfortunately, time is exactly what they do not have.

Klaus asks Violet to make more time, but even an inventor like Violet cannot do such a thing. However, as Violet puts on her coat, she gets an idea that might go a long way towards giving the Baudelaire children the time they need to solve the riddle of Aunt Josephine's suicide note.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Yet another adult has let the Baudelaire children down by refusing to see the truth about Count Olaf. Although his plot is as clear as day to the children, Mr. Poe is completely oblivious. Since he is in charge of placing the children with a guardian, he is obligated to follow the instructions left by Aunt Josephine. Once the handwriting is found to match the writing on the grocery list, the hopes of the children seem to go up in smoke.

Klaus' request for more time is truly impossible, but Violet may have found a way to arrange for it. Although it will not be more time as we may think of it, Violet has discovered a way to extend the time before they are forced to live with Captain Sham.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Mr. Poe takes Violet, Klaus and Sunny to lunch at the Anxious Clown restaurant, where they meet with Captain Sham. Captain Sham begins telling Mr. Poe how horrible it is that his dear friend Josephine is dead. Violet reminds him that they only met the day before, but he ignores her.

Their greasy meal of Cheer-Up Cheeseburgers arrives and the children realize that they are quite hungry, after days of eating nothing but cold food. Captain Sham wants to celebrate with a bottle of wine, but Mr. Poe reminds him that this is hardly a celebration. Captain Sham instantly changes his demeanor to a sorrowful one.

Mr. Poe informs Captain Sham of the children's fortune and the Captain acts surprised at first and then claims he is not interested in the fortune. As the grown-ups discuss what is to become of the Baudelaire children, Violet unwraps the peppermints that Mr. Poe had given the children, which are in her coat pocket. She places one on the lap of each of the other children. At first, they do not understand what Violet wants them to do, since they are all allergic to peppermints. Then, it dawns on them that Violet found a way to create more time for them.

Immediately, after eating the peppermints, the children show signs of their allergies. Violet breaks out into massive hives, Klaus' tongue swells up and both things happen to Sunny. Mr. Poe notices right away, but Captain Sham is not concerned. Violet induces them to allow the children to go back to Aunt Josephine's house to rest until the adults are finished with their lunch. Mr. Poe reluctantly agrees and the children head back home.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Captain Sham is certainly a good name for this latest incarnation of Count Olaf. He is running several shams at once on Mr. Poe, who is oblivious to his real designs. Mr. Poe does not seem to register the fact that Violet keeps refuting what Captain Sham is claiming and he swallows everything Count Olaf says.

Violet's idea to invent more time works well, although the children have to suffer to carry out the plan. Although their allergies are not terribly severe, they are still quite uncomfortable. It will remain to be seen what Klaus can do with the time that Violet created for them.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Violet, Klaus and Sunny arrive back at Aunt Josephine's house. The two girls go to take a baking soda bath to get rid of their hives and Klaus heads to the library to do some research. The girls return after their bath, but, unfortunately, were not able to use baking soda, since Aunt Josephine never baked anything. However, their allergies are starting to wear off and Klaus is making progress on cracking the code hidden within Aunt Josephine's note.

He begins by finding misspellings and misused words. By taking the letters that should have been in the words, he ends up with the name "Curdled Cave" when they are all put together. It then becomes obvious that Aunt Josephine was sending the children a message to meet her at Curdled Cave.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Herman is beginning and the open window in the library lets in enormous gusts of air. The children leave hurriedly and try to find something that will help them locate Curdled Cave.

Violet remembers that after Ike's death, Aunt Josephine hid all of her books about Lake Lachrymose, since she couldn't bear to see them again. After deliberating on where they could be hidden, the children decide to look under her bed.

Beneath Aunt Josephine's bed, they find a treasure trove of different items, including an atlas of Lake Lachrymose. They start paging through the book, without much luck, until Klaus uses the index to find the name of the cave. They are then able to find a map that will lead them right to Curdled Cave, which is located west of the Lavender Lighthouse, on the opposite side of the lake from Damocles Dock.

As the children celebrate their discovery, Hurricane Herman hits the house with full force. The house begins to shudder and come apart, as the children race for the exit. They make it out in time to watch the entire house topple into Lake Lachrymose.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Klaus' researching skills have come in handy once again, after Violet's invention buys them more time. By carefully studying the note, he reads the words in the context of Aunt Josephine's love of grammar and finds the answer to the riddle that she tucked away.

Previous clues in the story, such as Aunt Josephine's correction of Captain Sham's business card error, assist Klaus in making this discovery. Aunt Josephine's enormous collection of grammar books and Klaus' vast vocabulary help to put all of the pieces together.

