

Chasing Vermeer

by Blue Balliett

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

One October evening, three people in Chicago each receive the same letter. The unsigned letter asks the recipient for help solving a centuries-old crime. All three recipients, two women and a man, are disturbed by the letter.

Chapter 2

Ms. Hussey, the sixth grade teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory School, has no set curriculum. This day, she has the students ask an adult to tell them about a letter that changed their life. Eleven-year-old Petra Andalee and Calder Pillay are both in Ms. Hussey's class, but they barely know each other. They are both a little odd, too. Their intellectual curiosity and their unique hobbies fit right in, though, with their eccentric families and with their creative classmates at the Lab School. Calder misses his friend Tommy Segovia, who moved. Tommy's mother has remarried a man named Fred Steadman, whom Tommy does not like. After school, Petra goes to Powell's bookstore, where she sees Ms. Hussey, who is acting oddly. She also sees Calder, who works at the store.

Chapter 3

Petra's house is a mess because the family is large and freewheeling. As with most of the kids in Hyde Park, Petra has an interesting background. Her father is from North Africa and Europe, while her mother is from the Middle East. Calder's home, in contrast, is calm. His father is from India. Back at school, no one can find a life-altering letter so Ms. Hussey cancels the assignment. The class visits the Art Institute and Calder wanders into

a restricted area looking for a painting with a letter. Petra is right behind him.

Chapter 4

Now Ms. Hussey asks the class what makes something a piece of art. Then she asks her students to choose a piece of art from their homes and describe it without naming it. Calder keeps looking at his pentomino pieces and finding correspondences between the letters and his current situation and mood. Petra finds an odd discarded book, written in 1931 by a man named Charles Fort.

Chapter 5

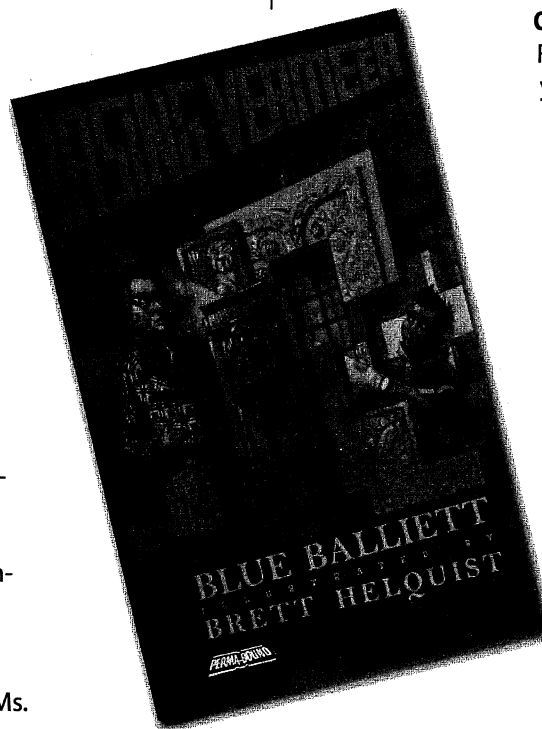
Fort writes that depending on how you look at things, your world could change completely. Petra has a strange dream about a young woman.

Chapter 6

At his home, Calder uses a box that had been a gift from his Grandma Ranjana as the subject of his essay on art. The box has a picture of a painting on it. Calder is disturbed to see Ms. Hussey and his boss at Powell's, Mr. Watch, outside together. Calder gets a letter from his friend Tommy. The letter is in a code that the boys created. Tommy is upset because the boy next door, called Frog, has vanished.

Chapter 7

Calder and Petra talk about some of the strange coincidences they have noticed. Calder delivers some books to Mrs. Sharpe, an elderly lady, and sees a big version of the painting that appears on his box. She explains that it is a Vermeer painting called "The Geographer." Calder is shocked to discover that the Fort book had belonged to Mrs. Sharpe, who had discarded it. Calder starts researching Vermeer and discovers more questions than answers.



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Chapter 8

The kids dress up for Halloween. Petra is shocked to discover that she has dressed like the woman in her dream, without even realizing it. The woman is the subject of Vermeer's painting "*A Lady Writing*."

Chapter 9

Calder and Petra record all the mysterious things that are happening. They decide that blue M&Ms symbolize secrecy and vow to eat one at special times as a sign of their determination to solve the weird coincidences.

Chapter 10

They call the National Gallery of Art, where the Vermeer painting "*A Lady Writing*" is supposed to be hanging, and discover it is traveling to Chicago for exhibit. Petra's father is distracted over a letter.

Chapter 11

The Vermeer painting "*A Lady Writing*" vanishes! A creative thief has stolen it en route to Chicago. When the thief leaves a trail of public clues via the newspaper, Petra and Calder decide to try and recover the painting themselves.

Chapter 12

According to the newspaper articles, an art scholar has become a thief and is asking the public for help. Petra and Calder have tea with Mrs. Sharpe, and her kitchen is decorated like Vermeer's world. They discuss the theft. Tracking down the Vermeer isn't easy.

