

# Curriculum Guide for The 39 Clues series

Build reading comprehension and research skills as you bring the excitement of *The 39 Clues* into your classroom!

- [The 39 Clues Book #1: The Maze of Bones Guide](#)  
Theme: Reading Comprehension
- [The 39 Clues Book #2: One False Note Guide](#)  
Theme: Understanding Plot
- [The 39 Clue Book #3: The Sword Thief Guide](#)  
Theme: Characterization

## About The 39 Clues

The 39 Clues is an exciting adventure series that will visit every continent and lead your students through 500 years of history, all while introducing them to fascinating historical figures like Benjamin Franklin, Amadeus Mozart, Amelia Earhart, and more!

Designed to connect with even the most reluctant readers, it meets children where they like to learn in a multi-platform approach. It will get your students engaged in history and leave them ready to devour the next book in the series. By combining a ten book series with an online game where students can solve puzzles, each child is able to become a member of the Cahill family and join in the pursuit of the clues to find the ultimate source of the Cahill fortune and power.

Created as a completely secure environment, [The 39 Clues Web site](#) precludes communication with other users, so you can be assured of your students' safety. There are even trading cards that allow students to access inside information about the Cahill power simply by entering a code from the card. The trading cards can be a great tool to use in your classroom-management reward system too! The books are incredible and can stand on their own if you choose not to engage your students in the online activities.

## About this Guide

Use this guide to bring the excitement of the 39 Clues books into the classroom – and to explore geography, history, literature and math – while at the same time teaching to the reading standards, in ways that can be geared to multiple learning styles.

The guide to Book #1 covers comprehension skills. The guide to Book #2 explores elements of plot. Guides to subsequent books will explore character, themes, settings, symbolism, and other skill areas.

## Guide to The 39 Clues Book #1: The Maze of Bones by Rick Riordan

Theme of this section: Reading Comprehension

Students will learn:

- Writing
- Creative Expression
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Deductive Reasoning

- Number Sense
- Historical Thinking

### About the Author

Rick Riordan is the author of *The Maze of Bones*, and the architect of the plot for the entire ten-book series. Author of the #1 New York Times best-selling Percy Jackson and the Olympians series for children, he draws on his experience as a teacher of fifteen years to enchant children with his award-winning stories.

Mr. Riordan taught English and history at public and private middle schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Texas. In 2002, Saint Mary's Hall honored him with the school's first Master Teacher Award. His own experience with his son's learning differences inspired him to create the Percy Jackson series that features a twelve-year-old dyslexic boy who discovers he is the modern-day son of a Greek god. Mr. Riordan does a masterful job of showing how learning disabilities can work to a person's advantage in life! Rick Riordan now writes full time. He lives in San Antonio with his wife and two sons.

To learn more about Rick Riordan and his work visit:

<http://www.rickriordan.com/>

[http://teacher.scholastic.com/read/authors/rick\\_riordan.htm](http://teacher.scholastic.com/read/authors/rick_riordan.htm)

### How the Story Begins

Minutes before she died, Grace Cahill changed her will, leaving her descendants an impossible decision: "You have a choice—one million dollars or a clue."

Grace is the last matriarch of the Cahills, the world's most powerful family. Everyone from Napoleon to Houdini is related to the Cahills, yet the source of the family power is lost. 39 clues hidden around the world stand to reveal the family's secret, but no one has been able to assemble them. Now the clues race is on, and young Amy and Dan must decide what's important: hunting clues or uncovering what really happened to their parents.

## Step 1: Begin the Hunt!

Hook your students by launching your unit with this exciting video clip of Rick Riordan discussing *The 39 Clues*:

<http://scholastic.com/aboutscholastic/mediaroom/opk/39clues/39Cluesvideoaug.html>

Or download and print this book talk about *The Maze of Bones*:

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/collateral.jsp?id=35884>

Now that the students are excited about their reading adventure, listen as David Pittu reads chapters one and two of *The Maze of Bones* from Scholastic Audio:

<http://scholastic.com/aboutscholastic/mediaroom/opk/39clues/39Clues.html>

A mystery reader is also a great way to launch a book unit. Invite a parent, the principal, or another volunteer to read the first two chapters aloud to the class.

## Step 2: Create an Investigation Journal

Your students will need a place to keep track of their ideas and clues. This will also be a place for them to write responses to discussion questions, ponder vocabulary words, and make connections to aid comprehension. The 39Clues series is a natural catalyst for students to students' comprehension, enticing them to understand fully what they are reading so they can drink in every potential clue! This guide will help you model reading comprehension strategies for your readers.

