

EDUCATOR GUIDE



The following Common Core Anchor Standards are integrated into this guide for grades 4–6:

- **Reading Literature**—
Key Ideas and Details,
Craft and Structure,
Integration of Knowledge
and Ideas
- **Writing**—
Production and
Distribution of Writing
- **Speaking and
Listening**—
Comprehension and
Collaboration

RANDOM HOUSE
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Alfred A. Knopf

With Readers' Theater Activity



Mister Max:
The Book of Lost Things
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About the Book

Max’s parents are missing. They are actors, and thus unpredictable, but sailing away, leaving Max with only a cryptic note, is unusual even for them. Did they *intend* to leave him behind? Have they been kidnapped?

Until he can figure it out, Max feels it’s safer to keep a low profile. Hiding out is no problem for a child of the theater. Max has played many roles; he can be whoever he needs to be to blend in. But finding a job is tricky, no matter what costume he dons.

Ironically, it turns out Max has a talent for finding things. He finds a runaway child, a stray dog, a missing heirloom, a lost love. . . . So is he a finder? A detective? No, it’s more. Max finds a way to solve people’s problems—he engineers better outcomes for them. He becomes Mister Max, *Solutioneer*.

Now if only he could find a solution to his own problems. . . .

Pre-Reading Activity

As a pre-reading activity, have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “0” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

| Before Reading | After Reading | Statements |
|----------------|---------------|---|
| | | Parents always do what’s best for their children. |
| | | Acting brave is the same as being brave. |
| | | All mysteries are worth solving. |
| | | Lost things should be returned to their owners. |

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R.L. 4.2.; S.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.3. Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. S.L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. S.L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.3. Key Ideas and Details R.L. 6.2.; Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration S.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3.

L. 4.1., 4.2., 4.3. R. L. 5.1., 5.2., 5.4., R.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas. C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R. L. 4.7., 4.9, R. L. 5.7., 5.9. Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R. L. 4.1., 4.3., R. L. 5.1., 5.3. S.L. 6.1., 6.2., 6.3. C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R. L. W.4.4., W.5.4., W.6.4.

Readers' Theater Classroom Activity

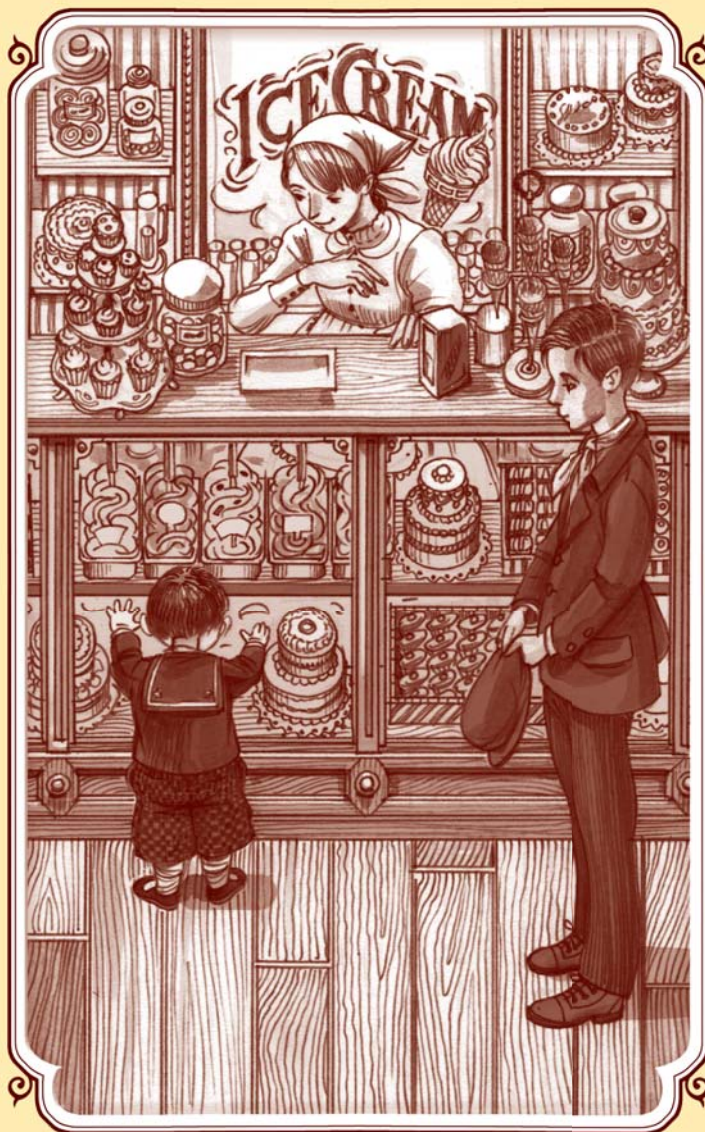
With lively dialogue, characters with distinct personalities, and lots of action, *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things* can provide excellent opportunities for student-created readers' theater experiences.