Chapter 13

The thief gets another letter published in the newspaper and soon everyone around the world is using his catch phrase: "You will come to agree with me."

Chapter 14

Calder delivers some book to Mrs. Sharpe and tries to search her house for clues. Mrs. Sharpe asks for police protection because she had received one of the letters back in October. Her late husband had been a Vermeer scholar and now she is scared because her husband had been murdered while researching Vermeer.

Chapter 15

Ms. Hussey is not in class and rumors abound that she has been arrested as a suspect in the theft. Ms. Hussey has received the same letter as Mrs. Sharpe. Ms. Hussey is released but is very shaken by the experience. Calder and Petra hunt for the painting in Fargo Hall, on their campus.

Chapter 16

They explore the basement. Calder finds a package that is just the right size as the missing painting, but it is not the Vermeer.

Chapter 17

On the street, Petra finds part of one of the original three letters. A book on Vermeer is being sold for only \$1.50 so everyone can become educated on the artist. The book ends by saying that the thief is wrong but the public's relationship to the great masters has changed as a result of his actions.

Chapter 18

Mrs. Sharpe is taken to the hospital with an injury. Petra and Calder visit her and she asks them to mail a letter for her. The letter is for Ms. Hussey! The kids want to read the letter before they mail it but they resist temptation. Tommy calls Calder to say that he isn't missing at all; rather, he and his mom are moving back to Hyde Park. His mother Zelda and step-father Fred have separated. Frog has been found, left in Washington D.C. with a relative while his parents took a trip.

Chapter 19

The kids continue to search the University School for the painting.

Chapter 20

When the thief ups the ante by declaring that he or she may very well destroy the painting, the two friends know they have to make the pieces of the puzzle fit before it is too late.

Chapter 21

The kids explore the same building, and see Petra's dad on campus. This is odd because he does not work on that side of campus.

Chapter 22

The kids find a hiding place and put more pieces of the code together. They find the missing painting!

Chapter 23

They leave with the painting but a man chases them. Calder forces Petra to run ahead. She gets a police officer but they can't find Calder. He is reported as missing. Petra goes to the old tree house and finds Calder there, clutching the painting. He has a concussion.

Chapter 24

The thief, the man chasing them, died of a massive heart

attack. He went by the name Fred Steadman, but his real name was Xavier Glitts. He was the leader of an international crime ring. Very well educated, his nickname was "Glitter Man." He had stolen the painting for a customer, who was willing to pay \$60 million for it. Glitter Man posed as an idealistic thief and married Tommy's mother, Zelda Segovia, as a cover. While living in the neighborhood, he had met Ms. Hussey and Mrs. Sharpe, who are friends. The police discover that Mrs. Sharpe had made a generous gift to the National Gallery after the painting was stolen. The money was used to print the inexpensive booklet *The Vermeer Dilemma*. Meanwhile, Zelda Segovia was horrified to learn that she had married a professional thief and glad they had already separated. The children discover many other coincidences, most involving repeated numbers and codes.

Timeline of Vermeer's Life and Times

- 1632 Vermeer baptized
- 1653 Vermeer marries Catharine Bolnes.
- 1660-61 Vermeer paints "*The View of Delft*."
Paris Opera Ballet is founded.
- Apr 23, 1661 English king Charles II crowned.
- 1662-1664 Vermeer paints "*The Music Lesson*."
Vermeer paints "*Woman with a Lute*."
Vermeer paints "*Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*."
Vermeer paints "*Woman Holding a Balance*."
- 1663 Vermeer paints "*Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*."
Vermeer paints "*Woman with a Pearl Necklace*."
Peter Stuyvesant gives New Amsterdam to the English, who rename the city "New York."
Vermeer paints "*Woman Writing*."
Vermeer paints "*Girl with a Flute*."
Vermeer paints "*Girl with a Red Hat*."
Rembrandt paints "*The Jewish Bride*."
Molière writes *Don Giovanni*.
At least 68,000 Londoners died of the plague in this year.
- 1666 Vermeer paints "*The Concert*."
Vermeer paints "*Girl with a Pearl Earring*."
Molière writes *The Misanthrope*.
- 1667 Vermeer paints "*Study of a Young Woman*."
Vermeer paints "*The Art of Painting*."
Milton publishes *Paradise Lost*.

Author Sketch

Blue (Elizabeth) Balliett was born in New York City in 1955. Her father was a journalist. Balliett grew up in Manhattan, "an easy walk from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Frick Collection, at a time when kids could wander in and out without paying big fees," she noted in an interview. These experiences helped her learn about Vermeer and his paintings which, she says, offers a "sense of immediacy, of peering into a private relaxed world. It appeals to all kinds of people." However, Balliett never liked "being told what to think" about art, whether on a museum tour or as a student in a classroom.