To create an investigation journal, use a composition notebook, binder, or even staple together notebook paper. Have students personalize a cover by decorating it with pictures or drawings of famous people they admire and places they would like to visit in the world. Leave the back cover blank for a later activity. Have them divide the journal into three sections:

1. Discussion
2. Vocabulary
3. Activities

### **Step 3: Read Chapters 1 and 2**

*Skill: Activating prior knowledge to make connections to the text*

Discuss the following questions as a group, or have students write thoughts in their journal.

1. What does power mean to you? What could make you the most powerful person in the world?
2. If you could be related to one famous person, who would it be?
3. One million dollars or a clue-what would you decide?

#### **Vocabulary Activity**

Students will work in groups of two. One child will read the word aloud to the other. The second student will respond with what they think it means. Have them discuss what mental image the word generates in their minds. Finally, have them locate the word in the text to see if their definitions fit the context. Did their definitions fit the meaning?

### **Step 4: Read Chapters 3 & 4**

*Skill: Making inferences to build comprehension*

Good readers draw conclusions based upon their own background knowledge and clues in the text. Model for your students how to read between the lines by asking "I wonder" questions. Ask your students to ponder the following questions. Discuss answers as a group or have them write their conclusions in their investigation journal.

1. Mr. McIntyre told the heirs that the prize would make the winners the most powerful beings on earth. I wonder what it could be?
2. Why there are exactly 39 clues?
3. Amy and Dan were given a warning: Beware of the Madrigals. I wonder what the Madrigals are and why they must beware of them?

## Vocabulary

Students can use Scholastic's Word Wizard Dictionary to look up the meaning of words and hear the pronunciation at: <http://wordwizard.scholastic.com/dictionary/>

## Step 5: Read Chapters 5, 6, & 7

*Skill: Synthesize - combine what you've read with your own existing ideas to form new ideas.*

Amy doesn't think she and Dan have a chance to find the clues. Mr. McIntyre assures her that they have talents to help them win. In your investigation journal compare and contrast Amy and Dan, the Kabras, the Starlings, Jonah Wizard, the Holts, Alistair Oh, and Irina Spasky. What advantage does each of them have over the other heirs? What is their weakness? What countries do they come from? What qualities do you think the winners will possess?

Here's a clue to get you started...

<http://cdn.static.the39clues.com/cards/0050535d50ba671c845505630cc97f0f/ca rd.pdf>

## Vocabulary Clue

Divide the class into two teams. Ask one person from each team to come to the front of the room. The teacher will show the class the word. Contestants can ask their team only yes or no questions about the word. The person who guesses their word in the fewest guesses wins a point for their team.

## Geography

Grace Cahill kept a map of the world with pushpins in her secret library. Help your students track their journey around the world by displaying a world map in your classroom. Track their locations with pushpins like Grace!

Another option is an online map like at

[http://www.scholastic.com/scholastic\\_thanksgiving/voyage/journey.htm](http://www.scholastic.com/scholastic_thanksgiving/voyage/journey.htm) where students can see pictures of the actual historical locations on line.

## Step 6: Read Chapters 8, 9, & 10

*Skill: Ask questions - before, during, and after reading - to better understand the author and the meaning of the text.*

Encourage your students to ask questions like:

1. What do I think will happen to Dan and Amy? Will the Luciens eliminate them?
2. What have I learned about Ben Franklin? What did he invent? What else do I want to know about him?
3. What predictions can I make? Do I think they will find the answer to the clue in Philadelphia?

In their investigation journal, have your students make predictions about the book's ending and ask questions about the text. At the end of the unit, see who guessed correctly!

### Vocabulary Activity

Student will be naturally interested in the espionage aspects of the book. This easy lesson integrates science with vocabulary from the book by having the students write the vocabulary words with invisible ink. Students will learn how types of juice, when heated with a light bulb, will reveal a secret message!

Have each student write the definition of a word on a piece of plain paper. Using invisible ink from the activity below, students will hide the word somewhere on the page. When the ink has dried, have a partner try to decode the secret word!

### Make Invisible Ink!

What to do

1. Using juice squeezed from a lemon or from a bottle, apply "ink" on paper with a cotton swab or paint brush.
2. Allow the paper to dry.
3. Ready to read the secret message? Hold the paper up to a light bulb. The heat will cause the "ink" to darken to a very pale brown. Be careful not to get the paper too close to the heat source and ignite the paper!

How it works

Lemon juice is acidic and weakens paper. When paper is heated, the remaining acid turns the writing brown before discoloring the paper.