For Max, the Starling Theatrical Company and their productions have played an integral part of his family and his life. Using the following directions, have students demonstrate an understanding of text structure by retelling and sequencing a scene from *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things*.

Directions:

- Read *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things* with the class. After reading the novel, have students complete a story analysis graphic organizer or a SWBS chart as a way to make observations about the characters, setting, conflict, and plot. A sample of an SWBS chart is included on the back.
- To enhance understanding, take a well-known story (perhaps a fairy tale) and model writing a Readers' Theater script as a whole class activity. After discussing dialogue and performance, divide the class into small groups that will create an original script using a chapter from *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things* as inspiration.
- Next, allow students ample time to practice, and be sure to confer with each group to answer or clarify any questions they may have.
- Finally, it's show time! Allow students to create costumes, props, and sets for the final Readers' Theater performance. Groups will perform for other teams of students. For additional fun, consider filming each performance to share with the whole class.

Correlates to Common Core Standard Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R. L. 4.1., 4.2.,4.3. R. L. 5.1., 5.2.,5.4., R.L. 6.1.,6.2.,6.3. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas. C.C.S.S.E.L.A. Literacy. R. L. 4.7.,4.9, R. L. 5.7.,5.9.



Sample Readers' Theater Script from MISTER MAX: THE BOOK OF LOST THINGS (Adapted from Chapter 6)

NARRATOR 1: After having no luck searching for employment, a tired and disappointed Max plops under a tree in a city park to rest.

NARRATOR 2: Upon awakening, Max feels himself being stared at and discovers a very young child, alone.

MAX: "Where's your mommy?"

CHILD: *(No response. Wears serious, staring expression.)*

MAX: "You want to come sit up here with me?"
(Motions up to a seat on a park bench.)

CHILD: *(No response. Raises arms to be lifted up.)*

MAX: "My name is Max. Can you say that? Who are you?"

CHILD: "Momma."

NARRATOR 1: Max realizes that he needs help. He considers taking the boy to the police, but decides against it as he doesn't want to answer questions.

NARRATOR 2: Realizing that he can no longer just sit with the child, Max loads the boy into the basket of his bike and rides him around the park in hopes of finding the child's mother. After the boy points his finger in the direction of a line of little shops, Max heads that direction hoping the child's mother will be found and stops in front of a storefront.

CHILD: "Eye! Eye!" *(Attempting to crawl out of the bicycle basket.)*

MAX: "NO!" *(Finally looking at what the child is gesturing to.)*
"Wait. You want ice cream?"

CHILD: *(Wearing a large smile knowing he's been understood.)* "I!"

NARRATOR 1: Inside the shop, the boy is recognized and Max is sent out to look for his mother who has been frantically searching for him. Mother and child are reunited, and Max is rewarded for his assistance.

NARRATOR 2: Max has successfully closed his first case as a "solutioneer."