After graduating from Brown University in Rhode Island with a degree in art history, Balliett moved to Nantucket Island. There, she began her writing career with two books of ghost stories. To support herself, Balliett worked a series of odd jobs, including cook, waitress, and art gallery director. She met the man she would marry and today they have two children.

When her children were ready to start school, the family moved to Hyde Park, Chicago. There, Balliett got a job teaching third-grade at the University of Chicago Laboratory School, a position she held for more than a decade, from 1980-1991. To engage her students at the Lab School, she took them on scavenger hunts. "We set off three different alarms on one trip to the Art Institute of Chicago," she said. Aside from irritating the security guards, such exercises were intended to get the children to think deeply about art. "Kids are good critical thinkers, if you let them do it," she noted. She now works full-time as a freelance writer.

Balliett spent five years researching *Chasing Vermeer*, her first young adult novel, and drew much of her inspiration from her career teaching third graders, as well as from her own lifelong love of fine art. She was also inspired by her love of codes, enigmas, and the patterns found in life, all of which, Balliett contends, young people almost instinctively grasp. As she explained to a *Publishers Weekly* interviewer, children "have an ability to see connections and to put the world together in so much more of an elastic and fluid way than adults."

Critic's Corner

Chasing Vermeer received enviable reviews, including starred reviews from *Kirkus*, *Booklist*, and *Publisher's Weekly*. For instance, reviewer Marie Orlando, reviewing *Chasing Vermeer* in *School Library Journal*, praised Balliett's debut children's book, noting that "Puzzles, codes, letters, number and wordplay, a bit of danger, a vivid sense of place, and a wealth of quirky characters" help make the book an "exciting, fast-paced story that's sure to be relished by mystery lovers."

A *Publishers Weekly* contributor also enjoyed the book, stating that the author's "ingeniously plotted and lightly delivered first novel ... also touches on the nature of coincidence, truth, art and similarly meaty topics." Jennifer Hubert, reviewing the novel for Amazon.com, noted: "Already being heralded as *The Da Vinci Code* for kids, *Chasing Vermeer* will have middle grade readers scrutinizing art books as they try to solve the mystery along with Calder and Petra. In an added bonus, artist Brett Helquist has also hidden a secret pentomino message in several of the book's illustrations for readers to decode. An auspicious and wonderfully satisfying debut that will leave no young detective clueless."

Ilene Cooper, writing in *Booklist*, gave the novel a starred review. She said: "The novel isn't perfect. It glides over a few nitty-gritty details (how did the thief nab the picture), and occasionally the coincidences seem more silly than serendipitous. However, these are quibbles for a book that offers children something new upon each reading. Adults who understand the links between children's reading and their developing minds and imaginations will see this as special, too. Helquist, who has illustrated the *Lemony Snicket* books, outdoes himself here, providing an interactive mystery in his pictures." *Chasing Vermeer* was awarded the 2004 *Chicago Tribune* Prize for Young Adult Fiction.

Balliett's Other Works

The Ghosts of Nantucket: Twenty-three True Accounts, (1984)
The Wright 3 (2006, sequel to *Chasing Vermeer*)

Bibliography

Booklist, April 1, 2004, Ilene Cooper, review of *Chasing Vermeer*, p. 1365; May 1, 2004, Ilene Cooper, review of *Chasing Vermeer*, p. 1496.

BookPage.com, [http:// www.bookpage.com/](http://www.bookpage.com/) (January 5, 2005), LindaM. Castellitto, "Mystery at the Museum" (interview with Balliett).

Horn Book, July-August, 2004, Peter D. Sieruta, review of *Chasing Vermeer*, p. 446.

Kirkus Reviews, May 15, 2004, review of *Chasing Vermeer*, p. 487.

Publishers Weekly, June 14, 2004, review of *Chasing Vermeer*, p. 63; June 28, 2004, "Flying Starts," p. 19.

School Library Journal, July, 2004, Marie Orlando, review of *Chasing Vermeer*, p. 98.

General Objectives

1. To understand Vermeer's importance
2. To appreciate the author's style
3. To analyze Petra's personality
4. To analyze Calder's personality
5. To recognize the novel's theme
6. To understand why the thief sets up the elaborate ruse
7. To trace the clues necessary to solve the mystery
8. To find examples of cleverness
9. To understand which "clues" are really red herrings
10. To solve the different puzzles

Specific Objectives

1. To understand why the thief sends the letters
2. To analyze the effect the letters have on the recipients
3. To assess the unconventional, creative education the children receive
4. To learn about Vermeer's art and life
5. To analyze what makes something into a work of art
6. To see how both the text and art contain clues to the mystery
7. To analyze why Petra and Calder decide to solve the mystery
8. To understand the plot structure
9. To tie up all the loose ends in the plot
10. To compare and contrast this novel to other mystery books

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Blue Balliett's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

point of view the position from which a story is told. In *Chasing Vermeer*, Blue Balliett uses the third-person point of view to give readers some distance from the mystery. Since readers are positioned outside the action, they can evaluate all the clues in the text and art. They can also figure out which clues are accurate and which are distracters, so-called "red herrings."

style the author's unique way of writing. Style is comprised of diction (word choice), sentence variety, sentence length, and figures of speech. Blue Balliett uses a straightforward style to make it easier for readers to concentrate on the mystery itself.

conflict literature a struggle or fight. Conflict makes a story interesting because readers want to find out the outcome. There are two kinds of conflict. In an external conflict, characters struggle against a force outside themselves. In an internal conflict, characters battle a force within themselves. In *Chasing Vermeer*, all the characters have an external conflict with the thief. He causes a great deal of worry among the recipients of the letters, the police, and the art world.