## Step 7: Read Chapters 11, 12, 13, & 14

*Skill: Visualize - create pictures in you mind while you read.*

Ask your students what they see, smell, feel, and taste while reading..

What did Amy look like after the flight to Paris?

What did it sound like to be mobbed by paparazzi?

What do you think Jonah Wizard's fashion line looks like?

Dan dreams about crème glâcee? What do you think it is and what does it taste like?

In the investigation journals, have students draw their most vivid scene/character/setting from these chapters and then compare their ideas with a partner to see the differences and similarities.

## Step 8: Read Chapters 15, 16, 17

*Skill: Finding the main idea*

Looking for the big idea in a book helps readers determine importance while they are reading. In textbooks, the main ideas are often announced in boldface words and titles, but in literature, students may need to hunt for clues to find the theme of the book.

One theme of this book is talent. The historical relatives of the Cahills are talented. The team members are talented. Dan and Amy don't think they are talented, yet everyone is

out to get them. What are their talents and how are their talents linked to the other theme of the book-power?

## Step 9: Read Chapters 18, 19, 20

*Skill: Putting the clues together-reading comprehension*

Your class is now armed with some powerful information to solve the 39 clues. They've learned what good readers do to comprehend a story. Review with your class their investigation journals now that they've finished the story. What predictions were accurate? What questions can they now answer? What new thoughts do they have?

### Vocabulary

Rick Riordan uses some powerful and vivid words in his writing. In their investigation journals, have your students write down words from *The Maze of Bones* that they would like to use in their own writing. What less effective synonym could the author use? How did the more picturesque word change the passage?

Here are some of the words:

#### Chapter One

Perilous  
Lamented  
Talisman  
Brusque  
Obscured

#### Chapter Two

Lunatic  
Careened  
Exploits  
Hearse  
Sentimental  
Exasperation  
Podium  
Beneficiaries  
Quest  
Instituted  
Destiny  
Surname  
Renounce

#### Chapter Three

Guardian  
Archeology  
Mutant  
Contorted  
Wards  
Embarking  
Coaxed

**Chapter Four**

Resolution  
Cartographer  
Alliance  
Collaborate

**Chapter Five**

Vellum  
Pseudonym  
Almanac  
Combusting  
Inferno

**Chapter Six**

Monogram

**Chapter Seven**

Antidote  
Incapacitate  
Anti-surveillance  
Kiosk

**Chapter Eight**

Cylinder  
Rendezvous  
Careened  
Submerged

**Chapter Nine**

Predicament  
Asunder

**Chapter Ten**

Ambushed  
Sarcasm  
Gendarme

**Chapter Eleven**

Shurikens

**Chapter Twelve**

Conspiracy

**Chapter Thirteen**

Stronghold

**Chapter Fourteen**

Quay  
Mausoleum

## **Chapter Fifteen**

Catacombs  
Symbolic  
Coordinates

## **Chapter Sixteen**

Forged  
Quavering  
Imploring  
Arrondissement

## **Chapter Seventeen**

Anagram

## **Chapter Eighteen**

Inert  
Catalyze  
Belfry  
Skittered

## **Chapter Nineteen**

Parchment  
Adagio

### **Explore History with Ben Franklin**

Introduce students to Ben Franklin and his many accomplishments by having them explore:  
[http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/games\\_quizzes/interview/index.asp](http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/games_quizzes/interview/index.asp)  
<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa/leaders/franklinb>

### **Learning about Ben Franklin**

Benjamin Franklin was naturally curious and liked to learn how things work. Introduce students to these fun facts about Franklin:

- He got tired of switching between two pairs of glasses — one for reading and one for distance. So he cut each pair in half to create the bifocal lens.
- He wanted to swim faster so he created swim fins.
- He wanted to reach a high shelf so he invented a long reach device.

Ask students what they wish was easier in their lives. Then have them create an idea for their own invention and sketch their design.

### **Electricity experiment**

Benjamin Franklin may be most famous for his experiments with electricity. Did you know that static electricity is similar to that of a lightning strike? Walking on carpet can generate about 3,000 volts of electricity and taking off a sweater can create about 30,000 volts. Lightning strikes discharge 100 million volts! Using a balloon and a fluorescent light bulb, students will explore how static electricity works.

Unlike standard incandescent bulbs, fluorescent tubes are filled with a gas that gets excited when even a small amount of electricity is applied to it. In fact, you can power up



a fluorescent bulb with a spark of static electricity. In this activity, you'll test this principle for yourself.

