

TEACHING & DISCUSSION GUIDE



**“A fast-paced mystery...
a sparkling start for
a promising new series.”**

—Kirkus Reviews

CAPTURE

THE

FLAG

**KATE
MESSNER**

**“Cinematic...
entertaining.”**

—Publishers Weekly

ABOUT THE BOOK Anna, José, and Henry have never met, but they have more in common than they realize. Snowed in together at a chaotic Washington, DC, airport, they encounter a mysterious tattooed man, a flamboyant politician, and a rambunctious poodle named for an ancient king. Even stranger, news stations everywhere have just announced that the famous flag that inspired “The Star-Spangled Banner” has been stolen! Anna, certain that the culprits must be snowed in, too, recruits Henry and José to help find the thieves and bring them to justice.

But when accusations start flying, they soon realize there’s even more than a national treasure at stake. And with unexpected enemies lurking around every corner, will Anna, José, and Henry solve the heist before the flag is lost forever?

GRADES 3–7

HOW TO PLAY "CAPTURE THE FLAG"

Number of players: At least 8

Equipment needed: 2 "flags" (can be handkerchiefs, bandannas, scarves, etc.)

How To Play:

1. Once a play area has been established, players should split into two equal teams and decide on a clear center dividing line.
2. Both teams should place their flag just inside the boundaries on their side. Each team's flag must always be visible to the other team.
3. Once the game begins, players should attempt to retrieve the other team's flag and bring it back to their side without getting tagged by their opponents.
4. The first team to capture the opposing team's flag wins the game.



Rules:

- All players tagged before successfully bringing the flag back to their side are considered captured and must stand in a designated area on the opponent's side (commonly referred to as the "jail").
- If a player is captured, the flag is restored to its original place.
- Players may guard their team's flag, but they must stay outside of a designated "safety zone" surrounding it. The size of this zone will depend on the overall size of the playing area, so players may use their discretion when determining boundaries.
- Players may rescue their imprisoned teammates by tagging them behind enemy lines without getting caught. Rescuers can only save one prisoner at a time, and they cannot attempt to capture the flag in the same run as a rescue. If rescuers are tagged before they can save their teammate, they are also considered captured.

EXPLORE ON THE WEB

Visit Kate Messner's *Capture the Flag* Pinterest board for online resources, suggested reading, and more!



<http://pinterest.com/katemessner/capture-the-flag-resources/>

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

Chapter 1 Why do you think the men who stole the flag were able to succeed?

Chapter 2 If Anna, José, and Henry went to the same school, how likely is it that they'd be friends? Which character is most like you?

Chapter 3 Why do you think Anna has mixed feelings about her mom's involvement in the Silver Jaguar Society?

Chapter 4 At the end of Chapter 4, José compares Anna's father to the Malfoy family. Do you think this is fair? How do you think Anna feels about what José said?

Chapter 5 Is it logical for Anna to think the flag might be at the airport? Why do you think she wants to investigate?

Chapter 6 Based on what you know about Snickerbottom so far, would you vote for him for president? Why or why not?

Chapter 7 If you were one of the investigators on the missing flag case, would you consider José's mom as a possible suspect? Why or why not?

Chapter 8 If you were at the airport investigating the flag theft, who would be on your list of possible suspects? Would Snake-Arm be among them? What would you do to try and get more information?

Chapter 9 Which character—Anna, Henry, or José—would you consider to be the smartest? Are they smart in different ways? If you were investigating a crime, which one would you most want to have as your partner?

Chapter 10 Why do you think Snickerbottom points to the orchestra members as suspects? Is it a fair guess on his part?

Chapter 11 Why do you think Sinan's family and the other orchestra members are being treated differently now? If you were Anna, Henry, or José, would you get involved? What would you do?

Chapter 12 Why don't you think José's mom noticed anything wrong when she did her final check on the flag after the party?

Chapter 13 What do you think of the choice Anna, Henry, and José make at the end of this chapter? Does going into the baggage area to look for Sinan seem like a good idea? Can you think of a better one?

Chapter 14 What do you make of Snake-Arm's suspicious activities? What evidence has there been that he might be connected to the theft of the flag?

Chapter 15 Looking for the hidden flag in a crowded, busy luggage area is like looking for a needle in a haystack. If you were Anna, Henry, or José, how would you go about tracking it down?

Chapter 16 If you were Anna, what conclusions might you draw based on what you heard the men say in Chapter 16, and why?

Chapter 17 Why do you think Henry snaps at Anna when she's hesitant about going back to look for the camera?

Chapter 18 Why do you think José quotes people all the time?

Chapter 19 How do you think Anna, Henry, and José have changed since the beginning of the book? Can you find examples in early and later chapters that illustrate those changes?

Chapter 20 What do you think Anna and José should do with the new information José discovers in this chapter?

Chapter 21 How much of an impact does the weather have on this story? Can you think of things that would have happened differently in the airport if it hadn't been for the big snowstorm?

Chapter 22 If you were Anna, what would you do at the end of this chapter? Can you think of any way out of her situation?

Chapter 23 Do you think it was okay for Henry to hit someone with a golf club in this chapter? Why or why not? What would you have done if you were him? What if you were Anna?

Chapter 24 Now that it's becoming clear who stole the flag, what do you think the motive might have been? Was there any evidence earlier in the story that pointed in this direction?

Chapter 25 Were you surprised about what you learned about Snake-Arm in this chapter? Looking back at earlier chapters, were there any clues about who he really was?