The Importance of Setting

Chasing Vermeer is set at the University of Chicago's Lab Schools. The Laboratory Schools are a division of the University of Chicago, and like the University of Chicago Hospitals, the Smart Museum, and the Court Theater, they are an integral part of the university community. An experimental private school began more than a century ago, the Lab School is a suitable setting for *Chasing Vermeer* because the school embraces creativity, diversity, and intellectual curiosity. Today, there are four school and nearly 1,700 students.

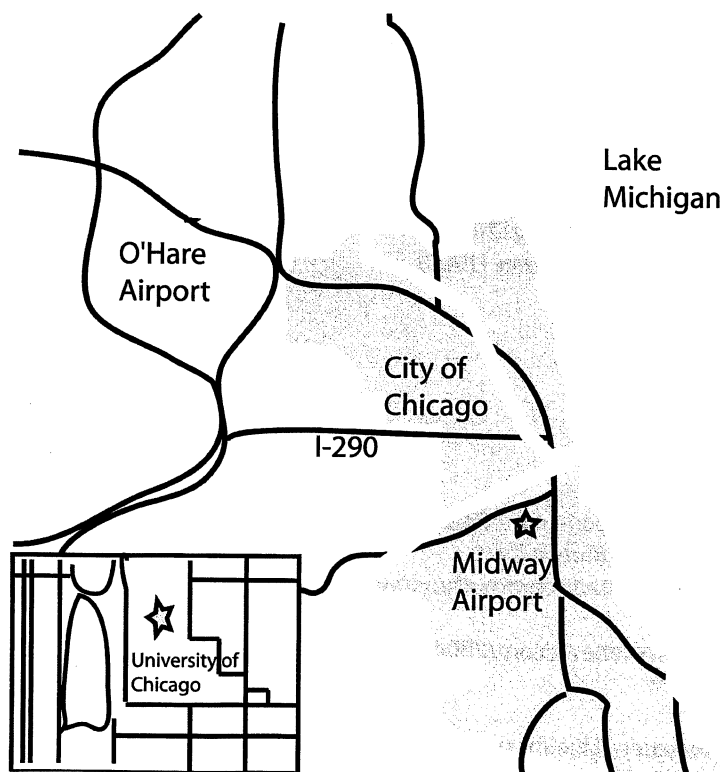
The four Laboratory Schools are organized as follows:

- Nursery/Kindergarten: (ages 3-6)
- Lower School: Grades 1-4 (ages 6-10)
- Middle School: Grades 5-8 (ages 10-14)
- High School: Grades 9-12 (ages 14-18)

The schools' director, David W. Magill, states the school's mission this way: "We are about learning well and complementing the work of one of the world's premier institutions of higher learning, the University of Chicago. Our academic program is rigorous, but we are as interested in the development of character as we are in scholastic achievement. . . . In short, we are among the leading independent schools in the nation and pride ourselves on creating conditions for a purposeful search for knowledge and truth."

The school is highly selective: each year it receives over 600 applications. Of these, some 200-220 children are accepted. More than half of the new students enter the nursery program (75-80 three-year-olds and 35-40 four-year-olds), while 25-30 new freshmen enroll in the high school. Other new students are spread throughout the grades.

An education like this does not come cheaply: Half day nursery school costs close to \$10,000 a year, full-day nursery/ kindergarten, \$13,500. Students in grades 1-4 pay \$15,000; those in grades 5-8, \$17,070; and those in grades 9-12, \$18,393 for the 2005-2006 academic year.



Cross-Curricular Sources

Novels

Peter Abrahams, *Down the Rabbit Hole: An Echo Falls Mystery*
Joan Bauer, *Hope Was Here*
Jenny Carroll, *Shadowland*
Tracy Chevalier, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*
Sarah Dessen, *Dreamland*
John Feinstein, *Last Shot: A Final Four Mystery*
Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*
Carolyn Keene, *The Nancy Drew Starter Set (The Secret of the Old Clock, The Hidden Staircase, The Bungalow Mystery, The Mystery at Lilac Inn, The Secret of Shadow Ranch, The Secret of Red Gate)*
E.L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*
Lois Lowry, *Gathering Blue*
Ellen Raskin, *The Westing Game*
Cynthia Rylant, *The High-Rise Private Eyes #1: The Case of the Missing Monkey*
Susan Vreeland, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*
Jacqueline Woodson, *If You Come Softly*

