A Listening Library Study Guide

A to Z Mysteries: The Absent Author

by Ron Roy

When Dink (whose full name is Donald David Duncan) invites his favorite author, mystery writer Wallis Wallace, to come to Green Lawn, he has no idea he and his friends, Josh and Ruth Rose, will soon be caught up in tracking down a kidnapper.

THEMES
mystery, friends, community, problem-solving

I. PRE-TEACHING
A. These terms should be defined and discussed:
   - business, mischievous, yanked, squeezed, slung, research, impressed, arrangements, urged, nervous, autographed, restless, grounded, wobbled, shiny, bravely, mentally, apologized, stunned, shrieked, gesture, scarf, ransom, suspicious, accomplice, swallowed, conclusions, rational, itinerary, scurried, recognize, mayonnaise, celebrity, centipede, twitched, mustache, squinted, smudged, disturbed, scrabled, revolving, devours, bulldozer, peckish, waggled, timidly, coughing, vividly, muffled, scheme

B. Consider the following questions:
   1. Have you ever met a famous person? What was it like?
   2. If you had a chance to meet your favorite author, who would you choose? What would you ask this author?
   3. If you had to solve a kidnapping in your neighborhood, what would you do first?

II. PRESENTATION
A. Understanding the Story:
   1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 3: How many books does Dink have by Wallis Wallace? Why is he taking them to the bookstore? Where does Wallis Wallace live? What does Josh plan to do at the bookstore? What is unusual about the way Ruth Rose dresses? What has Wallis Wallace said in the letter to Dink? What is Mr. Paskey worried about? What does Dink suddenly remember about Wallis Wallace's letter? Describe Mavis. What has Wallis Wallace said in the letter to her? Why does Josh think Mr. Paskey might have kidnapped Wallis Wallace? What does Officer Fallon think might have happened? What is on Wallis Wallace's itinerary? How will it help them?
   2. Advance to Chapters 4 - 7: What does Dink decide to do first? What does he learn? Why does Josh think Mr. Paskey might have kidnapped Wallis Wallace? What do they learn next? Why does Josh think the taxi driver might have kidnapped Wallis Wallace? What do they learn at the hotel? Why does Josh think Mr. Linkletter is the kidnapper? What information does the man in the red cap give them? Why hadn't Livvy Nugent cleaned Room 303 that morning? Why didn't she clean Room 202? What convinces Dink Wallis that Wallace has indeed been kidnapped? What suggestion does Ruth Rose make? What do they learn from the back cover of Wallis Wallace's book?
   3. Complete the story with Chapters 8 - 10: How do they convince Mr. Linkletter to let them search the rooms? What do they hear inside Room 302? What do they discover when they go in? Who does the man say he is? How does Ruth Rose know the man is lying? Why has Wallis Wallace disguised herself? Where had she slept that night? Why had she been smiling in the taxi? Why doesn't she want her readers to know what she looks like? What reward will she give the three detectives?

B. For Discussion:
   1. How do you feel about Wallis Wallace playing this trick on everybody? Does she have a good reason for doing it? Why or why not?
   2. Of the three friends, Dink, Josh, or Ruth Rose, who would you say is the leader? What strengths does each bring to the solution of the mystery? How is Ruth Rose able to figure out who Wallis Wallace really is?
   3. Outline the process they use to solve the kidnapping.
   4. Find the humor in the story. What kind of humor is it?
   5. At what point did you solve the mystery? What clues led you to the solution?

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON
Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:
A. Language Arts:
   1. Have students put together a character list featuring the different traits of the main characters. Compare Dink, Josh, and Ruth Rose. What characteristics does Wallis Wallace have? Mr. Paskey? Mavis Green? Mr. Linkletter?
   2. The name of the hotel is the Shangri-la. Have students use a literary reference book and find out what this
C. Social Studies:

1. Have students choose a place they'd like to visit, learn about this place, and develop an itinerary for what they would like to visit each day.

2. Wallis Wallace's name sounds like she's a man instead of a woman. Have students find out about women authors who use men's names, neutral names, or just initials, like J. K. Rowling. Have students hold a debate: If they know the author is a woman, boys are less likely to read her books.

3. Have students find autographs of famous people. They might learn something about handwriting analysis and discuss what the person's handwriting shows.

4. Have students learn about famous kidnappings, past and present. Discuss why people kidnap other people. What can be done to protect yourself?

5. Have students discuss what kind of research an author would need to do before writing a book.

D. Science and Math:

1. Have students make a flow chart following the trail of Dink, Josh, and Ruth Rose as they track down Wallis Wallace.

2. Have students draw a map to scale of the places where Dink and his friends go.

3. Have students calculate the distance from Maine to Connecticut. Another group can check on flights. Where is Bradley Airport? How far from Maine is it? How long would it take to get there?

4. Have students learn about famous kidnappings, past and present. Discuss why people kidnap other people. What can be done to protect yourself?

5. Have students discuss what kind of research an author would need to do before writing a book.

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They might illustrate the covers of some of Wallis Wallace's other books, or for books in other series, such as Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.

2. Have students draw cartoons or caricatures of some of the characters in the story.

3. Ruth Rose wears just one color each day. Have other students try dressing in only one color a day for a week. Students might make up titles for Wallis Wallace's books, show the bookstore where she is to read her books.

4. Have students listen for puns, such as Josh telling Ruth Rose he "got her out of hot water" or Wallis Wallace's brother saying he was "a bit tied up." What is a pun? What makes it funny? Then have students make up some puns of their own.

5. "Dink" is a nickname. Have students discuss their names and their nicknames. Why do people like to use nicknames?

6. Have students listen to the titles of Wallis Wallace's books. Do they see a pattern in her titles? Then have them look at the titles of other series books, such as those for The A-Z Mysteries, The Magic Tree House, or Junie B. Jones. What patterns do they notice in the titles? Students might make up titles for Wallis Wallace's other books, or for books in other series, such as Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.

7. Have students write a fan letter to their favorite author.

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