

A Teacher's Guide for **The Five Lost Aunts of Harriet Bean**

by Alexander McCall Smith



Graham Clark

“There are obvious differences between writing for children and writing for adults. I think that when one’s writing for children, one can take the brakes off in terms of fantasy and imagination. It’s really quite exhilarating.”

—Alexander McCall Smith



Guide prepared by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of several children’s books, including the upcoming novel *Reaching for Sun* from Bloomsbury Children’s Books.

THE FIVE LOST AUNTS OF HARRIET BEAN ISBN-10: 1-59990-053-X • \$4.95

Meet **Harriet Bean**, the feisty girl detective created by bestselling author Alexander McCall Smith. Harriet's stories incorporate the lighthearted mystery and fun wordplay audiences the world over have discovered in his books written for adults, but are tailored for emerging readers. Alexander McCall Smith began writing for children decades ago—well before he became the beloved author of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series. Now, Bloomsbury Children's Books introduces McCall Smith's delightful chapter books to American audiences young and old.

Like the heroes of his other early chapter-book series, **Akimbo** and **Max & Maddy**, Harriet Bean is a spirited, inquisitive child who loves to investigate the world around her. Children will love reading all about her quest to find her five lost aunts and laugh along with Harriet at all of her family's comic antics.

We hope that the following Teacher's Guide helps you introduce Harriet Bean to your class. To keep the fun and mystery going, we've included a complimentary Teacher's Guide for another Harriet adventure, **Harriet Bean and the League of Cheats**, as well.

With best wishes from all of us at
Bloomsbury Children's Books

For more information about Alexander McCall Smith, or to sign up for his fan club, visit: www.alexandermccallsmith.com

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Pre-reading Activities

Get your students ready to read
The Five Lost Aunts of Harriet Bean
with these fun ideas!

On a piece of paper, list as many of your
aunts and uncles as you can.

Do they have children?
Can you list their names too?

Are there any people in your family that
you've never met? How can this happen?

How would you feel if you discovered that you had five
missing aunts? Would you want to find them?
How would you start to locate them?

Discussion Guide

After reading **The Five Lost Aunts of Harriet Bean** with your students, start a discussion of the book using the following questions as a guide.

1. What is Harriet's father's job? Is he good at it? What clues are given to make you decide this?
2. Why hasn't Harriet known about her aunts? What happened when Harold was young on the farm?
3. Describe the painting made of the five aunts and their brother. Why did the parents want to have it made? What happened?
4. What piece of information does Harriet's father have about his sister? What does Harriet decide to do with it? Where does this clue lead?
5. Describe Aunt Veronica's job. How does it relate to what Harriet has already been told about her? Retell the events with Harold and the elephant.
6. What is the secret to Aunt Veronica's car? Why does she have this? What trick does she play on the mechanic?
7. How does Aunt Harmonica use her special gift? Why isn't she happy about her role at the opera?

8. What was the strangest incident in the whole history of opera?

9. Explain the plan to find Aunt Majolica. Does it work? What is she like?

10. Aunt Veronica says, “There are some things that can’t be bought. These things are by far the most valuable” (p. 84). What does this mean? Do you agree with her? What did she do for the girl instead of just giving her a prize?

11. Why do the twins wear disguises? What special tools do they have in their office? Which one would you most like to use? Why?

12. The painter makes a mistake on the portrait. What is it? How does he fix it?

13. Do you think the aunts and their brother will keep their promise to see each other weekly? Why or why not?

14. Which aunt would be your favorite? Why? What special abilities do members of your own family have? How would you try to find someone now?

15. Predict what types of adventures Harriet will have with her aunts.

The following are terrific words from the book **The Five Lost Aunts of Harriet Bean**. Have children draw pictures that help them remember what the words mean. Sort the words by noun, verb or adjective. Then, play a challenge game like a spelling bee, one in which children must use the word correctly in a sentence.

Wonderful Words:

astonished	existed
absent-minded	irritating
rejected	scone
coax	scythe
immensely	temperamental
alternative	vaguely
protested	stout
bedecked	dismantled
resemblance	valuable
lozenge	confidential
intriguing	ordinary
jubilation	laden

Character Chart

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As you read, fill out this character chart about Harriet, her father, and the aunts. Be sure to keep the details straight for each character!

Character	Description	Career
Harriet		
Harold		
Aunt Veronica		
Aunt Harmonica		
Aunt Majolica		
Aunt Japonica		
Aunt Thessalonika		

Music: Aunt Playlist

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What types of music do you think each aunt listens to?
Choose a song for each and explain why you picked it.

Art: Family Portrait

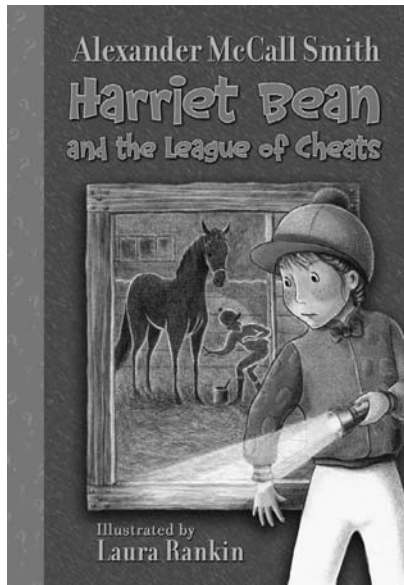
.....

