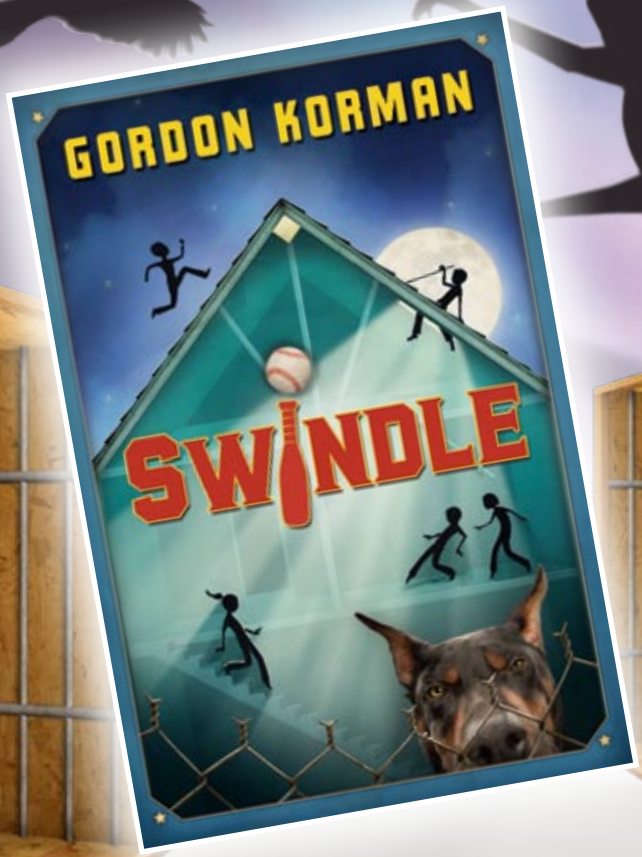
GRADES 4-7

Discussion Guide



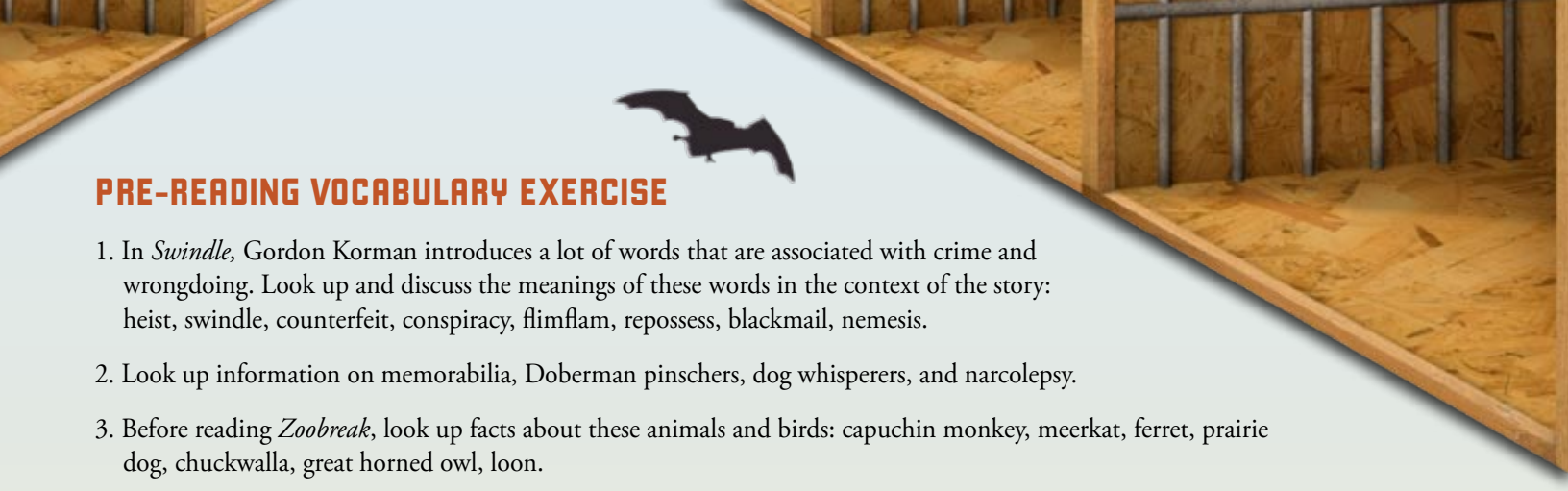


Griffin Bing is known as The Man with a Plan, especially one that involves kids outwitting adults. In *Swindle*, Griffin acquires a rare baseball card, only to be cheated out of its true value by an unscrupulous dealer, S. Wendell Palomino, who is quickly nicknamed "Swindle" by Griffin and his friend Ben.

