

DISCUSSION GUIDE

“A terrific twisty, turny tale.”

Shane Hegarty

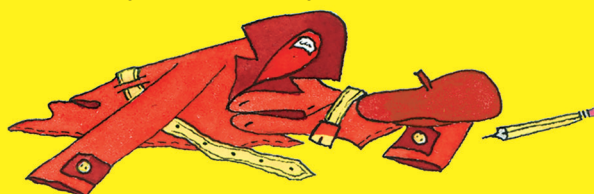


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MURDER AT THE MUSEUM

ALASDAIR BECKETT-KING

ILLUSTRATED BY CLAIRE POWELL

ABOUT THE BOOK

Montgomery Bonbon: Murder at the Museum is a comedy crime caper classic-in-waiting. The world's greatest detective – Montgomery Bonbon – is mysteriously short, with a shabby coat, a big moustache and a hard to place accent. Only Grampa Banks knows that his true identity is actually Bonnie Montgomery, a ten-year-old girl from Widdlington. This first book in a new series sees Bonnie exploring the Hornville Museum, but when the visit ends in murder and the theft of the Widdlington Eagle, it is Montgomery Bonbon who must hunt down clues, recover the statue and stay hot on the murderer's trail. Full of mystery and misdirection, a cast of great characters and modern twists on the classic traits of murder mystery, this is a brilliantly original new voice in children's detective fiction.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alasdair Beckett-King is a multi-award-winning comedian and writer. He studied at the London Film School, and since then he has performed critically lauded solo shows at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, written for BBC radio, appeared on comedy panel shows such as *Mock the Week*, co-written an award-winning video game and created numerous viral sketches for social media, including an interactive whodunit.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

This novel is jam-packed with ideas to discuss, ways to engage young readers and opportunities to extend exploration in fun, creative ways. From the array of characters, to the slow unravelling of the mystery, to the self-referential writing style and the range of influences found in the book, it offers a wealth of angles to hook children in, spark their imaginations and keep them talking and excited for more. Of course, as a murder mystery, it does deal with murder and crime, so appropriate care should be taken with any group and appropriate safeguarding and signposting should be in place before beginning.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask anyone in the group to tell you something they like about the book. What were their favourite parts? Why? Did anyone have a favourite character? What was it about that character they most liked? If appropriate for the group, introduce/recap the word 'genre' – what genre is the book? Is it just one genre? Can it be a comedy and detective fiction? Does anyone know any other stories that would be described as detective fiction, or any other famous fictional detectives?

1. Bonnie Montgomery

'Bonnie Montgomery noticed things that were afoot all the time because, unlike most ten-year-old girls, she was the world's finest detective.' -p. 14

What did members of the group like about Bonnie? How is she different from other ten-year-old girls? Why are ten-year-old girls 'not allowed' to be detectives? Who likes the idea of being a detective with a secret identity? Why?

Extension: at the end of the session, task the group to come up with their own secret detective identity. Create a character sheet, with details of their disguise and name, and a description.

2. In On The Secret

'This fact was known only to Bonnie herself – and Grampa Banks. Even Bonnie's mum did not know.' -p. 14

How does the author bring the reader 'in on the secret' of Bonnie's secret identity? Who else in the book knows? What effect does this have? How did it make anyone feel, knowing something secret, that the other characters didn't know?

3. Montgomery Bonbon

'Bonnie Montgomery might be funny about creepy-crawlies, but Montgomery Bonbon was not.' -p. 183

What does becoming Montgomery Bonbon allow Bonnie to do, that she can't do as herself? Why is this? Is it just the way people see her, or Bonbon? Or does becoming Bonbon affect how she sees herself?

4. Grampa Banks

'There were many things Bonnie loved about Grampa Banks, and many things that made him an excellent detective's assistant.' -p. 88

All great detectives seem to have a sidekick – what does Grampa Banks offer Bonnie, that she doesn't have? How do they 'complement' one another (explore meaning of 'complement' as required)? Does anyone think their grampa, or someone else in their family, would make a good sidekick? Can anyone think of other fictional detectives that have a sidekick?

Extension: task the group to each create another character sheet, inspired by someone in their family. Focus on the qualities that make them a good match with their secret detective identity.

5. Widdlington

'The people of Widdlington were used to facing two threats: seagulls and olde tea shoppes.' -p. 97

What did anyone in the group think of the town Widdlington? Was it a funny place? What about its name – does it sound like a real place? Or a joke place? Why? What about the local paper, *The Widdler*? What might it be like to live in Widdlington?

6. Dana Hornville

'Dressed in a billowy white chorister's tunic, Dana struck Bonnie as even more otherworldly than she had the day before.' -p. 104

How is Dana different from Bonnie? Are they similar in any ways? Do they share any interests? Dana is also trying to investigate the murder – how would the book be different if the mystery was presented from her perspective, not Bonnie's? What might Dana's impression of Bonnie be?

7. The Hornville Museum

'It always seemed to be dusk inside the Hornville Museum' -p. 9

How would anyone describe the Hornville Museum, from the book? Who likes the sound of the museum, with all the strange creatures? Why? Why might Bonnie have been the youngest person the museum had seen 'in a long time'? Has anyone in the group been to a museum full of strange exhibits? Can they describe anything they remember seeing or doing? You may

wish to prepare in advance, or bring up on screen, some information or images from the Horniman museum, which may have inspired the Hornville Museum – what does the group think of the strange objects on display? (INB: if you are based near enough, school trips to the Horniman can be arranged.)

Extension: Task the group with researching any local museums, or specialist exhibitions. They can report back in groups on what they've found. If close enough, consider a trip to visit your nearest museum.

8. Talking to the Reader

'Bonnie had a nasty feeling she actually *had* said that back in Chapter 5.' -p.213

Look at the given quotation for this question, from p.213. Read out loud to the group from p.212 to this line. What is strange about this last line? Does anyone notice anything unusual? What is the writer doing here? How could Bonnie know what chapter part of the story was told in? What effect does this create for the reader?

9. What Makes a Mystery?

'Locked. From. The. Inside. The four words every detective hoped to hear.' -p.30

As a group, try to remember all the mysterious elements around the murder and the theft of the Widdlington Eagle. What are the key ingredients for a good mystery story? What clues did anyone spot when reading the book? Did anyone work out who the murderer was? Check understanding/explain the idea of a 'red herring' – how does the writer mislead the reader with false clues?

10. A Great Detective

"It is Montgomery Bonbon," replied Bonnie. With a twinge of self-doubt she added, "The great detective!" -p.75

What are the qualities that make a great detective? How many of them does Bonnie possess? Look again at the descriptions of Bonnie and Grampa Banks on p.11 – does someone like Bonnie need someone like Grampa Banks to be a great detective? If so, why? Is this the same for the other detectives you've discussed? What about Inspector Sands – why isn't she a good detective? Can anyone think of any characteristics of Montgomery Bonbon that have been inspired by other detectives?

Extension: look up other fictional detectives to discover some of the influences that have gone into Montgomery Bonbon.