Nonfiction

Sandra Forty, *Vermeer*
Lawrence Gowing, *Vermeer*
Walter Liedtke, *Vermeer and the Delft School*
Norbert Schneider, *Vermeer*
Edward A. Snow, *A Study of Vermeer*
Philip Steadman, *Vermeer's Camera: Uncovering the Truth Behind the Masterpieces*
Arthur K. Wheelock, *Vermeer*

Videos/DVDs

Dutch Masters: Vermeer (2000)
Discovery of Art: Vermeer—The Magical Light (1999)
The Girl with the Pearl Earring (2004)
Vermeer: Light, Love, and Silence (1997)

Audiocassettes

Chasing Vermeer (2005)
The Wright 3 (2006)

Internet

BookPage Interview
www.bookpage.com/0406bp/blue_balliett.html
Interview with Blue Balliett
www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-balliett-blue.asp
Blue Balliett
www.writenews.com/2004/072304_tribune_balliett.htm
Kids Lit
www.greenlakelibrary.org/kidslit/archives/002265.html

Scholastic Author Information

www2.scholastic.com/teachers/authorsandbooks/authorstudies/authorhome.jhtml?authorID=6148&collaterall

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Blue Balliett's *Chasing Vermeer* should include these aspects:

Themes

- art
- betrayal
- clues
- coincidences
- creativity
- friendship
- individuality
- mysteries
- puzzles
- working together

Motifs

- judging fine art
- learning about the "Old Masters"
- being a good friend
- expressing your individuality
- solving a mystery
- being part of a multicultural family
- sifting through real clues and "red herrings"
- landing in the middle of an international art scandal
- using your powers of intuition
- employing problem-solving skills

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. "Dear Friend: I would like your help in identifying a crime that is now centuries old." (Chap. 1, p. 1)
(So opens the anonymous letter that sets off the plot. In this letter, the thief asks the recipient to help right a centuries-old wrong: a "crime that has wronged one of the world's greatest painters." As readers learn much later, the letter is a red herring to distract the thief from his real purpose: to steal a very valuable Vermeer painting.)

2. The title jumped out at her: *Lo!* (Chap. 4, p. 41)
(*Petra finds a discarded book, Lo! by Charles Fort. The book describes different ways of looking at things. In so doing, it helps Petra and Calder look at their world in different ways. They become more creative, eventually solving a mystery that had baffled the police around the world.*)
3. Then he saw it. Calder couldn't believe his eyes. There, hanging over the sofa, was a big version of the painting on his box. (Chap. 7, p. 67)
(*This is just one of the many odd coincidences in the novel. Some, like this one, are "red herrings" designed to throw readers off the scent. Others, in contrast, are real clues to the mystery of the stolen Vermeer.*)
4. The caption next to it read: JOHANNES VERMEER, A LADY WRITING, 1665 (Chap. 9, p. 80)
(*Petra is shocked to discover that she has subconsciously dressed for Halloween in the same costume as the woman in her dream, who is the woman in the Vermeer painting. This is another odd coincidence that gives the book its tremendous appeal.*)
5. "VERMEER VANISHES. IRREPLACEABLE TREASURE DISAPPEARS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND CHICAGO. (Chap. 11, p. 99)
(*The plot heats up as the Vermeer being loaned to the Chicago Art Institute vanishes en route. This is also one of the events in the plot that does not make sense because Balliett doesn't explain how security broke down and the thief was able to steal the painting so easily.*)
6. "If these attributions are not changed within one month, by January 11, I will, against my desires, destroy A LADY WRITING." (Chap. 20, p. 204)
(*The thief raises the stakes when he sends a letter to the newspaper stating that he will destroy the painting unless his demands are met. This is a red herring, because the thief does not care about the attributions, only with stealing the painting for a wealthy client. He would never destroy it.*)
7. He went on, "It's a puzzle that hinges on twelves." (Chap. 22, p. 215)
(*Indeed, many of the clues do hinge on twelves. Solving the various puzzles scattered in the book, including the art, make the reading more interesting.*)
8. It was a moment they would remember with perfect clarity for the rest of their lives. (Chap. 22, p. 221)
(*Calder and Petra have found the stolen painting. The plot accelerates as readers press on to discover if the kids can remove the painting from its hiding place and return it to the museum before the thief finds them.*)