#### Materials

- Balloon
- Dark room
- Fluorescent light bulb

#### What to Do

1. Decide who will hold the bulb first and who will be on "balloon duty." Designate another person as note taker. Make the room as dark as possible.
2. While the bulb holder firmly grasps the bulb with the metal contact portion facing outward, have the person on balloon duty rub the balloon against his or her head and then immediately touch the "charged" balloon to the metal contact.
3. Observe what happens.
4. Change roles, and repeat step two.
5. Change roles once more and repeat step two but this time introduce a variable, such as rubbing the balloon for a longer period of time or waiting for five seconds before touching the balloon to the bulb. Be sure to record your observations in your investigation journal.

#### Understand Symbols and Crests – then Design your own Crest

The four branches of the Cahill family use symbols to represent themselves. Look at the Cahill crest on page 45. What do the symbols of the four branches mean?

Have students find out which branch of the Cahill family they are in when they log onto [www.the39clues.com](http://www.the39clues.com) (see "Join the Cahill Family" below).

Share familiar symbols with the students such as the McDonald's arch, the Nike swoosh, the Olympic rings etc. Why do people and corporations use symbols? Discuss other symbols such as your state's seal. Discuss symbols from nature such as the eagle, or flowers such as the rose.

Have the students design their own crest using symbols that they feel represent them, or use one of the Cahill family crests. Place the crest on the back cover of their investigative journal.

#### Join the Cahill Family

Children can become part of the Cahill Family and join the hunt for clues and prizes! With the help of their parents, have students log on to the 39 Clues Web site, [www.the39clues.com](http://www.the39clues.com), to create an account and find out to which branch of the Cahill family they belong! Students will need to have their parent's email address to gain permission to activate the account.

#### Multi-Author Stories – A Fun Writing Activity

Each book in the 39 Clues series is written by a different author. Have students explore this process through cooperative writing.

First, have a class discussion to outline an idea for a story. Then have each student write their opening paragraph, then pass their paper to the next person to write the second paragraph. Continues until the work is complete. For a more unpredictable experience, after each paragraph papers can be shuffled and passed randomly to the next author. Finally, share/compare/discuss the stories. Are they similar or very different? Why?

## Guide to The 39 Clues Book #2: One False Note by Gordon Korman

Theme of this section: Understanding Plot

Use this guide to bring all the instruments of plot together to create an orchestra of literary understanding in your classroom!

### **What the Book is About**

THIS JUST IN! Amy and Dan Cahill were spotted on a train, hot on the trail of one of 39 Clues hidden around the world. BUT WAIT! Police report a break-in at an elite hotel, and the suspects ALSO sound suspiciously like Amy and Dan. UPDATE! Amy and Dan have been seen in a car . . . no, in a speedboat chase . . . and HOLD EVERYTHING! They're being chased by an angry mob?!? When there's a Clue on the line, anything can happen.

### **About the Author**

Did you know that Korman wrote his first book in seventh grade? Learn more about the author [Gordon Korman and his writing adventures](#).

### **Plot – The map of the journey**

Like a sequence of musical notes, a plot is comprised of the events in a story – it is simply what the book is about. Use this guide to introduce your students to the various elements of plot and how they are integral to a story.

### **Conflict**

Conflict is the clash of actions, ideas, desires or wills. It may be physical, mental, emotional or moral. After reading *One False Note*, invite students to discuss these questions:

1. What is the main conflict of The 39 Clues series that continues into book two?
2. What is Amy's mental conflict? How does it contribute to her character and the story?
3. The Holt family represents a physical conflict with Amy and Dan. How does the author's description of the Holts emphasize this conflict?
4. Amy and Dan face multiple moral conflicts in the series. What are these conflicts and what choice of action would you choose?

In their investigative journals, have students reflect upon which type of conflict adds the most to the story. Which type makes the story the most interesting?

### **Protagonist and Antagonist**

These are the central characters in the conflict. The central character is referred to the protagonist. The forces that oppose him, whether it is another person, thing, or the central character's own traits, are known as the antagonist.

Who are the protagonists and who are the antagonists in *One False Note*? What character traits are antagonists and to whom do they belong? In their investigative journals, have students draw a semantic map to show their thoughts.

### **Suspense**

Suspense is the element of plot that keeps the reader turning the page. It makes the reader wonder what will happen next!

Invite students to discuss these questions:

1. What elements of suspense did you wonder about the most in *One False Note*?
2. Where did you find the most suspenseful part of the plot – in the beginning, middle or ending of each chapter?
3. Why would the author plan where to put the suspenseful part of the story?