After one failed attempt to retrieve the card, Griffin recruits a group of classmates, each with a specific skill his new plan requires. But even the best of plans can be thrown off by unexpected circumstances, creating hilarious and heart-stopping adventure for this motley group of sixth graders.

In *Zoobreak*, Griffin's class visits a floating zoo where his friend Samantha finds her own recently stolen capuchin monkey. Planning a break-in to retrieve the monkey requires the talents of all Griffin's friends, and a lot of last-minute changes to make the plan work. But when they reach the zoo boat, Samantha becomes determined to help all the animals escape their terrible conditions, making the plan much more complicated. Dividing up the animals and keeping them safe in a variety of ways, the kids soon realize they will need to stage a completely different sort of break-in.

In both of these adventures, the friends work as a team and learn a lot about each other in the bargain. They face some ethical dilemmas, learn how to think quickly, and demonstrate both courage and cleverness in carrying out their plans.



PRE-READING VOCABULARY EXERCISE

1. In *Swindle,* Gordon Korman introduces a lot of words that are associated with crime and wrongdoing. Look up and discuss the meanings of these words in the context of the story: heist, swindle, counterfeit, conspiracy, flimflam, repossess, blackmail, nemesis.
2. Look up information on memorabilia, Doberman pinschers, dog whisperers, and narcolepsy.
3. Before reading *Zoobreak*, look up facts about these animals and birds: capuchin monkey, meerkat, ferret, prairie dog, chuckwalla, great horned owl, loon.
4. Since the floating zoo is located on a boat, there are many nautical terms in the book. Look up the meanings of these words so you can visualize the setting: paddleboat, pylon, starboard, stern, portholes, bilge pump, bulkhead, portside, tarpaulin, dory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *SWINDLE*



1. Why do Griffin and Ben spend the night in the old Rockford House? What do they hope to accomplish? Why don't the other kids show up?
2. Why does Griffin sell the baseball card to S. Wendell Palomino? How does he discover that Palomino has cheated him?
3. Does Griffin feel justified in stealing back the baseball card after Palomino paid him for it? Do you think this is the right thing for him to do? Are there other ways he could retrieve the card?
4. As "The Man with a Plan," Griffin says that developing a plan is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. How does he decide which pieces fit into the plan? How does he have to adjust the plan when he discovers that the baseball card is no longer in the shop?
5. Describe each of the members of the team that Griffin puts together for the heist of the baseball card from "Swindle's" house. What talent does each of them have that will contribute to the success of the venture? How does Griffin know he can trust them?
6. How would you describe Darren Vader? Why does he try to run off with the baseball card once they find it? Why is he important to the story?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *ZOOBREAK*



1. Compare the two friendships that are affected by separation—or impending separation —at the beginning of the story. How is the theft of Cleopatra similar to Ben's going away to school? What is the main element they have in common that makes Griffin angry?
2. Describe each of the characters who take part in the zoobreak and what role they have to play. Are the kids doing the right thing to plan the rescue of Cleopatra on their own? Do they have any choice?
3. Why do they allow Darren to be part of the plan? How does he let them down? Why is he important to the story?
4. How do the kids decide which animals to take to each of their homes? Look up each of these animals to see what habitat they need, and decide whether you think it makes sense for the kids to try to care for them.
5. Compare the characters of Mr. Nastase and Klaus. When does Klaus realize that he does not agree with his boss?
6. Search the website of the Long Island Zoo and use the map of the zoo to make your own plan for finding a place for each animal there.

