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Activity Guide

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The Case of the Puzzling Possum

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ABOUT THE STORY

Mr. Riley has a problem: the trombone in his music store window keeps disappearing, appearing again, and then disappearing. He calls in Bunny and Jack, Private Eyes, to solve the mystery. Find out who keeps taking the trombone, and why the thief keeps giving it back, in the third book of the High-Rise Private Eyes series.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cynthia Rylant has written several other books about the High-Rise Private Eyes, including *The Case of the Missing Monkey* and *The Case of the Climbing Cat*, both Live Oak Readalongs. Her books have won dozens of awards; in 1993 she received the Newbery Award for her novel *Missing May*. She is also the author of the Henry and Mudge books. She lives with her family in Washington State.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

G. Brian Karas has illustrated more than 50 books. His first lessons in illustration came when he was five, and his sister taught him how to draw pilgrims. He went on to study art at the Paier School of Art in Connecticut. He lives in Rhinebeck, New York, with his family.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children if they have ever heard a trombone played. Have volunteers describe the sound of a trombone. Then tell them the book they are about to read is about a trombone that keeps disappearing — and appearing again.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- “What does Bunny collect?”
- “What happens when Jack makes cocoa?”
- “What clues does Bunny write down?”
- “Who took the trombone? Why?”
- “Do you think Bunny’s solution to Freddy’s problem is a good one? Explain.”
(*Make Judgements*)
- “How do you think Mr. Riley will react when he finds out why the trombone was taken?” (*Make Predictions*)

Vocabulary

Write these words on the chalkboard. Have children work in small groups to write the words in alphabetical order and find their definitions in a dictionary. Then have the groups use three of the words in sentences.

professional trombone sensitive display bandit culprit

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Music: Listen to the Trombone

Have recordings of trombone music available for children to hear. Some trombone musicians include John Cage, Tommy Dorsey, Sunny Russo, and Bill Watrous. Ask children to write down a description of what the trombone sounds like and to explain whether they like the sound and why.

Art: Make a Collection

Bunny collects buttons. Encourage children to start their own collections, gathering whatever objects they like. Some possibilities include stamps, coins, Beanie Babies, and snow globes. Have volunteers bring in their collections to share with the class.

Science: About the Opossum

The trombone thief is an opossum. Ask children to work in groups to find out facts about real opossums. Each group can use books about animals or encyclopedias for research and then write a brief report on opossums. Reports should include information such as where opossums live, what they eat, and what their habits are.

Language Arts: Describe a Hayride

Ask children who have been on hayrides to write a descriptive paragraph about the experience. Children who have not been on a hayride can use their imaginations to write a description. Encourage them to include all the senses in their descriptions: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. Volunteers can share their descriptions with the rest of the class.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords suggested below, you may wish to try them yourself to make sure the sites are suitable.

Trombone History

Using the keywords “history of the trombone”, children can use the Internet to find out when the trombone was invented and how it was used. Ask them to write a brief report on the history of the instrument and to present the information they find to the class.