



Seymour's Secret

Discussion Guide

By: Mindy Hardwick

Eagle Bay Press

July 2016

ISBN: 978-0-69273-103-1

Can eleven-year-old Colt find the obit robber who stole Granddad's vintage toy collection before it's too late?

About the Book

Eleven-year-old Colt is devastated when his beloved Granddad's vintage toy collection is stolen by a gang of obit robbers. Determined to solve the crime, Colt enlists the help of a girl who talks to ghosts and a gang leader who plants marigolds in the moonlight. But can Colt uncover the secret behind Granddad's toys before everything is destroyed? The story will appeal to young readers between the ages of 8-13.

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Al Capone Does My Shirts Gennifer Choldenko

Websites

- Seymour's Secret Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/seymourssecret/>
- Author Website: www.mindyhardwick.com
- Writing a Mystery for Kids: <http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mystery/>
- The Dougy Center: National Center for Grieving Children and Families: <http://www.dougy.org/>
- The Moyer Foundation: Grief Camps for Children: <http://moyerfoundation.org/>
- Chicago Toy and Game Fair: <http://www.chitagfair.com/>

About the Author



Mindy Hardwick is a former middle and alternative high school teacher who now writes full-time from her home in the Seattle area. Mindy facilitates a poetry workshop with teens at Denney Youth Juvenile Justice Center. She is the co-editor of four anthologies, written by the youth at Denney, as well as the teen's blog www.denneypoetry.org.

Mindy is included on the Washington State Arts Commission Teaching Artist Roster and worked with the youth of the Tulalip Tribe in the 2011 New Directions Music and Art Prevention Program. She holds an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College. When Mindy is not writing, she likes to art journal and walk her dog Stormy on the north Oregon Coast beaches.

Mindy's Published Children's Books

Stained Glass Summer – Middle Grade Novel

<http://www.mindyhardwick.com/books/stained-glass-summer/>

Weaving Magic – Young Adult Novel

<http://www.mindyhardwick.com/books/weaving-magic/>

Finder's Keepers – A Digital Picture Book

<http://www.mindyhardwick.com/finders-keepers/>

Interview with Mindy Hardwick

How did you start writing?

I was always a reader. As a child, I devoured books. My favorite books were: The Little Princess by Frances Burnett Hodgson, Mandy by Julie Andrews Edwards, Homecoming and Dacey's Song by Cynthia Voigt.

In middle school, I really enjoyed reading. But, I never made the connection that I could be the person who wrote those stories. I majored in Creative Writing and spent time working on the St John Fisher College literary magazine, *The Angle*, which was also where my first published writing appeared. By then, I knew I liked to write, but I had to figure out *what* I liked to write! A few years later, I was teaching middle school language arts. I took a group of students to a young author's day, and I heard children's authors speak. That was the moment I began to connect my passion for children's stories to writing.

Where did you get the idea for Seymour's Secret?

The original idea came from an article I read about robbers who were targeting families by reading the obituaries. The group robbed the families while they were at their loved one's funerals. You can read a bit about those robberies here:

<http://komonews.com/news/local/grieving-family-fights-back-against-accused-obituary-burglar>

I was inspired to create the relationship between Colt and Elliot by the youth in the poetry workshop at Denney Juvenile Justice Center. In the workshop, the older boys always seem to take the younger boys under their wing. I drew on these relationships to write Colt and Elliot's friendship. You can read some of our poetry from the workshop here: www.denneypoetry.org

During the writing of this novel, I lost both my Dad and Grandfather and many of Colt's feelings of grief were the ones I was experiencing.

What advice would you give young writers?

Read, write, have patience and persistence, but most of all, believe in your story. It took nine years to write and publish *Seymour's Secret*. There were many times I wanted to

give up. But, I always had faith in Colt and the journey he needed to take to find who stole his beloved Grandfather's antique toys.

How can readers contact you?

Website: www.mindyhardwick.com

Blog: www.mindyhardwick.wordpress.com

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/#!/mindyhardwick>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/seymourssecret/>

Discussion Questions: Chapters One, Two and Three

➤ **Predict**

Look at the cover. Read the back cover blurb. Predict what this story will be about. What are the cover art details or blurb details which give shape to this prediction?

