

THE BUG BANDITS

JENNI L. WALSH

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

or Middle Grades, ages 8 and up

created by JENNIFER GUYOR JOWETT



“What if our plan starts to fall apart before we even begin?” (154)

SUMMARY ZONDERKIDZ:

Without a mom and with her dad busy running the museum, Liberty Jacobs was practically raised by the tarantulas, leopard geckos, and rare butterflies of the Walnut Street Insectarium. She loves being the resident “Bug Girl,” but unless Liberty and her dad can snag a big investor, they’ll lose the museum, their home, and the funding Liberty needs to launch her dream business: a butterfly release program called Life & Liberty.

The investor meeting is a week away, but there’s a big problem: Liberty has reason to suspect there’s going to be a “buglary” of the museum’s rarest animals. But the police don’t believe her, and with Dad out of town for an insect convention, it’s up to Liberty and her friends (and her vast knowledge of bug defense mechanisms) to thwart the thieves and save the museum.

The Bug Bandits is:

- perfect for readers ages 8 and up who love mystery and suspense
- an empowering story of adventure, friendship, and courage
- ideal for fans of Blue Balliett, James Ponti, and Deron Hicks

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jenni L. Walsh is the author of the She Dared series and novels *Hettie and the London Blitz*, *I Am Defiance*, *By the Light of Fireflies*, *Over and Out*, and *Operation: Happy*. She also writes historical novels for adults, including *Becoming Bonnie*, *Side by Side*, *A Betting Woman*, *The Call of the Wrens*, *Unsinkable*, and *Ace, Marvel, Spy*. To learn more about Jenni and her books, please visit jennilwalsh.com or @jennilwalsh on social media.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

These pre-reading activities allow students to draw from preexisting knowledge and make predictions so that they are better able to make connections within the novel.

1. Imagine being able to live within the place where your family works. What type of building and business would be the most interesting to you? Draw what you imagine in the form of blueprints, an architectural rendering, or another way you prefer. Provide a written description.
2. Set up a “theft” within the classroom. Carry out the “theft” while students are working (ask a student or another staff member to take something in a prearranged plan). Have students describe what they witnessed. They might make a list of their observations independently and then compare their lists. What do their lists have in common? Discuss why there might be differences.
3. Have students consider the details provided on the chapter 1 page (“Sunday: One week and one day to go”). What do they imagine will take place in one week and one day? Have them imagine five possible situations (they could return to their lists to see if they are correct after reading). Have them share their possibilities with partners and within the whole group.
4. Have students spend some time exploring the chapter pages, noting the art details. Which bugs stand out the most? Why do you think the book designer used the artwork they did? Did the variety of bugs and their placement make them more or less interested in reading the story? (You might revisit the questions after reading and see if their thoughts remained the same or changed.)
5. Take a temperature gauge by having students stand on a line that marks their assessment of how serious they feel it is to tell a white lie—ranging from it’s always fine to it’s never acceptable. Discuss their reasoning and whether or not it’s okay to tell a white lie. Ask students to place themselves on the line again after discussing (and again after reading), noting changes.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What makes a mystery good? Why?
2. Think of a time when you had a good friend or important person in your life move away. Did you try to continue the friendship or did you handle it in a different way? How did you feel? What problems did you experience, or you think might arise in the future?



3. When have you used courage to face a challenging situation? Describe the situation and how you showed courage.
 4. Who do you turn to when you need help navigating a situation? Explain why. How would you be affected if that person was unavailable?
 5. We all have qualities that define us. Make a list of the qualities that make you who you are. You can include both obvious and less obvious, positive and challenging qualities.
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ACTIVITIES DURING READING



Suspects and Observations Notebook

Once Liberty realizes that a theft is going to occur, she starts to wonder who might be behind it. Everyone connected to the museum or entering it should be considered a potential suspect. Take notes on the characters and what you observe in the story, writing down things that cause you to be suspicious. Cross suspects off the list as information eliminates them. Be sure to document the evidence that led you to eliminate a suspect. Consider adding motives as information is revealed throughout the story. As you read further, discuss which suspect you think is most likely behind the theft.

Suspects	Observations (page numbers)	Motive

FACT OR OPINION

A fact is a statement that can be proven to be true or false with evidence from the story. An opinion is a statement that shares feelings, beliefs, or attitudes. Decide whether the

following statements are facts or opinions. Use evidence from the text to support your answer. Include page numbers as a parenthetical citation. You may find more than one piece of evidence for each item. Students will find it interesting to discuss their responses, as they likely found varying pieces of evidence and have differing thoughts.