The destruction of Aunt Josephine's house occurs in the way that the children thought Aunt Josephine died, by falling into Lake Lachrymose. They cannot save the house, but they may be able to save their aunt.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The children rush to Damocles Dock with the atlas in hopes of finding the ferry still operating. However, due to the hurricane, there are absolutely no boats on the lake and no one is willing to risk taking the children to the Curdled Cave.

Violet remembers that Captain Sham has a sailboat business and the children decide to "borrow" a sailboat from him. They rush over to his business, but to their surprise, they find Count Olaf's colleague, the one that looks like neither a man nor a woman, asleep in the shack. The keys that they need to unlock the gate so they can reach the boat are in the creature's hand. Violet convinces her siblings that the only way to save Aunt Josephine is to steal a boat. Klaus and Violet try to figure out how to get the keys away from the creature without waking it.

As they do their best to come up with a plan, they realize that Sunny is gone. Looking inside, they watch as she carefully crawls across the floor. Very slowly, she takes the keys and makes her way back out, undetected. Just as she leaves the shack, an enormous crack of thunder wakes the creature, who quickly figures out that the keys are missing. It looks directly at Violet and begins to lumber out of the shack.

The children run for the gate and Klaus desperately tries to find the right key to unlock it. There are three keys on the ring and he cannot seem to get any of them to work. As he fumbles with the ring, the creature comes upon them and grabs Violet and Sunny. As Klaus finally gets the gate open, the creature picks him up in its teeth, as Klaus drops his book. The creature turns to leave and slips on the book, dropping all three children.

The children rush through the open gate, slamming it behind them as the creature slowly gets up. They run to the boats and hop in one, as the creature gets closer to them. Sunny bites the rope that is attached to the dock, freeing the boat and the orphans are on their way to the Curdled Cave, on the middle of a lake in a hurricane.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Even though this book is geared towards children, the author does not shy away from tackling tough subjects. There have already been several murders in the series and now the Baudelaires are reduced to stealing. The author does try to make it clear that stealing is not a good thing to do, but that it is "acceptable under certain circumstances." It is likely that the majority of parents and teachers would not agree with this statement.

One of Count Olaf's henchmen makes an appearance in this book, the creature that looks like neither a man nor a woman. The other associates are nowhere in sight and do not appear in this particular book.



This chapter also features the children doing something dangerous, sailing onto a lake in the middle of a hurricane. Of course, since hurricanes do not occur in lakes, this excuses the author in some small way, but does not completely remove his culpability in encouraging children to attempt dangerous tasks. This issue will be tackled in the next chapter.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

As the children sail out onto Lake Lachrymose in the middle of the hurricane, the author breaks into the narrative, stating that the publishers of the book are concerned that children will attempt to emulate the Baudelaires.

Instead of discouraging children from doing such a dangerous thing, the author states that, "If you ever need to get to Curdled Cave in a hurry, do not, under any circumstances, attempt to steal a boat to sail across Lake Lachrymose in a hurricane." This warning is without meaning, since the places mentioned within the book do not exist.

The Baudelaires do not have much experience in operating sailboats, but manage to pool what skills they do have to successfully begin steering the boat towards Curdled Cave. As the hurricane ends, they reach their destination. As they arrive, they hear the sounds of terrible wailing.

The source of the wailing is none other than Aunt Josephine. She is delighted that the children figured out her note but wonders why they did not bring any food with them. The children are puzzled at this remark until their aunt reveals that she thought they were coming to live with them. Aunt Josephine reveals that Count Olaf threatened her, so she did what he asked, leaving the children in his clutches because she was afraid.

Aghast at her cowardice, the Baudelaires attempt to convince Aunt Josephine that she must return with them to tell Mr. Poe that she is not dead and that Count Olaf forced her to write the note and fake her own death. Violet tries to tell her aunt that they are all afraid, but that it is better to face your fears than to run away.

Aunt Josephine continues to refuse to help them until Klaus tells her that Curdled Cave is up for sale and that a realtor might show up at any minute. The mention of a realtor sparks yet another one of Aunt Josephine's fears and spurs her into motion. She agrees to leave the cave and go back with the children.

Chapter 10 Analysis

As mentioned previously, the author takes a somewhat laissez-faire attitude in regards to the safety of his readers. He may assume that the children reading the book are too intelligent to attempt them, or he uses this as a device to encourage dialogue with parents. Either way, it is of concern.