➤ **Journal**

Write about a time you received a gift. Did you like it? Why or why not?

Write about a time something was stolen from you. How did you feel?

➤ **Discuss**

How would you describe the relationship between Colt and his Mom? How would you describe the relationship between Colt and his sister? How do you predict these relationships will impact his story?

What are some of the things Colt misses about his Granddad? How do these memories show the relationship between the two of them?

Why does Colt lie about his art project? Is Colt a sympathetic character or an unsympathetic character? Why?

➤ **Activity: Monologue Point of View Writing**

Write a monologue from the point of view of one of the robbers who stole the antique toys. Why did they steal them? Where are the toys? Act out the monologue.

Discussion Questions: Chapter Four, Five and Six

➤ **Predict**

Do you think Colt will be able to solve the obit robbery? What do you know about his character that makes him a good sleuth for this crime?

➤ **Journal**

Write about a lie you told. Who did you lie to? Why? Did anyone find out?

Write about a place you've been warned about as dangerous or mysterious. What are the stories you've heard about that place?

➤ **Discussion Questions**

In Chapter four, a dark figure is huddled on the porch when Colt and his family arrive home from the art show. How does the arrival of this character enhance the theme of the story, things are not as they seem?

Why is Colt unsure about living in Granddad's home? What are some of the details about Granddad's house which add to his uncertainty?

In Chapter Six, marigolds have been planted in the snow at the Boys and Girls Club. How do these flowers contrast the mood and tone of the story so far?

➤ **Activity: Description Writing**

Colt's Mom says Granddad lived in a "dangerous neighborhood." Think of a place that is a little "dangerous" or "mysterious," On a piece of paper, draw that place. Write a one to two paragraph describing that place. Be sure to use words which enhance the tone of the setting as well as the five senses.

Discussion Questions: Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine

➤ **Predict**

What is in the backroom of Seymour's shop?

➤ **Journal**

Write about a time you got into trouble. What was your punishment?
Did you think it was fair?

Draw a sketch of a new toy or game you would invent. If it's a game, include the directions.

➤ **Discussion Questions**

Describe Seymour. What do you know about his personality? Have you ever known someone who is "sinister."

Describe Angelina. What do you know about her personality? How does she add more "mystery" to the cast of character's in Colt's life?

Describe the activity Josh and Colt participate in together. Why is this relationship important to Colt? Why does Colt say, "I'd been trying so hard and I wanted Josh to like me, but I got carried away in the moment and messed up. Again."

➤ **Activity: Character Sketch Writing**

Identify someone in your life who is a "mysterious" character. Write a one-page character description of that person. Describe their appearance, manners, way of speaking, hobbies and interests.

Discussion Questions: Chapter Ten, Eleven and Twelve

➤ **Predict**

Do you think Colt will be able to get the camera back for Josh? How do you think Josh will respond?

➤ **Journal**

Write about a ghost story you have heard from your family or friends.

Write about a person who you really wanted to be your friend. Why did you want to be friends with them? Did you try to impress them?

➤ **Discussion Questions**

Describe the friendship with Elliot and Colt. Why does Colt want to be friends with Elliot? What need do you think Elliot fills for Colt?

Angelina says there is a ghost in the antique shop and she is a “medium” like her Aunt. Do you believe in ghosts? Have you ever been somewhere and felt there was a ghost?

Explain how Mom, Melissa and Colt each respond to the church service. Why does Colt steal money from the collection plate?

➤ **Activity: Role Play**

Take one of the scenes in chapters ten, eleven or twelve and act it out. After you have enacted the scene, reflect on how it felt to be that character. Did your acting give you new insight into the characters of the story? How?

Discussion Questions: Chapter Thirteen, Fourteen and Fifteen

➤ **Predict**

At the end of chapter seven, Colt steals a hundred-dollars from the collection plate. Do you think he'll get caught by anyone?

➤ **Journal**

Write about someone who has died.

Write about a favorite food you or your family likes to eat on your birthday or another holiday. Why is this food significant to you?

➤ **Discussion Questions**

Discuss Colt's struggles in school. How do these struggles relate to his friendship with Elliot and his job in the antique shop?