Fact or Opinion	Evidence
Emmy is a good friend to Liberty.	
Liberty works at the Walnut Street Insectarium.	
Liberty likes the nickname “Bug Girl.”	
Liberty made a good decision in not entering the alley when returning home.	
Liberty’s father believes her when she tells him about the robbery.	
Liberty and her father are the only two people who live at the museum.	
When the police officers arrive, they believe Liberty and Emmy.	
Liberty is right to trust her gut about the robbery.	
Liberty’s father thinks her proposal for Life & Liberty is a good idea.	
Liberty is relieved that the police decide not to post men outside the museum for a third night.	
Several of the pranks in Home Alone would have killed Harry and Marv.	
Emmy and Cam both care a lot about Liberty.	

QUESTIONS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION DURING READING

1. How do you think Liberty feels when Emmy has to end their nightly phone call early (7)?
2. Do you think that Liberty and Emmy will be able to sustain their friendship from separate states? Explain your thoughts.
3. Liberty and her father are trying many ways to increase revenue for the museum (chapter 2). Which idea do you believe offers the best outcome? Explain your reasoning.
4. What does it say about Liberty and her friendship with Emmy that she is truthful with Emmy when Emmy asks why Cam is at the museum (39)? Why do you think Liberty is honest enough to say that she doesn't want to tell her?
5. What can you tell about the relationship between Liberty and her father from the exchange they have during the Life & Liberty pitch (51–55)? Be prepared to support your answer with details.
6. By the next morning, Liberty still hasn't told her dad what Emmy overheard. Why do you think she is waiting (66)? Explain your answer.
7. Why does Liberty's father call the police when she informs him of what Emmy overheard while on the phone in the lobby (75–76)?
8. Why do you believe Emmy doesn't call Liberty like she usually does? Why don't the robbers show up? Do you think Liberty is more upset that Emmy hasn't called or that the robbers haven't shown (81)? Explain your answer.
9. What do you think Liberty's father should do: go the trade show or stay home at the museum (84)? Explain your thoughts.
10. Do you believe Liberty did the right thing when she texted Officer Morris (94)? Why or why not?
11. Does Liberty lie when she tells Officer Morris her father is in the shower (98)? What makes you believe that?
12. Where do you think Liberty gets her courage from? Would you be able to do what she does?
13. Do you agree that Liberty is telling "white lies," or are they more serious lies (112)? What makes you believe this?
14. Why don't Liberty and Cam call the police after they overhear the door's passcode being spoken (121)? Explain your ideas as to whether this was/wasn't the right decision.

15. When Liberty tells Grams that her father is back, would that be considered a white lie, or is it more serious (146)?
16. What do you think of Cam’s suggestion to focus on controlling the controllable (147)? Why do you think this might be good advice?
17. What do you consider to be the most dangerous part of the plan to catch the robbers? Which part takes the most courage? Explain your responses.
18. When Liberty’s father returns early, why do you think he allows the plan to trap the robbers to go forward (173)?
19. Why does Liberty make the decision to go toward the thieves without waiting for her father to call the police (181)?
20. What was your reaction when the person behind the robbery was revealed? How surprised were you? At what point in reading did you suspect this person?

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1-8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3-8.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1-8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.9-8.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1-8.1]

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Research

Explore the ways insects use camouflage. Write an essay describing which use is the most effective or the most unusual (or some other “most”).

Museum Model

Liberty gives Cam a tour of the museum in chapter 3. Create a replica of her descriptions in an art medium of your choosing. You might consider a 3D model or a detailed drawing. Pay close attention to the details, especially those on the second and third floors.

Collective Noun Field Guide

A collective noun is a word that refers to a group of people, animals, or things. Liberty informs the crowd of museumgoers that a group of butterflies is called a kaleidoscope (71). Create a journal of other interesting or unusual collective nouns. You might draw images of the groups similar to what you would see in a scientist’s field guide.

A Collection of Collectives

What might you call a group of basketball players? A huddle? Would a bunch of turkeys be called a gobble? Create your own collective nouns, choosing words that connect to the

group. You might craft them into a poem or a song, or create a dictionary with illustrations to accompany the entries.

Gift Shop Designs

The Walnut Street Insectarium has a variety of merchandise for sale with punny sayings on T-shirts and greeting cards, such as “You’re so fly” (15). Come up with some of your own punny sayings and create some designs for merchandise that could be offered in the gift shop.

Infographic

As Liberty is introduced in the book, readers learn that she has a wealth of knowledge about interesting insect facts, such as the fact that cockroaches can live for a week without a head (13). Do some bug research on your own and create an infographic filled with interesting facts. Present your information.

Butterfly Habitats

Research butterflies and what they need to thrive in your area. Create a habitat in your yard that is inviting to butterflies. Include nectar and host plants, as well as plants for protection. Document your research and the habitat. Present this information to the class.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1-8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1A-8.1.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1B-8.1.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4-8.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.7-8.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.9-8.9]

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