9. "Calder!" she gasped. (Chap. 23, p. 235)
(*After the kids find the painting and the thief chases them, Calder forces Petra to run ahead. She again uses her intelligence and finds Calder in the old tree house. He still has the painting!*)
10. Glitter Man came up with what he'd thought was a brilliant plan. (Chap. 24, p. 238)
(*In this chapter, the writer explains the entire plot and ties up all the loose ends. We discover that the letters were a diversion so the thief could steal the painting and sell it for a huge profit.*)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What does the first mysterious letter say?
(*The writer asks the three recipients for help solving a centuries-old art crime.*)
2. What assignment about art does Ms. Hussey give her students?
(*She asks them to find an object in their house that they think is art and describe it in writing, without naming it.*)
3. What person appears in Petra's dream?
(*Petra dreams of the woman in the stolen painting "A Lady Writing."*)
4. Who stole the Vermeer painting?
(*Xavier Glitts, an international art thief, stole the painting.*)
5. Why did the thief steal the painting?
(*Glitts posed as an idealistic thief, but it was all a ruse: he stole the painting simply to make money by selling it to a wealthy collector.*)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. How is the Chicago Lab School similar to your school? How is it different?
(*Students are likely to say that while both schools are concerned with education, their lessons are more structured than those taught in the Chicago Lab School.*)
7. What function do Calder's pentominoes serve in the novel?
(*They help the author work in clues.*)

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8. Why were Calder and Petra able to solve the crime that had baffled the police?
(Their success was a combination of sheer luck, determination, and clever detective work.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What parts of the story did not make sense to you? Which coincidences did you find most unlikely?
(It did not make sense that the thief would store the painting rather than selling it immediately; it did not make sense that the kids would be able to solve a crime that had baffled the police.)
10. Do you think Petra and Calder will remain friends, now that the mystery is solved?
(It seems likely they will remain friends because they have many common interests and a similar way of looking at the world.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Decide on the punishment Glitter Man deserves for stealing the painting. Justify your response.
12. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss some criteria for art. What makes a work of art something special and valuable?

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

1. Make a set of pentominoes and use them to create a story.
2. Copy one of the Vermeer paintings in the novel.
3. Working with a group of classmates, create a museum of art work from Vermeer's time, the mid-1600s. Have each group member bring in a print of a painting from the era and write a brief description of the artwork on an index card. Display the paintings and have group members give tours of the museum.
4. Matters of perspective and imagination fascinate Balliett, and both are important elements of *Chasing Vermeer*. Choose one of these elements and find examples of it in *Chasing Vermeer*.
5. Visit a local or virtual art museum and describe its collection.

Language Arts

1. The novel opens with a quote from "Wild Talents." Explain why this quote fits the novel.
2. Complete Ms. Hussey's assignment by writing a letter that someone will never forget, a letter that will change their life.
3. Read one of Petra's favorite novels, such as *Kidnapped*.
4. List some books that you think should be sold in Powell's bookstore. Include at least 10 titles. Be ready to explain their inclusion on your list.
5. Complete the assignment that Ms. Hussey gives her students: Describe an item from your home that you think is art. Don't name the item in your description.

History/Social Studies

1. Research John Dewey and his educational reforms. What impact did he have on education in America?
2. The University of Chicago Laboratory School has an unusual and experimental curriculum. Create a curriculum that you would like to study.
3. Write a brief history of the early 17th century, the time during which Vermeer lived. Include information about the political, social, and economic situation at the time.
4. Write a brief biography of Vermeer. Use some of the source material listed in this guide to get you started.
5. Petra was named for her grandmother, who lives in Istanbul. Petra was the name of an ancient stone city in Jordan. Research this city and share your findings in a booklet or report.

Speech/Debate

1. Debate whether or not an untrained person is qualified to judge if something is "art."
2. In a speech, describe some of your favorite artists and their works. Illustrate your talk with slides or posters of the art work.

3. Working with some classmates, perform your own mystery theater. Use one of the kits available for this purpose or write your own mystery. Challenge the members of your audience to solve the mystery.
4. With a team of classmates, debate whether schools should have a set curriculum or be experimental.

Science/Math

1. Make up your own secret code. Write a message about this novel in your code. Then see if a classmate can break your code and read the message!
2. Calder sees a rainbow on the wall. Explain what makes a rainbow form.
3. Calculate how far your home is from Hyde Park, Chicago.
4. Find out how much a Vermeer painting would sell for today, were one available for sale.

Alternate Assessment

1. Make one of the foods that Petra has in her lunch, such as baba ghanoush. Share it with your classmates so they can discover how delicious it is.
2. In your own words, state the novel's theme or message.
3. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural that shows its main events.
4. Explain the puzzles and codes in the novel.

