

The Blue Ghost

Marion Dane Bauer ♦ Classroom Guide

Teachers, librarians, and parents, feel free to choose from the questions below, all of which prepare the readers for the ideas brought forth in the book.

Pre-Reading Questions

1. Without reading the title of the book, read the first sentence of the book, then read the entire first paragraph. Ask the students what type of a story they think this will be. Why do they think so?
2. Have you ever woken up from a dream that scared you?

Before Reading the Book

1. What do you know about ghosts? Share what you know with the rest of the group.

Characters in the Book

Liz, the main character
Gran, Liz's grandmother and the owner of the cabin
Elizabeth, a young girl
Matthew, a baby boy

While Reading the Book

1. [after page 17]: What is a guardian angel? Do you think you have one? Do you think you might be a guardian angel for someone else?
2. [after page 39]: Have you ever wanted to walk through a wall? Have you tried to do it? What happened?

After Reading the Book

1. Write a ghost story.
2. Now that you know how your story goes, write it again. This time, start the story at the scariest part.
3. In your story, how did you know how to describe the ghost?
4. Why do you think Marion Dane Bauer describes her ghost as a "blue ghost"?
5. Draw what you think a ghost might look like. Use a pencil, markers, or crayons, or make one out of cut paper. Which type of drawing tools will work best for a ghost?



Random House
Stepping Stones
Ages 7 to 9
ISBN 0-375-83179-7

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After Reading the Book (cont'd)

6. Create puppets out of the materials you think would work best for this story and then act out the scenes where Liz walks through the wall and visits the Elizabeth from the past. Using these same puppets or others, act out the ghost story you wrote. How are these stories different and alike?
7. Do you know stories about your family that show “connections”? How was the story told, read, or shown to you? Can you tell that story out loud, write it as a short story, or draw that story?

Where do a writer's ideas come from?

The author, Marion Dane Bauer, answers these questions about writing *The Blue Ghost*:

Do you believe in ghosts?

I'll answer that question the way I once heard the writer Avi answer it. I believe in ghost stories, but I don't believe in ghosts. I enjoy writing ghost stories, because they always deal with large issues, issues so large that they continue to be important even beyond someone's death. As to believing in ghosts themselves, I've never met one and I'd be astonished if I ever did.

Was Gran's cabin inspired by a cabin you've visited?

It was, probably more than anything, inspired by an old log cabin in the mountains of Colorado I lived in for a summer when I was twenty. It had been built by original settlers, then added onto and added onto until the original cabin was impossible to distinguish. There were even two separate upstairs that had to be reached by different stairs. You couldn't get from one set of upstairs rooms to the other without going down and climbing the other staircase. Now that I think about it, there may be more stories residing in that old house.

Does your family tell stories about connections?

My mother used to tell stories about her family, her mother's father, who brought a colony from England to Minnesota. (I wrote about him in my Dear America novel, *Land of the Buffalo Bones*.) She told of her mother's years of teaching in a one-room school and of her homesteading grandfather, her father's father, who moved across the country homesteading in different places until he finally reached Minnesota, where he settled and stayed. My father had almost no stories to tell about his family, so I felt closer to my mother's people. Stories brought them alive, even the ones I never knew.

Where did your idea come from for having Liz walk through a wall to visit the past?

Ah . . . that's a rather long story. In quick summary, I may not believe in ghosts, but I've always believed in being able to walk through walls. When I

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Where do a writer's ideas come from? (cont'd)

was very young – perhaps four or five – I had a dream in which a wagon-load of kids pulled by two huge, dapple-gray horses came to me during the night and took me to a playground in the dark of my wall. There we played the night away. The dream came back several times, and I used to lie in bed, facing into the fearsome darkness of my wall, waiting for the dream to come again. Even today, walls never seem completely solid to me.

*Is it harder to write a mystery than another type of story?
How is the process different?*

In some ways a mystery is easier, because it is more about plot than about character. All I have to know before I begin to write is what is going to happen and why, and then I can write the story fairly quickly. In more deeply character-based stories I often have many discoveries to make along the way before I can fully know who my characters are, and that makes for slower writing and more circling back to rethink what I have already written.

Unfamiliar terms

Have the students predict what these words and phrases might mean, based on the context. Next, have them look up what the words mean, either in a dictionary, a book like *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, or online.

croup
hodgepodge
grew like Topsy
sunnies

For Teachers: What makes a mystery?