MISTER MAX: THE BOOK OF LOST THINGS through Writing and Research

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts or, alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

- In *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things*, most of the chapter titles of the novel begin with “In which . . .” Did you like this manner of introducing the chapters? Why or why not?
- In the novel’s Prologue, readers learn that the story takes place during the early part of the 20th century. What other elements of the story help the reader understand that it is set in a different time? In your opinion, does this make the story more or less appealing to you?
- Consider the novel’s title; in what ways does it capture the themes of the book?
- After the arrival of the summons from the Maharajah of Kashmir, Mary Starling tells her husband, “All right, William. I give up, I’ll ask. if you’re going to be so . . . so *theatrical* about it. What does the letter say?” (p. 4) How does the interaction between the couple prove that for the Starlings, everything is a performance?
- Describe Max’s Grammie. How does her experience as a librarian and former grade-school teacher help her investigate the mystery of the disappearance of the Starlings? In what ways is she the glue that keeps Max’s family together?
- Gabrielle, the baker, tells Max, “You’re easier to talk to than most people. I think you must have your own story.” (p. 104) Do you agree with her assessment of Max? In what ways does Max’s ability to get others to open up about themselves ultimately assist him in getting the information he needs to find solutions for people?
- Describe Max. What makes him a dynamic character? Is he the type of person you would want as a friend? Why or why not?
- What was your earliest impression of Madame Olenka? Did you find her to be a trustworthy person? Using examples from the text, support your position.
- Consider Max’s evolution from Max to Mister Max. How does the title of Mister Max ultimately come to be the appropriate designation for him?
- Readers learn that “One of the good things about Grammie was that she didn’t ask questions so you would tell her what she hoped to hear. She asked to find out what you actually thought.” (p. 109) Do you believe that to be important? If so, why?
- Describe Ari, Max’s tutor. Do you find him to be an appropriate chaperone to Max? Why or why not? Are there any ways that he and Max are similar? How are they different?
- Consider the variety of settings for *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things*; name the three places you believe to be most important to the story. Using textual evidence from the book, explain why you find them to be significant to the overall story structure.
- Max’s father has declared that 12 is the age of independence. Do you agree? Why do you think it is so important to Max to live in his own house rather than moving in with Grammie?
- Consider the unusual cast of secondary characters. Who did you like the most? The least? For what reason? Of all of the characters, who did you feel was most similar to you due to his/her personality or experiences?
- *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things* is told in third person. How would the story be different if a specific character were telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?
- Thinking about all of the mysteries and issues Max tackles throughout the course of the novel, why is “Solutioneer,” a better description of what Max actually does than “detective”?
- Using the phrase, “This is a story about . . .” supply five words to describe *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things*. Explain your choices.
- As the novel closes, Max has assisted several people and solved a number of important mysteries, yet the most important and personal mystery remains—the fate of his parents who have been duped into a possibly dangerous situation. Predict what Mister Max will do to come to their aid in the next installment of *Mister Max*.

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Sample SWBS Chart

To help students identify basic literary elements, as well as major plot points in *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things*.

Directions: As a whole class, model the process of the SWBS chart using a familiar story (perhaps a well-known fairy tale). Have students select a favorite scene from *Mister Max: The Book of Lost Things* and complete the SWBS chart to check for understanding of major literary elements and plot points of the novel in preparation for writing their Readers' Theater piece.

Somebody (Character)

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Wanted (Goal)

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But . . . (Problem)

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So . . . (Solution)

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Photo credit: Michael Linsler

About the Author:

Cynthia Voigt is the acclaimed author of many books, including *Dacey's Song*, winner of the Newbery Medal, and *A Solitary Blue*, winner of a Newbery Honor, and *Homecoming*. For the body of her work, Cynthia Voigt was honored with the Margaret A. Edwards Award for Outstanding Literature for Young Adults. She lives with her husband in Maine.