Once the children find Aunt Josephine, they find that she is still crippled by her fears. In fact, she is so caught up in her fears that she placed the children in grave danger to protect herself. This is of course, not something that a good guardian would do, further

illustrating the horrible luck that the Baudelaire children have had in finding an appropriate guardian. Only by further frightening their aunt are the children able to get her to take action to help them.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The Baudelaires work together to return to shore with their Aunt Josephine. Violet operates the sail, while Klaus makes sure they are on the right track and Sunny steers the boat with the tiller. Aunt Josephine is of little help, as she sits in the back of the boat wearing two life jackets and constantly repeating, "Oh no."

Looking out at the water, Aunt Josephine says, "Oh no" again, but this time she means it. They have entered the territory of the feared Lake Lachrymose leeches. Violet tries to calm her aunt by telling her that they haven't eaten anything recently and that there is no need to be frightened. However, that isn't completely true. While The Baudelaires have had nothing to eat since their lunch at the Anxious Clown, Aunt Josephine had a banana right before the children arrived at Curdled Cave.

The children still attempt to calm her, but in the distance, the leeches can be seen swarming towards the boat, in search of the source of the smell of banana. At first, the boat seems to stump the leeches, but they quickly organize and begin ramming the boat. The wood cracks and water begins to fill the small sailboat.

Violet tries to figure out how to build a signaling device to try to get help and comes up with an idea for an impromptu beacon. After arguing with Aunt Josephine to let her borrow her hairnet, Violet rips it from her aunt's head and wraps it around a small bundle of the ship's sail. Using a bucket, an oar and the wadded up sail, she attempts to light the end on fire using two sticks of wood. The wood, unfortunately, is wet and will not spark.

As Violet uses the spyglass to scan for any approaching boats, she gets another idea. Using the spyglass as a magnifier, Violet focuses a ray of sunlight onto the wadded up sail and it bursts into flames. She then begins waving the contraption back and forth in hopes of finding help. Help does arrive, but unfortunately for the Baudelaires, their rescuer is Captain Sham.

Chapter 11 Analysis

While the Baudelaires work together, as usual, to solve their problems, their aunt is absolutely no help. Instead of assisting three children in steering the sailboat, she sits in the back of the boat and worries.

For once, her fears are founded, as the leeches attack the boat. Instead of helping the children fight off the leeches, Aunt Josephine simply gets even more afraid and is absolutely useless.

Violet's invention, although it fails at first, was a brilliant way to create a signaling beacon in an emergency and her brain has saved the day for the Baudelaires once again, albeit briefly. Although they were saved from being devoured by the Lake Lachrymose leeches, they now face an even hungrier adversary.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Captain Sham welcomes the four occupants of the sinking sailboat onto his boat. He reveals that he thought the children had died when Aunt Josephine's house collapsed, but his associate told him that they had stolen a boat. He has been out on the lake ever since, searching for them.

Although the Baudelaire children are happy that they did not join their boat at the bottom of Lake Lachrymose, they are back in a familiar predicament and completely at the mercy of their nemesis. Captain Sham is not pleased that Aunt Josephine faked her own death, particularly when the children tell him that she will tell Mr. Poe the truth about Captain Sham.

This enrages him and he reminds them that no one else knows that Aunt Josephine is actually alive. He threatens to throw Aunt Josephine to the leeches and she begs for mercy. She even tells him that he can have the children if he won't kill her. This shocks the Baudelaires. Aunt Josephine is supposed to be looking out for them and, once again, puts them in danger.

Aunt Josephine offers to run away, change her name and go into hiding, if Captain Sham will let her live. She makes the mistake of correcting Captain Sham when he says that she "hadn't been a very trustworthy person." This seals her fate and Captain Sham tosses her overboard to the dismay of the children.

They try their best to save their aunt, but Captain Sham's boat is moving too quickly. Even though their aunt was a bad guardian and they didn't enjoy their time with her, the children feel terrible that she has been thrown to certain death.

Captain Sham's boat arrives back at Damocles Dock and Mr. Poe is waiting for them. He is thrilled that they are alive, but refuses to listen to their pleas to save Aunt Josephine. Klaus tries to show him the note Aunt Josephine left to prove his case, but the note has been ruined in his soggy pocket.

They beg him to help their aunt and do their best to tell him that Captain Sham is really Count Olaf, but to no avail. Meanwhile, while everyone else is occupied, Sunny begins studying Captain Sham's leg. She gets an idea and bites down hard on the wooden leg. It cracks, revealing a perfectly normal leg underneath, with one exception. The tattoo of an eye can clearly be seen on the ankle.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The emotional rollercoaster that the Baudelaires have been riding up to this point in the story is enormous. They had just left their Uncle Monty, who had been murdered, stayed



with their aunt a short while before she apparently killed herself, only to find out that she had faked her death. As soon as they were reunited with their aunt, Captain Sham threw her into Lake Lachrymose, to a certain death. Although the reader was alerted to this upcoming death by the author, the children were, of course, left in the dark.