How does Granddad's relationship with Susan inspire Colt? How does it relate to his friendship with Angelina?

Discuss Colt's feelings about Granddad's birthday. Why does Mom make the chocolate cake? How does this help all of them on Granddad's birthday?

➤ **Activity: Family Recipe**

Work with a family member to find and make a favorite recipe of a relative in your family who is no longer living. Ask a family member to tell you stories about that person as you cook the recipe together.

Discussion Questions: Chapter Sixteen, Seventeen and Eighteen

➤ **Predict**

How will Angelina respond to Colt after seeing him get in trouble in class?

➤ **Journal**

Write about a secret.

Write about a piece of furniture that has a mysterious element or could have something mysterious about it.

➤ **Discussion Questions**

Discuss the prototype Colt finds in the sideboard drawer. Why is it hidden? Why is Seymour's name on it? Why has Granddad never talked about this?

In chapter eighteen, Colt gets in the car with Elliot. Where do you think they are going? Why? What is your reaction when you find out what they are doing at the Boys and Girls Club? How does this scene fit the theme, "Things are not as they seem?"

Colt is surprised to see Granddad's trunk in the pictures in Seymour's shop. Discuss how he responds to this clue. How would you have responded? Does his response fit his character? How?

➤ **Activity: Expository Writing**

Design and draw a trunk with two or three symbols that represent the novel. Write two to three paragraphs explaining your symbols and how they represent the story.

Discussion Questions: Chapter Nineteen, Twenty and Twenty-One

➤ **Predict**

Will Colt be able to get the trunk from Seymour's shop without anyone finding out?

➤ **Journal**

Write about a time you were disappointed.

Write about someone who helped you through a difficult time.

➤ **Discussion Questions**

What motivates Colt to return the hundred dollars to the collection plate? Why?

How does Colt see Seymour who might be the Obit Robber and Elliot who burned the shop? Are they heroes or villains? Why?

What does Colt hope to hear at the Séance? How does the Séance make his grief over losing Granddad better or worse?

➤ **Activity: Poetry Writing**

Select one of the following topics and write a free-verse poem from the point of view of one of the characters.

"A lie I told..."

"You see me as...but really I am..."

"Beware of..."

Discussion Questions: Chapter Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three

➤ **Predict**

How will Colt resolve losing Granddad's trunk of antique toys?

➤ **Journal**

Write about the following line, "I never wanted to believe he was capable of being that person."

Write about a time when you let someone or something go.

➤ **Discussion Questions**

Discuss how Josh fits the theme of "things are not as they seem."

Discuss how Counselor is a good man. How does he compare and contrast to Josh? Seymour? Elliot?

Discuss the following line, "People came in all shades of grey and, Sometimes you just had to learn to live with those shades of grey."

➤ **Activity: Collage**

Gather magazines and images and create a collage about the book either by cutting and pasting or digital.

Book Activities and Resources

- **Camera Fun!** Identify unique signs in your neighborhood, city or town. Take pictures of the signs. Create a display or exhibit which you might hang in your library, local art museum, artist cooperative, church, or other community center. Post a few to Seymour's Secret Facebook Fan Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/seymourssecret/>
- **Write your own mystery story.** Create a cast of characters including a sleuth, a best friend, a villain and a crime. Use the following website to help you:
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mystery/>
- **Create your own toy or game.** Consider entering the Chicago Toy and Game Young Inventor's contest. <http://www.chitagfair.com/young-inventor-challenge/>
- **Research a toy or game inventor.** Create a power point presentation about that person's life. What struggles did they overcome? What successes did they have?
- **Research the history of toys and games.** Create a display for your local library or community center about the history of toys and games. To find out more about the History of Toys and Games:
National Toy Hall of Fame: <http://www.toyhalloffame.org/>
History of Toys:
http://inventors.about.com/od/tstartinventions/a/Toy_Inventions.htm
History of Toys and Games:
<http://www.ideafinder.com/history/category/toys.htm>
- Be a book reviewer! Write a book review about *Seymour's Secret* and post it on the following sites: Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Goodreads. Be sure to link your reviews to Seymour Secret's Facebook Fan Page:
<https://www.facebook.com/seymourssecret/>