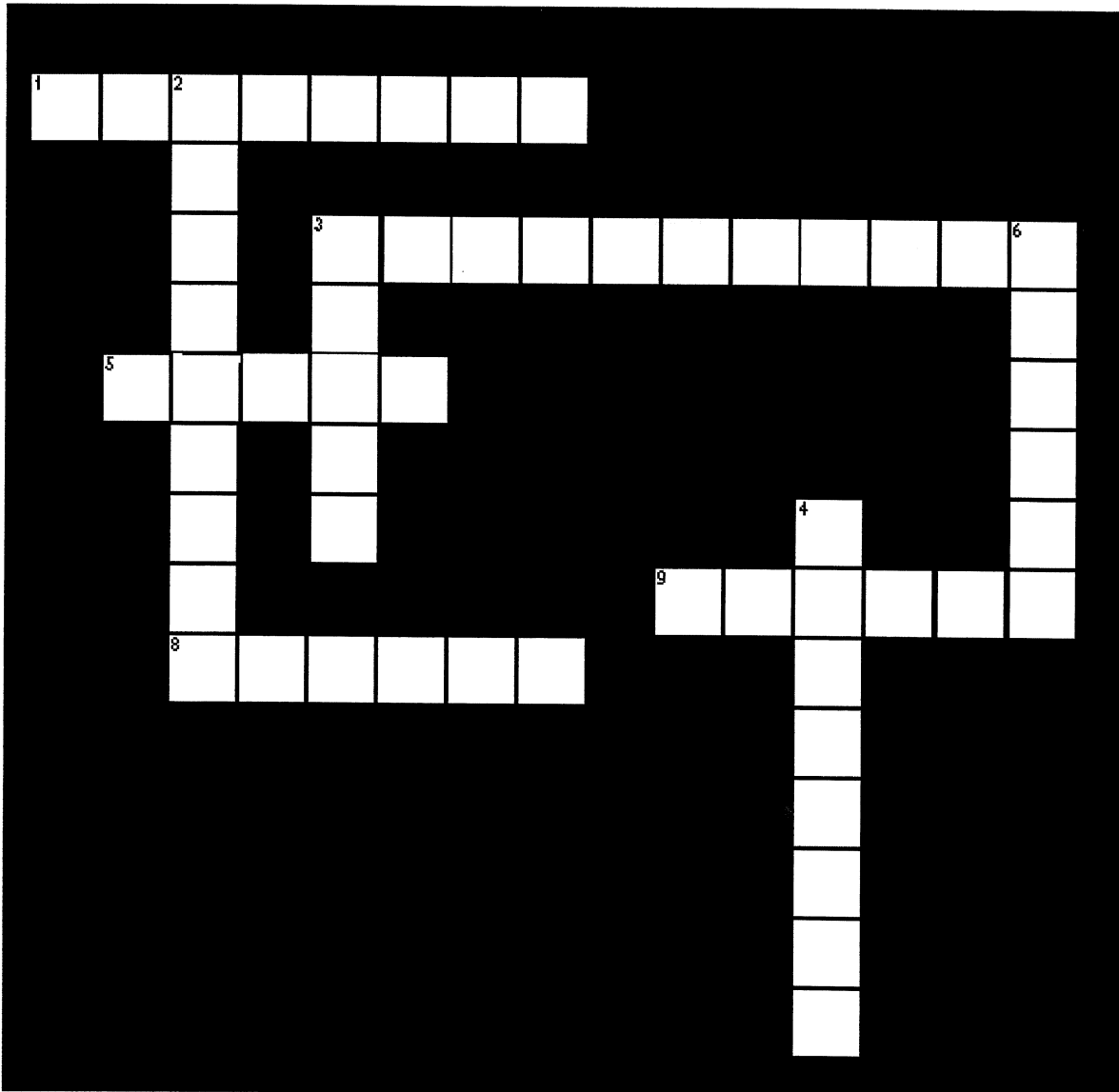
Vocabulary

Complete the crossword puzzle with the following words from *Chasing Vermeer*.

Word Choices

plump	pretentious	gullible
mediocre	labyrinth	fraud
hybrid	queasy	scurry

Across	Down
1. easily fooled	2. maze
3. arrogant	3. heavy
5. fake	4. average
8. blend, mixture	6. walk quickly
9. nauseous	



Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| ___ 1. Calder's best friend; he moved from Chicago | A. Petra Andalee |
| ___ 2. A 17th century painter | B. Calder |
| ___ 3. An elderly neighbor | C. Mrs. Sharpe |
| ___ 4. Petra's mother | D. Tommy Segovia |
| ___ 5. A male student who helps solve the mystery of the stolen painting | E. Ms. Hussey |
| ___ 6. A friend of Tommy's who seems to vanish | F. Frog |
| ___ 7. The art thief | G. Glitter Man |
| ___ 8. A female student who helps solve the mystery of the stolen painting | H. Zelda |
| ___ 9. Tommy's mother; she marries the art thief unknowingly | I. Vermeer |
| ___ 10. Petra and Calder's teacher | J. Norma |

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Circle the term that best completes each of the following statements.

- One October evening, three people in **(New York, Chicago)** each receive the same letter.
- Calder works at **(Powell's bookstore, a fast-food restaurant)**.
- Petra's father is from North Africa and Europe, while her mother is from **(Florida, the Middle East)**.
- Calder's father is from **(India, France)**.
- Calder keeps looking at his **(playing cards, pentomino pieces)** and finding correspondences between the letters and his current situation and mood.
- Petra finds an odd discarded book, written in 1931 by a man named Charles **(Fort, Watch)**.
- The painting on Calder's box and hanging on Mrs. Sharpe's wall is called **(*"The Geographer," "Winged Victory."*)**
- The Vermeer painting **(*"The Mona Lisa," "A Lady Writing"*)** vanishes!
- The thief gets another letter published in the newspaper and soon everyone around the world is using his catch phrase: "You will come to **(thank me, agree with me)**."
- The kids continue to search the **(University School, Art Museum)** for the painting.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each and explain its importance in the story.