Create your own family portrait, but be sure to put the right head on the right body—or if you're feeling silly—well, don't!

Social Studies: Family Tree

Create your own family tree. Ask parents, grandparents, and uncles and aunts to help you get the information as complete as possible. Organize the information in a way that helps you keep it straight!

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Harriet Bean
and the League of Cheats
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Get your students ready to read
Harriet Bean and the League of Cheats
with these discussion ideas!

What is a cheat? What is a league? How do you think these two things will be combined in this story? Before reading page one, what else do you already know about the book?

Discussion Guide

After reading **Harriet Bean and the League of Cheats** with your students, start a discussion of the book using the following questions as a guide.

1. What did Harriet discover about her aunt? Why did they want her to come over?
2. Who do the aunts think must be cheating Mr. Fetlock? Why? How does Harriet dress? Why?
3. Describe Aunt Thessalonika and Aunt Japonica. Would you like to have Harriet's aunts as your own? Why or why not?
4. What does a detective do? What are disguises? Would you ever like to have a disguise? When?
5. What is a jockey's job? Would you like to be one? Why or why not?
6. What had someone done to Black Lightning's hooves? How was Harriet able to discover it?
7. Have you ever discovered information that you weren't supposed to know? Did you tell anyone? Did it scare you?

8. Why does Harriet study the boots on the way to the race? What does she learn?

9. Who does Harriet realize is the cheat? How? What plan do they make together?

10. What happens when Harriet rides Black Lightning? Would you want to ride him? Why do they think she, too, is cheating?

11. Who led the league of cheats? How did Harriet and her aunts scare him?

12. What will happen to the cheater after the story ends? What makes you think this?

13. What should happen to people who cheat? Why do you think people cheat? How do people learn not to cheat?

14. Describe how Harriet's aunts scared Charlie Heat. What happens next? Why is it important?

15. Often in mystery stories, clues are given that are not true (these are called "red herrings"). What are some false clues that were given in this story? Did they keep you guessing? Why or why not?

Projects

Language Arts: Word Challenge

Harriet Bean and the League of Cheats has many great words that you may not know. Try to figure out the meaning by reading the sentence or look the word up in a dictionary if you're stuck. Then, draw a picture that helps you remember what the definition is.

Chapter 1: ridiculous, expecting, ancient, disguised

Chapter 2: interfering, jockey, jodhpurs, extracted, flourish

Chapter 3: companion, disturbed, ordinary, powerless

Chapter 4: scramble, suspicious, collided, exhausted

Chapter. 5: sabotage, seethe, dashing, flustered

Chapter 6: mount, hoisted, reins, deliberately

Chapter 7: beckoned, sniveling, accused, icily, limp

Projects

Language Arts: Brainteasers

If a horse eats one pound of oats, and two pounds of hay a day then how much of each does he need for the week? The month? The year?

If a horse can run ten laps around the track without needing water, how many times must it stop if he goes around it thirty times? How did you figure it out?

If it takes fifteen minutes to saddle a horse, how many horses could you saddle in an hour? Two hours? Three?

Art

Study the Laura Rankin illustration in the book. What tools do you think she used to create them? How is working in black and white different from using color? Create your own black-and-white illustration of a scene from the novel that is not illustrated.



A Conversation with Alexander McCall Smith

Q: Your career as a children's book writer had a surreptitious beginning. Please tell us your story.

A: It started in a rather odd way. There was a literary competition in Scotland, years ago, and I decided to enter it. One of the categories was for a children's book, and I wrote one and I am happy to say I was one of the winners. It was a bit of a surprise, but it set me off.

Q: When did you realize you wanted to be a writer?

A: Right from the beginning. I think if you ask that question of virtually any writer the answer would be, as a child. One knows as a child that one wants to write and that was the case with me.

Q: You have written more than fifty books in various genres and for various ages, yet there is a definitive Alexander McCall Smith style and tone. Do you think of yourself as having a signature style?

A: I suppose my writing is fairly straightforward, fairly plain. It's not over-adorned. I suppose that's what it is.

Q: You have lived in several different countries. In what ways have your international travels informed your writing?

A: Writers should travel. Travel broadens the mind, as they always say. You meet new people, all sorts of people; you see places of interest; and that, of course, comes out in the writing. So the more you travel, as a writer, I think the better.

Q: Since you first wrote these books for children, you have attained international success as an adult mystery author. What have you learned about yourself as a writer from your success and the experiences you've had touring the world, promoting your books?

A: It's been very interesting meeting so many readers, as I go around the world from country to country, and it certainly brings it home to one how intimate and important is the relationship between the writer and his readers.

Q: What do you consider the most rewarding part of writing books for young readers?

A: I very much enjoy the way in which when writing for young people you can let your imagination run away with you.

Q: Have you written other books for this age group that will be published in the United States as well?

A: I've written a considerable number of children's books and many of these are going to be re-published in the United States, and I'm very happy about that.