Aunt Josephine is a person completely crippled by her fears, to the point of sending the children into the hands of a villain to save her own life. Instead of finding some shred of bravery, she continues to look for the easy way out.

The children have bravery to spare, but it doesn't do them much good when the people to whom they are entrusted continually fail them. Mr. Poe repeatedly puts the children in danger, but at the very least, he is not aware of the actual danger. Aunt Josephine knew what she was doing to the children by giving them to Captain Sham and continued to do so, simply because she could not overcome her fear.

Although the children were unable to convince Mr. Poe that Captain Sham is truly Count Olaf, Sunny's actions have taken care of this problem. There is no way that Mr. Poe can now deny Captain Sham's true identity. The only question that remains is if Mr. Poe will let him escape yet again.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

The revelation that Captain Sham is really Count Olaf shocks Mr. Poe. Count Olaf tries to claim that the children are still his, but Mr. Poe informs him that since his name is not Captain Sham, the adoption is void. Count Olaf brags that this would have been best plot yet, if Aunt Josephine hadn't ruined it by faking her death. Even though their aunt just betrayed them, the children defend her actions as best they can.

Once again, Count Olaf runs off and Mr. Poe cries vainly after him to stop. He doesn't allow the children to chase after him and Count Olaf and his associate get away, leaving Mr. Poe and the children on the dock.

The realization of all that has taken place sinks into the Baudelaires and they sit on the pavement. They realize that they still have each other and that is more than Aunt Josephine ever had. They thank each other for the roles that each one played in figuring out and stopping Count Olaf's plot.

The author mentions that the remains of Aunt Josephine's life jackets washed up on the shore some time later, but her body was never found. No more mention is made of Aunt Josephine and it is assumed that she was eaten by the Lake Lachrymose leeches. This book closes with the children happy that they are together but uncertain of what awaits them on their next journey.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The loyalty of the Baudelaire children is illustrated once again in this final chapter. Not only are they loyal to one another, but they are also loyal to their flawed guardian, Aunt Josephine. Even though she had problems, the children still loved and cared for her.

Mr. Poe's inaction led, once again, to Count Olaf's escape. He waits too long and doesn't chase after the Count and his associate, choosing instead to vainly ask them to stop. This inaction will put the Baudelaires in future jeopardy, as it usually does.

Count Olaf's escape paves the way for even more misadventures for the Baudelaire children as he continues his quest to take their fortune and, quite possibly, their lives.



Characters

Violet Baudelaire

Violet Baudelaire is the eldest of the three Baudelaire children. She is fourteen years old and extremely bright. Her genius lies in the ability to invent things and she spends a great deal of her time coming up with new inventions.

Violet has an idiosyncrasy of tying up her hair when she is trying to think. The feeling of her hair on her face distracts her and prevents her from concentrating on her inventions.

Since she is the oldest Baudelaire, she feels responsible for her two younger siblings, Klaus and Sunny. Violet made a promise to her mother that she would always protect them from harm and do her best to keep them safe and she has taken this promise very seriously.

Unlike many siblings, Violet and Klaus seem to get along very well. In this book, they do get into a small squabble as their frustration rises to the surface while trying to figure out Count Olaf's plan. Sunny quickly diffuses the situation and the two return to their more normal behavioral patterns.

Violet shares a room with her two siblings in Aunt Josephine's house. It is a large room, with two beds and a crib, all with identical bedspreads. At the foot of each bed and the crib is a trunk, where Aunt Josephine placed a gift for each child. Violet receives a doll, but gives it to Sunny. She is not particularly fond of dolls and considers herself too old to be interested in them.

Violet's inventing talents come in handy several times throughout this book and throughout the remainder of the series. She creates a signaling device and even manages to find a way to create more time, just when the Baudelaires need it the most.

Klaus Baudelaire

Klaus is the middle child of the three Baudelaire siblings. He is twelve years old and is also exceptionally bright, but in a different way from Violet. Klaus is a reader and has read an incredible number of books for a twelve year old.

The gift that Aunt Josephine left in his trunk does not suit Klaus at all. He is given a model train, but finds toys like this incredibly dull. He gives the train to Violet, hoping that she can use it to invent something to help them out of their situation.

Although Aunt Josephine has a library, it is completely filled with books on grammar, which, at first, do not interest Klaus. However, they come in handy when it is up to him to figure out the message that Aunt Josephine hid in her note.