1. blue M & M's
2. letters
3. pentominoes
4. *Lo!*
5. Vermeer

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast Petra and Calder. Explain how they are the same and different.
2. Which character in *Chasing Vermeer* do you find most admirable? Why?
3. Analyze what role codes and coincidence play in the novel.
4. List at least two real clues and two false clues in the story. Explain how the real clues contribute to solving the mystery.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: True/False (20 points)

Write T if the statement is true or F if the statement is false.

- ___ 1. Four people receive a mysterious letter. All four recipients, two women and two man, are disturbed by it.
- ___ 2. The unsigned letter asks the recipient for help solving a centuries-old crime.
- ___ 3. Calder and Petra have been close friends since they were babies.
- ___ 4. Petra's house is messy and disorganized because the family is large and freewheeling.
- ___ 5. Petra dresses like the woman in "A Lady Writing" for Halloween.
- ___ 6. Petra and Calder eat red M&Ms every time they find a good clue.
- ___ 7. The thief publishes letters in the newspaper and soon everyone around the world is using his catch phrase:
"You know best!"
- ___ 8. Mrs. Sharpe's late husband was a Vermeer scholar.
- ___ 9. Calder and Petra hunt for the painting in Fargo Hall, on their campus.
- ___ 10. Petra finds Calder in an old tree house. He has a mild concussion.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| ___ 1. A 6th grade teacher | A. Grandma Ranjana |
| ___ 2. The elderly neighbor | B. Fred Steadman |
| ___ 3. Tommy's mother; Fred's wife | C. Mr. Watch |
| ___ 4. Calder's friend who moved away | D. Frog |
| ___ 5. Tommy's friend who goes missing | E. Calder Pillay |
| ___ 6. The female student who solves the mystery | F. Petra Andalee |
| ___ 7. Xavier Glitts | G. Ms. Hussey |
| ___ 8. The male student who solves the mystery | H. Zelda |
| ___ 9. Calder's relative | I. Mrs. Sharpe |
| ___ 10. Calder's boss at the book store | J. Tommy Segovia |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

Complete each phrase below with a reason or justification.

1. The thief sends the mysterious letter because
2. Ms. Hussey gives her students unusual assignments because
3. She cancels the letter assignment because
4. Petra Andalee and Calder Pillay are similar because
5. When Calder calls Tommy, he gets upset because
6. Calder tries to search Mrs. Sharpe's house because
7. Mrs. Sharpe is frightened because.
8. A book on Vermeer is being sold for only \$1.50 so
9. A man chases the kids because
10. Petra and Calder are heroes at the end of the book because

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain who the thief is and why the thief steals the painting
2. Tell what you learned about Vermeer from this novel.
3. Describe the novel's setting and explain why it is important in the novel.
4. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and resolution.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

Across

1. gullible
3. pretentious
5. fraud
8. hybrid
9. queasy

Down

2. labyrinth
3. plump
4. mediocre
6. scurry

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. F |
| 2. I | 7. G |
| 3. C | 8. A |
| 4. J | 9. H |
| 5. B | 10. E |

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Chicago | 6. Fort |
| 2. Powell's bookstore | 7. "The Geographer," |
| 3. the Middle East | 8. "A Lady Writing" |
| 4. India | 9. "You will come to agree with me." |
| 5. pentomino pieces | 10. University School |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. Calder and Petra decide that blue M&Ms symbolize secrecy and they each eat one at special times as a sign of their determination to solve the weird coincidences.
2. The plot revolves around letters, both epistles and characters. The epistles set the plot into motion; the characters are used in many of the codes.
3. Pentominoes are a mathematical tools consisting of twelve pieces. Each piece is made up of five squares that share at least one side. Mathematicians use pentominoes to explore ideas about geometry and numbers. Calder uses them to help him solve the mystery of the stolen painting.
4. *Lo!* is Mrs. Sharpe's discarded book. Calder and Petra use to sharpen their abilities to look at issues from many different sides.
5. Vermeer is the 17th century Dutch painter whose works form the center of the novel. When one of his paintings is stolen, the entire world follows the clues.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. F |
| 2. I | 7. B |
| 3. H | 8. E |
| 4. J | 9. A |
| 5. D | 10. C |

Part III: Motivation (20 points)

1. he wants to distract people from his real purpose: to steal the Vermeer
2. she wants to make them think and use their imagination
3. it proved to difficult to do
4. they are both bright, a little odd, intellectually curious, and multicultural
5. Tommy's telephone number has been disconnected
6. he is looking for clues
7. her husband was a Vermeer scholar and he was murdered while researching Vermeer.
8. everyone can become educated on the artist
9. he is the thief and they have found the painting
10. they find the painting

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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