Mysteries have common elements, but there are several kinds of mysteries. A mystery may have one of these elements or it may have many.

There is one or more question that must be answered by the end of the story or the book. Sometimes that is a simple question, and sometimes there are many questions wrapped inside other questions.

Some stories have characters who are mysterious. We don't know who they are. They may tell us they are a certain kind of person, but by the end of the story we discover they are somebody quite different.



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For Teachers: What makes a mystery? (cont'd)

Another type of mystery has an object that is unfamiliar or hidden or lost. The characters in this story will search for the truth or the location of that object.

The place setting may be a part of the mystery. We may not know until very late in the story where the book takes place. That may be an important part of the mystery.

Some stories are realistic mysteries set in a neighborhood just like our own.

Others are historical mysteries, relying on place and time to provide the interesting mystery for the reader.

Science fiction or fantasy may be an element of the mystery. The story may be set in the future or in an imaginary land.

Then there are ghost stories, horror stories, and puzzle stories. These can be types of mysteries as well.

What elements of the mystery does *The Blue Ghost* have?

Read some of the companion books we've suggested and see if readers can identify the elements of the mystery in each of them.

How about the mystery the students wrote? Were one or more of these elements present?

Teacher references

How mysteries fit into Bloom's Taxonomy

- ❖ Knowledge: Students arrange characters and events in the mystery.
- ❖ Comprehension: Students classify events, describe characters, and explain precisely what has occurred.
- ❖ Application: Students apply existing knowledge to the mystery by illustrating, dramatizing, and writing their interpretations.
- ❖ Analysis: Students analyze, categorize, and differentiate characters and events.
- ❖ Synthesis: Students collect and organize facts to form hypotheses.
- ❖ Evaluation: Students appraise, argue, assess, and evaluate their opinions in the process of solving the mystery.

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Examples of mysteries specifically for children

This site, posted by Dakota Meadows eighth grade classes, features two-minute mysteries written by the students every year since 1996.

- ❖ <http://www.isd77.k12.mn.us/schools/dakota/mystery/contents.html>

On MysteryNet.com, you'll find children's mysteries, some written for children and others written by children. They periodically run a writing contest for children.

- ❖ <http://kids.mysterynet.com/>

Here are online mysteries to solve with Rex, the Dino Detective, at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis.

- ❖ <http://www.childrensmuseum.org/geomysteries/mysteries.html>

Companion Books

Adler, David. *Cam Jansen and the First Day of School Mystery*. Puffin, 2003. A series of books with Cam (short for Camera) Jansen, who has a photographic memory, and enjoys solving mysteries. Early reader.

Hale, Bruce. *The Chameleon Wore Chartreuse*. Harcourt, 2000. Tongue firmly in cheek, these are funny, laugh-out-loud mysteries featuring Chet Gecko, private eye. Read aloud for this age level.

Horowitz, Ruth. *Breakout at the Bug Lab*. Puffin, 2002. A good example of a mystery with a mysterious character and a surprise ending. Early reader.

Maitland, Barbara. *Bookstore Ghost*. Puffin, 1998. Fun and funny, this mystery set in a bookstore plays with language. Early reader.

Osborne, Mary Pope. *Dinosaurs Before Dark*, a Magic Tree House mystery. Random House, 1992. An early chapter book that transports its young hero and heroine back through time travel to solve a mystery. Extensive series.

Warner, Gertrude Chandler. *The Boxcar Children*. Albert Whitman, 1989. One of the original series books, this set of mysteries has been fascinating children for more than fifty years. Good read-aloud.

Young, Richard and Judy Dockery. *Favorite Scary Stories of American Children*. August House, 1996. Just right for kids who will read *Blue Ghost*, this is a collection of stories that are scary and not-so-scary to be read aloud.

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About Marion Dane Bauer

Marion Dane Bauer writes books for children and teens, from picture books to long novels. Among her newest books are *The Blue Ghost* and *A Bear Named Trouble*, as well as board books celebrating the holidays. Her beginning readers feature nature themes, among them animals and weather and geography.

On My Honor, a book about making decisions and doing what you believe is right, won a Newbery Honor Award from the American Library Association. Ms. Bauer has written more than 50 books and teaches writing in the MFA program at Vermont College. She lives in Minnesota, where she is close to nature, animals, her children, and her grandchildren.



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