Klaus' idiosyncrasy is his ability to research problems thoroughly and pour through complicated books with ease. His vocabulary is quite large and he is often better read than the adults in the story. Although he is not as familiar with grammar as Aunt Josephine is, he quickly catches on and retains the short lessons that she shared with the children.

This knowledge and his ability to find information come in handy when the clock is ticking and the time Violet managed to invent for them is slipping away.

He is very close to his two sisters, even though he did not like Sunny right after she was born. Once he got to know her, however, they became as thick as thieves. He does his best to watch out for his sister and keep her safe.

Sunny Baudelaire

Sunny is the youngest of the Baudelaire children and is described as an infant. She is compared several times to small objects, such as shoes and salamis. Unlike many infants however, Sunny has four teeth that are very well developed and quite sharp.

Sunny's gift from Aunt Josephine is a rattle, which she does not like. In fact, Sunny has an aversion to rattles and has only had one in her short life. This rattle was the one thing that was destroyed in the Baudelaire mansion fire that she did not miss. When the children trade their gifts, Klaus ends up with Sunny's rattle. She instead, gets Violet's doll and proceeds to gnaw on the head.

Her favorite pastime is biting things and she prefers to find objects that are very hard. Sunny's talents with her teeth are useful at various times throughout the story. They also mesh well with the talents of her siblings, making them a very good team.

Sunny gets to show that her siblings are not the only brave Baudelaires. When her siblings are busy trying to figure out how to get the keys to unlock the gate to get to the sailboats, she takes the initiative and sneaks into a shack to retrieve them from the hand of one of Count Olaf's associates.

Her particular idiosyncrasy is her method of speech. Since she is only an infant, she has not yet learned to talk. This doesn't mean she doesn't try and her siblings usually understand her. Aunt Josephine, however, does not and continually corrects her, hoping that Sunny will learn to use correct English.

Mr. Poe

Mr. Poe is a family friend of the Baudelaires and is the banker who is charge of finding the children a proper home and looking after their monetary affairs. He is normally seen with a handkerchief due to his persistent cough.



Mr. Poe does not focus well on what children try to tell him. He underestimates the intelligence of the Baudelaires and tends to write them off as hysterical children, even when they are right.

He is an ineffectual executor and endangers the three children through his inaction. While he does not mean to cause them harm, invariably, his actions do just that.

Once again, he has managed to find the Baudelaire children a horrible guardian. Although Aunt Josephine is a nice person, her fears prevent her from taking adequate care of the children. In fact, she ends up endangering them.

Count Olaf/Captain Sham

Count Olaf is a tall, thin man, with shiny eyes and a uni-brow. He is described as being predatory in nature, similar to a bird of prey. On his left ankle is the tattoo of an eye. The vision of this tattoo haunts the Baudelaire children.

In *The Wide Window*, Count Olaf assumes the disguise of Captain Sham. He covers one of his eyes with a patch and seems to have lost his left leg, making it harder for the children to use the tattoo to prove his identity to Mr. Poe. However, the wooden leg is yet another one of his elaborate disguises. His real leg is hidden within, as Sunny reveals towards the end of the book by cracking the fake leg open with her teeth. His disguise works well on the adults in the story, but the children are not fooled for an instant.

In the previous book in this series, Count Olaf was responsible for the death of two people, Uncle Montgomery and his assistant, Gustav. *The Wide Window* continues the killing spree as Aunt Josephine falls victim to his plot. He is truly a man without a moral compass.

Aunt Josephine

Aunt Josephine is the newest guardian of the Baudelaire children. She is described as being an elderly woman who wears her hair piled on the top of her head in a bun. She recently lost her husband Ike and her only remaining joy is grammar, which she takes very seriously. In fact, her propensity to correct people when they do not speak properly gets her into trouble more than once in this story.

Aunt Josephine is afraid of just about everything. As the children get used to their new life with their guardian, they begin to despair. The house is cold because she is afraid of radiators. Their dinners are cold because she is afraid of the stove. Her irrational fears do not end there. Aunt Josephine is terrified of everything from telephones, to doormats, to realtors.

Her newest fear is Lake Lachrymose. Ike was killed when the Lake Lachrymose leeches ate him after he failed to follow her advice to wait an hour before swimming in the lake.



This fear is perhaps her most understandable, except that her house is perched atop a hill, precariously leaning over the lake.

Aunt Josephine's fears end up affecting the children when her actions and reactions place them in grave danger. She would rather avoid a scary situation and put someone else in harm's way, than face it and be brave.