Chapter 26 If you were a police officer or reporter investigating the flag theft and you had the chance to interview Anna, Henry, and José, what questions would you ask?

Chapter 27 If you were the head of Smithsonian security, what policy changes would you recommend as a result of this heist?

Chapter 28 Do you think the parents owe Anna, Henry, and José more information about the Silver Jaguar Society now? How involved should the kids be from now on?

WRITING TO PERSUADE

Imagine that you are Jeff Brodie, the curator of the Star-Spangled Banner exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of American History. Write a letter to the president of the museum requesting additional security to prevent future problems with the flag.

In your letter, be sure to include →

Dear Mr. President,

Details about when and how the flag was stolen

Specific security issues that allowed the theft to happen

Your recommendations for how the exhibit should be protected in the future

The Washington Post

An attention-grabbing headline

- A lead that gives the most important information first
- The Five **W**s—**W**ho, **W**hat, **W**hen, **W**here, and **W**hy (and also **H**ow!)
- Quotes from people involved

WRITING TO INFORM

The Common Core Standards encourage students to “**Read Like a Detective** and **Write Like a Reporter**.”

With this in mind, pretend you are a newspaper reporter for *The Washington Post* and you’ve been assigned a front-page story about the theft and recovery of the Star-Spangled Banner. Write the article that you will submit for publication.

← Be sure to include

MOCK TRIAL ACTIVITY

Stage a mock trial for the
people who stole the flag.
Assign the following parts:

Prosecuting Attorney:

This person is responsible for presenting the evidence against the thief or thieves. He or she will give an opening statement, providing an overview of the case and then ask questions of witnesses. At the end, the prosecutor also gives a closing argument, summarizing why the jury should find the person guilty.

Defense Attorney:

This person is responsible for defending the thief or thieves. This person will also give an opening statement, providing an overview of the case from his or her perspective, and then ask questions of witnesses. At the end, the defendant also gives a closing argument, summarizing why the jury should find the person not guilty.

Defendant(s):

These are the people accused of the crime. They may or may not be called as witnesses, but they should work with the defense attorney to try and come up with evidence that will keep them out of jail.

Jury Members:

These people are responsible for listening to the evidence presented and deciding if it proves, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the defendant(s) are guilty of the crime.



Witnesses:

These people are all responsible for telling their own story as it relates to the flag theft and answering questions from the prosecuting and defense attorneys. They may *only* testify about the events of which they have first-hand knowledge. (For example, someone can't testify about what happened in the flag chamber unless he or she was there to see or hear what happened.) The following witnesses should be prepared to testify:

- Anna
- Henry
- José
- Mr. McGilligan
- Senator Hobbs
- Sinan
- Sinan's mother
- Senator Snickerbottom
- Snickerbottom's security guard, Earl
- Snickerbottom's security guard, Zeke Skipworth
- Snake-Arm
- Waitress at Pickersgill Diner
- George Malbut, the baggage handler
- Jeff Brodie
- Erma Emma Jones
- Henry's Aunt Lucinda
- Smithsonian Security Guard Paul Lahue



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATE MESSNER is the author of *The Brilliant Fall of Gianna Z.*, winner of the E. B. White Read Aloud Award for Older Readers; *Sugar and Ice*; *Eye of the Storm*; *Sea Monster's First Day*; *Over and Under the Snow*; and the Marty McGuire chapter book series. A former middle-school English teacher, Kate lives on Lake Champlain with her family and loves reading, walking in the woods, and traveling. Visit her online at katemessner.com.

Kate's Story Behind *Capture the Flag*

One of the inspirations for *Capture the Flag* was a letter I received from a kid named Patrick after I'd visited his school in Vermont to talk about one of my earlier titles. His letter was kind but honest and one of my favorites I've ever gotten from a reader:

I'm sorry, but I didn't really like your book. I like books with a lot of action, and I felt there wasn't enough. It's just not my type of book. But if it was, I would have thought it was a great one.

*Merry Christmas,
— Patrick*

I decided that day I needed to write a book for Patrick and for all the other Patricks of the world, and that was the inspiration for *Capture the Flag* as well as a couple of my other upcoming books.

When I was researching this book, I realized that if I was going to have a heist from the Smithsonian, I needed a plausible story for how that could happen, so I picked up the phone and called the curator of the Star-Spangled Banner exhibit at the National Museum of American History to ask him how, hypothetically speaking of course, someone might go about stealing his flag. Once he checked me out, he was delighted to help and invited my family to the museum an hour before it opened one day. We spent a delightful morning in the flag exhibit, talking over how one might go about breaking into the enclosure and prowling the Smithsonian's back hallways and riding the freight elevators to devise a getaway plan for my bad guys.

I also love the other setting of this book—airports. I always have because they're so full of stories. Everybody in an airport has a story—whether they're coming or going, whether they're full of eager anticipation or grief. When my family travels, we make up stories about the people hanging around our gate, so this book was a natural extension of that!

Capture the Flag

by Kate Messner

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To order, contact your local bookstore or usual supplier. Teachers and librarians may order from Scholastic, P.O. Box 7502, 2931 East McCarty Street, Jefferson City, MO 65102, or call toll-free 1-800-SCHOLASTIC.

Be sure to look for *Hide and Seek*, the sequel to *Capture the Flag*, published in April 2013. For more information, visit scholastic.com/katemessner.

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