
MYSTERY ON THE DOCKS

Author: Thacher Hurd

Publisher: HarperCollins

THEME:

A good mystery sparks the imagination and encourages appreciation of the unexplained marvels of life.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

Ralph, a short-order cook, rescues a kidnapped opera singer from Big Al and his gang of nasty rats. Detective LeVar takes viewers to the “scene of the crime”—the docks. While he is there, he learns about Big Momma Blue, a crane that loads and unloads freighters, and then goes for a spin on a tugboat to find out how they are used.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Invite students to share a mysterious event that occurred in their lives. How did they go about solving the mystery?

Discuss with students how people solve mysteries. What makes a good mystery? Why do people like mysteries?

Have students respond to the same question LeVar asks the children in the program, “What do you love to do best in the whole world and why?”

Invite students to share experiences they have had on boats or ships.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Set up a chart that lists the basic elements of a mystery: something has happened that no one can explain; someone is identified to solve the mystery; clues to the mystery must be organized and followed; suspects are identified, and we find out what really happened (i.e., the mystery is solved). Leave space on the chart beneath each of these five elements. Review the story of *Mystery on the Docks* with the students and write the details (using a different color marker) under the correct element.

Brainstorm with the students a list of qualities that a good detective must have. Compare Ralph, the cook-turned-detective in the story, with these qualities. Have students think of other detectives they know from books (such as *Nate the Great*) and discuss how well they match the items on the list.

While the children are out of the classroom, invite another teacher the children know well to visit and leave some clues behind as to her/his identity. These clues might be a hat or scarf she/he always wears on the playground, an item that is unique to her/his classroom or subject, something that shows

a personal interest of that teacher, etc. When the children return, let them know that someone was there while they were gone and ask them to try to figure out who it was. List clues they find on the chalkboard. When they figure out who the mystery person is, ask them to explain how they put the clues together to solve the mystery.

Have students make up coded messages and trade them with each other. Use a code such as A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, etc. Put the code on the board or a chart so students can refer to it to decode their messages.

As a class, compose two news articles: one based on the kidnapping of the opera singer and the other on the solution to the mystery. Discuss the 5 W’s of news reporting—who, what, when, where, why (or how)—before writing. Take dictation of the students’ ideas. Refer to the book if they have difficulty recalling details. Edit the news “copy” as a group and give both articles a headline.

Conduct a survey among class members of their favorite singers. Have students graph the results. To make a larger survey, they might pose the question to other classrooms in the school. (Sometimes a graph of this nature may be too large because too many names are mentioned. To make it more manageable, have the class decide on five or six of the most popular names after they have finished their own survey. Then, in the other classrooms they survey, students will have a forced choice response.)

Give students a brief definition of “opera” (a form of theatrical presentation in which a dramatic performance is set to music). Perhaps the music teacher or another staff member who has an interest in opera could help with the explanation. Listen to some opera recordings and discuss the special talents needed to become an opera singer. Discuss differences students notice between opera and other kinds of music.

Have students research different kinds of boats (e.g., canoe, gondola, ferry, aircraft carrier, kayak, tanker, ocean liner, steamboat, yacht, windjammer, junk, hydrofoil, tugboat, etc.). Give them 3 x 5 index cards and have them put facts about the boats on one side of the card and a picture of the boat on the other. Put the fact cards on a metal ring and place the set in the classroom library.

RELATED THEMES:

transportation
heroes

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #48 — Robbery At The Diamond Dog Diner

Program #101 — Nosey Mrs. Rat

Program #100 — June 29, 1999

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The son of well-known children's book author and illustrator Edith Thacher Hurd and Clement Hurd, Thacher Hurd believes his parents influenced his art by "osmosis" because he was always around while they worked. He began his career doing "classical" types of art, such as still lifes and landscapes, but found more fulfillment in the fanciful drawings that are the basis of his children's books. Thacher and his wife Olivia are the founders of Peaceable Kingdom Press, a distributor of posters and greeting cards from children's books. Thacher is also the author/illustrator of **Reading Rainbow** feature book, *Mama Don't Allow*.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

BIG CITY PORT

by Betsy Maestro and Ellen DelVecchio, illus. by Giulio Maestro (Four Winds)

WRECK OF THE ZEPHYR

by Chris Van Allsburg (Houghton Mifflin)

NATE THE GREAT Mystery Series

by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat, illus. by Marc Simont (Coward-McCann)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

FLATFOOT FOX Mystery Series

by Eth Clifford (Houghton Mifflin)

A CASE FOR JENNY ARCHER

by Ellen Conford, illus. by Diane Palmisciano (Little, Brown)

HARBOR

by Donald Crews (Greenwillow)

THE MYSTERY OF KING KARFU

by Doug Cushman (HarperCollins)

AUNT EATER LOVES A MYSTERY

by Doug Cushman (HarperCollins)

BOAT BOOK

by Gail Gibbons (Holiday House)

GUMSHOE GOOSE, PRIVATE EYE

by Mary DeBall Kwitz, illus. by Lisa Campbell Ernst (Dial)

THE BOAT ALPHABET BOOK

by Jerry Pallotta, illus. by David Biedrzycki (Charlesbridge)

BOATS

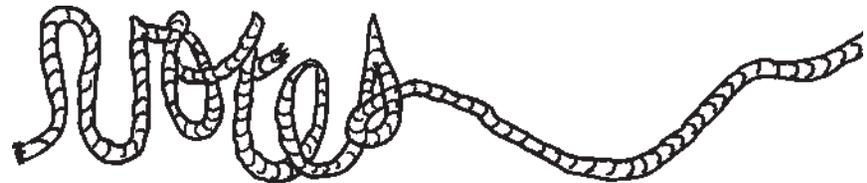
by Ken Robbins (Scholastic)

DETECTIVE DINOSAUR

by James Skofield, illus. by R. W. Alley (HarperCollins)

PIGGINS

by Jane Yolen, illus. by Jane Dyer (Harcourt Brace)



Episode Guide for Reading Rainbow 2x04: Mystery on the Docks. Episode summary, trailer and screencaps; guest stars and main cast list; and more. We don't have a summary for Mystery on the Docks yet. Hang in there, or go ahead and contribute one. Share this on:

Episode Info. Show: Reading Rainbow Number: Season 2, Episode 4 Airdate: Sep 6, 1984 at 14:30 Runtime: 30 minutes. Mystery on the Docks is a one-act opera by Edward Barnes, based on a book by Thacher Hurd. The opera was a joint commission from the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Los Angeles Opera, and Opera Columbus, sponsored by a consortium commissioning grant from the Wallace Foundation. Mystery on the Docks prem. [1] Mystery on the Docks premiered in Kansas City, Missouri, in August 1995 [2] and went on to further productions by the Los Angeles Opera, Opera Columbus, Memphis Opera, Cincinnati Opera, University of Southern Illinois, and many others. [3]. Edward Barnes is an American composer and producer. John Thacher Hurd is an American artist and the creator of children's picture books including *Mama Don't Allow* and *Art Dog*.