She goes so far as to fake her own death, leaving the children in the care of Captain Sham, because he threatens her. When the children finally track her down, they have to use her fears against her in order to get her to help them.

Aunt Josephine betrays the children in the end, but this does not affect the love the Baudelaires have for this poor woman.

The Creature Who Looks Like Neither a Man Nor a Woman

This non-identifiable person is one of Count Olaf's associates who was mentioned in the first book, *The Bad Beginning*. It is very large, smelly and does not speak intelligibly. Count Olaf uses this person to guard his new sailboat business when he is not there.

The Baudelaires have a run-in with the creature and are almost captured. When the true identity of Captain Sham is revealed, the creature manages to escape with him before either one can be captured.

The Lake Lachrymose Leeches

The leeches of Lake Lachrymose are not typical leeches. They have six rows of teeth and a very good nose. If they smell food on someone, they will swarm and overtake the person, eating them alive. Aunt Josephine's husband was killed by the leeches. The only way to avoid being consumed by them is to wait one hour after eating before going swimming in the lake. The leeches are intelligent and work together when the Baudelaire children are in a boat on the lake with Aunt Josephine. It is believed that the leeches are also responsible for the death of Aunt Josephine.



Objects/Places

Lake Lachrymose

This lake is the central feature of The Baudelaires new home. It is a large body of water, home to the Lake Lachrymose leeches. Aunt Josephine's husband, Ike, was killed by the leeches. Several caves line the shores and Aunt Josephine's house is located above the lake on a cliff.

Fickle Ferry

This is the boat that the children take to their new home.

Damocles Dock

This is the name of the dock where the children arrive when they come to meet their new guardian. The name Damocles refers to a story where the hero had a sword suspended over his head by a single thread, a source of constant danger.

Lavender Lighthouse

Lavender Lighthouse is the lighthouse that is located on Lake Lachrymose. Instead of the usual white spotlight, this lighthouse has a lavender spotlight, hence its name.

Aunt Josephine's Home

Aunt Josephine's home is located on a cliff above Lake Lachrymose. Most of the house is supported by wooden beams, which are the only things keeping the house from toppling into the lake. It is destroyed in Hurricane Herman.

The Anxious Clown Restaurant

This is the restaurant in town where the Baudelaire children have lunch with Mr. Poe and Captain Sham. Described as a garish place, it is complete with waiters dressed as clowns, neon lights and plenty of balloons. The food served at the restaurant is very greasy and unappetizing.



Captain Sham's Sailboat Rentals

This is the name of Count Olaf's new business and his cover for infiltrating the lives of the Baudelaire children. Violet, Klaus and Sunny steal a boat from this location to find their Aunt Josephine.

Curdled Cave

Curdled Cave is the name of a cave that Aunt Josephine hid within her note to the children. She hides there to escape Count Olaf.



Themes

Fear

Fear is mentioned throughout this book and it rules the life of The Baudelaires new guardian, Aunt Josephine. She is afraid of many things and some of her fears are quite silly. Silly as they may be, however, they are not any less real to this terrified woman.

Through her inability to overcome her fears, Aunt Josephine ends up endangering the children not just once, but twice. At first, her fear of Count Olaf spurs her to fake her own death, leaving behind a fake suicide note that stated that the children were to be cared for by Count Olaf. She leaves a hidden message within this note, hoping that the children will figure it out and find her.

The children overcome their fears of being left in the hands of Count Olaf, a hurricane and one of Count Olaf's associates as they do their best to find their Aunt Josephine. They are disappointed to find out that she has no intention of helping them by proving she is alive. It is only by further frightening their aunt by pointing out that the Curdled Cave is for sale and will be visited soon by realtors that they are able to induce her to help them.

Aunt Josephine's second betrayal comes when she is afraid that Count Olaf will throw her overboard to the leeches. She completely abandons the children to his care, offering to run away and hide forever. Her protestations do not help her, however and she ends up being thrown in the lake anyway.

By illustrating how the Baudelaires conquer their fears and by comparing their actions to Aunt Josephine's, the point is made that their aunt is an inadequate guardian and is incapable of taking care of anyone.

Deception

Deception is a key theme in this book and in the series. The first deception is Count Olaf's disguise as Captain Sham and his elaborate story that fools Aunt Josephine. Count Olaf will go to any length in order to deceive someone. He has added an eye-patch, a wooden leg and a convincing story to ingratiate him with Aunt Josephine. By telling her that the Lake Lachrymose leeches ate his leg, she immediately associates this with the death of her husband and feels sorry for him. This pity allows Count Olaf to completely deceive Aunt Josephine.