COMPARING THE NOVELS

1. Compare Griffin and his inventor father. How are they similar and how are they different? Why doesn't Griffin ask his parents for help in each of these situations?

2. Both books involve a plot element in which one main character may have to leave town. Compare the situations that affect Griffin in *Swindle* and Ben in *Zoobreak*. How are they similar and how are they different? How does each one get solved?

3. Discuss the theme of friendship. Who are Griffin's friends at the beginning of the first book? Which of the characters find it difficult to make friends? How have they changed by the end of the second book?

4. Luthor is an important presence in both books. Compare his role in *Swindle* and his role in *Zoobreak*. How has Luthor changed? Why are Griffin and Ben still wary of him?

5. Griffin says: "Who would have thought that a few helpless animals would be harder to handle than a million-dollar baseball card?" Compare the difficulties the kids face in each of these stories. Which situation do you think would be harder to handle?

6. What are the ethical dilemmas that face Griffin and his team in each story? What would you do if you were faced with these problems?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Cornelia Funke. *The Thief Lord*. Scholastic, 2002. A disparate band of homeless children in Venice is organized by a boy who calls himself "The Thief Lord" and claims to steal from wealthy homes.

Dan Gutman. *Honus and Me*. HarperCollins, 1998. Twelve-year-old Joe finds a valuable baseball card in an attic, then travels back in time to the 1909 World Series. Joe's adventures continue, and each involve a different player, in the other titles of the Baseball Card Adventure series.

Peg Kehret. *Terror at the Zoo*. Puffin, 2001. Ellen and her brother Corey are trapped in the zoo after hours along with an escaped criminal.

James Preller. *A Jigsaw Jones Mystery: The Case of the Stolen Baseball Cards*. Scholastic, 2001. An easy-to-read story in the Jigsaw Jones Mystery series.

Ron Roy. *Capital Mysteries #9: A Thief at the National Zoo*. Random House, 2007. An easy-to-read story in the Capital Mysteries series.

Brian Selznick. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*. Scholastic, 2007. Hugo lives behind the walls of a Paris train station, surviving by his wits and what he can steal, but his secret life is about to be discovered.

Also available from Gordon Korman

Losing Joe's Place. "A frenetic string of funny scenes—supported by a handful of sturdy characters and a generous dose of pure slapstick."—*Booklist*

The 39 Clues, Book Two: One False Note. Amy and Dan Cahill are in the adventure of a lifetime—to find the clues that will reveal the secret of the Cahill family's power.

Kidnapped series. Aiden helps the FBI track down his kidnapped sister Meg, following clues only a brother could recognize.

On the Run series. Two kids break out of juvenile detention and become fugitives in order to clear the names of their convicted parents.

Island trilogy. Six kids are sent on a "character-building" boat trip that turns into a fight for survival.

Dive trilogy. Four kids on a marine expedition discover sunken treasure. Can they salvage it without anyone else getting there first?

Everest trilogy. Four kids, one mountain. A group of teens compete to become the youngest kid ever to climb Everest.

WEBSITES

http://baberuthcards.net
How much are vintage Babe Ruth cards really worth?

www.dogbreedinfo.com/doberman.htm
Learn more about Doberman pinschers and their breeding.

www.cesarmillaninc.com/dogwhisperer/
Official website of the television show about a "dog whisperer."

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/narcolepsy/detail_narcolepsy.htm
Learn more about narcolepsy, the condition that makes Ben fall asleep at odd times.

www.longislandgamefarm.com/
An actual place on Long Island, the game farm and zoo has a fascinating website with a map of the grounds.



Swindle
by Gordon Korman
Hardcover: 0-439-90344-0, $16.99
Paperback: 0-439-90345-9, $6.99

Zoobreak
by Gordon Korman
Hardcover: 0-545-12499-7, $16.99

Both books are available from your local bookstore or usual supplier, or from: Scholastic, 2931 East McCarty Street, P.O. Box 7502, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

Discussion Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant, adjunct professor of children's and young adult literature, and Editor of the 8th, 9th, and 10th books in the H. W. Wilson Junior Authors and Illustrators series.

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