This disguise also works on Mr. Poe, particularly the wooden leg that hides Count Olaf's notorious tattoo. Without the visible tattoo, the children are not able to convince Mr. Poe that Captain Sham is really Count Olaf. He almost succeeds with this particular deception, but is foiled by Sunny.



The second act of deception occurs when Aunt Josephine fakes her own death by throwing a chair through the window in her library, leading everyone to believe that she jumped to her death in the lake below.

The string of deception continues as the children realize that the apparent suicide note left behind by Aunt Josephine contains a hidden message that reveals her hiding place. This is the one case in the book in which deception is used to reach a good end.

Count Olaf deceives Mr. Poe into believing that he was a close friend of Aunt Josephine and that she always said that if she ever adopted any orphans and something happened to her, that she wanted him to take care of them. Mr. Poe eats this story up, even though Violet tells him that they only met yesterday.

As is typical in this series, the children are not fooled by deceptions. However, the adults continually fall for Count Olaf's lies and refuse to see the truth until it is under their noses. Unfortunately, this is usually too little, too late to help the Baudelaire children when they need it the most.

Ingenuity

The Baudelaire children are continually called upon to exercise their ingenuity. In *The Wide Window*, Violet faces her toughest challenge as she tries to figure out how to create more time. Instead of building a complicated device, she uses her ingenuity to come up with a simple answer to this problem.

Klaus' ingenuity is needed when the children are running out of time to avoid falling into the hands of Count Olaf. Aunt Josephine's note has put them in the position of having Count Olaf as their legal guardian once again, a horrifying prospect. However, she has imbedded certain clues in this note to let the children know that she is still alive and waiting for them at the Curdled Cave.

Klaus has to use all of his newly learned grammar skills, his love of research and Aunt Josephine's vast library of books on spelling and grammar to figure out Aunt Josephine's clues. In the end, his ingenuity leads them in the right direction.

Sunny's ingenuity is required when it looks as though Count Olaf will be successful in taking over guardianship of the children. His left leg, which normally carries the telltale tattoo of an eye, appears to have been replaced with a wooden leg. This is the one piece of evidence the Baudelaire children need to convince Mr. Poe of Captain's Sham true identity.

By carefully studying the wooden leg and finally biting down hard on it, Sunny reveals that the wooden leg is a fake and that Count Olaf's real leg, complete with tattoo, is hidden inside. This is similar to how Sunny revealed the true identity of Dr. Lucafont in *The Reptile Room*. Once she bit down on his hand, his hooks were revealed, proving that he was the Hook-Handed man, one of Count Olaf's associates.



Count Olaf's ingenuity cannot be overlooked. This new disguise is very well done and the fake wooden leg fools the adults in the story. His ingenuity is used for evil purposes, unlike the Baudelaire's.



Style

Point of View

The Wide Window is told in a third person narrative. As in the first book and second books, the author often uses asides to the reader, encouraging them to break from their reading at various points during the book.

The author's habit of breaking into the narrative to reveal upcoming plot twists is continued. Although the first time we hear of Aunt Josephine's death it is a surprise, we have foreknowledge of her second brush with the death and we are aware that this brush will be fatal.

This leaves the reader in an omniscient position, where we are allowed more knowledge than the characters within the story. While in some cases, this point of view can lead to a lack of reader interest; it works well within this story to encourage the reader to keep reading, despite frequent pleadings to stop.

Setting

The Wide Window is set in a town on the banks of Lake Lachrymose. The town itself is not named, but it is described as a small place, somewhere that might cater to tourists. In other words, it is a typical lake town.

Aunt Josephine's house is the setting for much of the first part of the book. The house itself teeters over Lake Lachrymose, something the children find surprising, considering Aunt Josephine's fear of the lake.

The title of the book, *The Wide Window*, refers to a window that is located in Aunt Josephine's library. It is the size of an entire wall and has a fantastic view of the lake below. It is the one place where Aunt Josephine feels safe looking at Lake Lachrymose.

The lake itself is the setting for the second half of the book. The children are forced to traverse the lake in the midst of a hurricane when they try to rescue Aunt Josephine. Although their aunt has told them horror stories about the lake, they find that it is actually quite beautiful.

There is one thing that is not beautiful about the lake and that is the leeches. Unlike regular leeches, these leeches devour anything they can get their teeth into and in the end, unfortunately this means Aunt Josephine.



Language and Meaning

The name of the lake is an uncommon word that means sorrowful. Lachrymose is a word that has fallen out of general usage, like many of the other words that are used in the book. This series is truly a vocabulary lesson and features many words that children may not have heard.

These words include dowager, which refers to an older, unmarried woman, Brobdingnagian, which means large; and phantasmagorical, which means unusual or ethereal. Each time a strange word is given, the definition follows.

Although many of the books in this series are similar to each other, *The Wide Window* stands out in regards to the activities of the Baudelaires and the caution that the author gives. For example, the children steal a sailboat from Count Olaf and traverse the lake in the middle of the hurricane. Instead of warning children about doing this in general, the author chooses to give a warning that is only applicable to the story and not life in general. Since children may have trouble separating fact from fiction, this is of some concern.

The introduction of Aunt Josephine serves as a way to teach children about grammar and word usage. Aunt Josephine loves grammar and consistently corrects the children, particularly Sunny and anyone else who misuses a word. Sunny, of course, is too young to speak properly, but Aunt Josephine is determined that Sunny learn proper English, even if she is only an infant.

Structure

The book is divided into thirteen chapters, like the preceding books in this series. Each chapter has at least one drawing by the illustrator, Brett Helquist, which add a unique element to the story.

Frequent asides are given throughout the book, as the author discusses the plot with the reader. The reader is given the feeling of being in the same position as Lemony Snicket as he tells the tale. Since he knows the ending of the story, the reader is allowed glimpses into what will eventually happen.

The ending of the book is typical of the books in this series. The reader is left to wonder what will happen to the Baudelaire children as they go to yet another guardian.

The chapters are brief and often end without resolution, a device which appeals to the age group most likely to read these stories. Each chapter stands on its own and frequently end with a cliffhanger.



Quotes

"She apologizes for not meeting you at the dock, but she says she's frightened of it." Chapter 1, page 5.

"A hurricane on a lake?" Klaus asked. "I thought hurricanes only occurred near the ocean." Chapter 1, page 9.

"Angry burglars?" she repeated. "Angry burglars? Why are you talking about angry burglars? Are you trying to make us all even more frightened than we already are?" Chapter 2, page 22.

"They each have six rows of very sharp teeth - and one very sharp nose." Chapter 3, page 32.

"Of course, nobody knows what happens after you die, but it's nice to think of my husband someplace very, very hot, don't you think?" Chapter 3, page 32.

"Oh, I could never sell this house," Aunt Josephine said. "I'm terrified of realtors." Chapter 3, page 34.

"Count Olaf certainly does sound evil. Imagine forcing children to stand near a stove!" Chapter 3, page 41.

"But plenty of people have those characteristics," Aunt Josephine said. "Why my mother-in-law had not only one eyebrow but also only one ear." Chapter 3, page 48.

"I have eye problems," Klaus said, pointing to his glasses, "and you're disagreeing with me." Chapter 4, page 56.

"Do you think he actually let leeches chew off his leg," Klaus wondered, shuddering, "just to hide his tattoo?" Chapter 4, page 62.

"But you can't invent things like time," Violet said. "You can invent things like automatic popcorn poppers. You can invent things like steam powered window washers. But you can't invent more time." Chapter 6, page 93.

"That means," Klaus said, "that before long certain people will come to look at it. And some of those people - he paused here dramatically - "will be realtors." Chapter 10, page 161.

"But I'm scared of having hair in my face," Aunt Josephine whined, just as another pair of thwacks hit the boat. Chapter 11, page 177.

"You can have the children! Just don't throw me to the leeches." Chapter 12, page 188.



Topics for Discussion

The differences between rational and irrational fears are discussed in this book. Pick three of Aunt Josephine's irrational fears and describe what they are and what makes them irrational.

While Aunt Josephine is preoccupied and incapacitated by her fears, the Baudelaire children manage to consistently overcome them. Name one instance where the Baudelaires successfully conquered their fear and describe why their fears are rational but not insurmountable.

Count Olaf is able to deceive adults quite easily, while the Baudelaire children are never fooled. Why do you think this happens?

Mr. Poe seems to imply that the children and not Count Olaf, are responsible for all of their past trouble. He tells Aunt Josephine that the children see Count Olaf everywhere, implying that they are imagining his appearances, even knowing this is not the case. Why do you think he does this?

Do you feel that the warning provided by the author for children to avoid stealing boats and sailing them in a hurricane is strong enough, considering recent problems in society where children have imitated their favorite television shows with injurious results? If you were the author, what would you have done differently?

The Baudelaire children stick by their aunt, even after she offers them to Count Olaf in exchange for her life. Why do you think they remain loyal to her, even after this betrayal?

Mr. Poe refuses to allow the children to follow Count Olaf and once again, he manages to escape. Why do you think Mr. Poe lets Count Olaf escape? Is there something more to Mr. Poe than meets the eye?