### **Mystery**

Readers crave an explanation for what they don't understand. A good mystery drives the reader to find out just what is going on! Just what is in the diary? What does the clue mean?

In their investigative journals, students can reflect on some of the mysteries in *One False Note*. Then they can discuss whether they predicted the outcome correctly. What is the mysterious code on pages 83-95?

### **Dilemma**

Dilemma is a difficult choice between two actions. For example, should the heirs take a million dollars or a clue? Dan and Amy are constantly faced with dilemmas in their quest for the clues.

Discuss with students: What dilemma have you faced in real life recently? How would the outcome be different if you picked the other course of action?

### **Surprise**

Surprise is an element of plot that causes an unexpected event. It makes the reader shout, "I never guessed that!" Artfully crafted surprise entertains the reader, especially in a mystery. Discuss what elements of surprise worked in *One False Note* and caught readers off guard?

### **Ending or Resolution**

Whether happy or sad, all plots must come to an end. In most mystery stories, conflicts are resolved, all answers to the mystery are revealed, and all is explained.

But not always! How is a series like *The 39 Clues* different? What parts of the plot ended and/or were fully resolved? What parts continue, or remain unresolved?

### **Activities**

Information and study skills – students use multiple sources to research a topic.

### **Student Travel Agent**

Turn your students into travel agents! Using guidebooks, encyclopedias, books, online resources, maps and other resources, have students plan a trip to one of the cities Dan and

Amy have visited. Students should create a budget to include cost of transportation, accommodations, food, and admissions. Have them create a marketing brochure to explain their trip, show the costs, and sell their tour!

### **The Mozart Effect**

Can listening to Mozart make you smarter? According to research, Mozart's music may improve short-term performance on certain mental tasks such as spatial-temporal reasoning or the ability to visualize spatial patterns. This ability is important for creating solutions to problems that have multiple steps such as mathematics, art, science, games and everyday life.

Does it work? Try it out with your class. Divide the class into two groups. One group will listen very attentively to a Mozart sonata. The second group should not listen to anything. Next, pass out a difficult maze or puzzle and time how long it takes each student to complete it. What is the average time of the Mozart group? What is the average time of the second (or control) group? Did the Mozart effect work?

## **Guide to The 39 Clue #3: The Sword Thief By Peter Lerangis**

Theme of this section: Characterization

### **What the Book is About**

Amy and Dan Cahill have been located once again, this time in the company of the notoriously unreliable Alistair Oh. Could they have been foolish enough to make an alliance? Spies report that Amy and Dan seem to be tracking the life of one of the most powerful fighters the world has ever known. If this fearsome warrior was a Cahill, his secrets are sure to be well guarded . . . and the price to uncover them just might be lethal.

### **About the Author**

Peter Lerangis is the author of over 150 books, for early readers through teens, which have sold nearly 3 million copies. He injects his own brand of suspense, humor, and colorful characters into many different writing genres - mystery (the Spy X series), science fiction (the Watchers series), teen romance (the Drama Club series), and serious historical fiction (Smiler's Bones). Scholastic is pleased to announce him as the author of Book 3 of The 39 Clues, entitled *The Sword Thief*.

### **Characterization – Powerful Literary Tool or Cahill Secret?**

While plot is the road map of a story, characterization is the car that drives the story to its destination. Reading for character can be more difficult than reading for plot. However, helping your students learn this literary skill can transform their reading journey from a drab interstate road trip to a vibrant scenic Sunday drive!

What is this powerful literary tool? Is it a Cahill secret? NO! It is simply a device the author uses to help the reader empathize with the protagonist (main character) and secondary characters in a story. By feeling and sensing what is happening to the people in the story, the reader is able to live vicariously through the character. It is like the reader is actually Dan or Amy on the hunt for the 39 Clues!

Authors use a variety of techniques to introduce the reader to their characters. While artists can draw the details for all to see, authors must paint with words for the reader to uncover. In fact, many are like clues – some are easy to spot like dialogue; while others require a deeper level of detective work like examining a character's motivation through actions, dialog and background.

**Clues that can make characters come to life:**

### **Physical Description**

Authors use adjectives, similes, and metaphors to make the character realistic so the reader can clearly see them in their mind and be able to respond to them. This is the easiest type of character clue because authors tend to tell the reader the information.

### **Dialog and Thoughts**

This type of character clue is easy to find but must be translated by the reader into information about the character. Dialog breathes life into the character's personality. It is an opportunity to "hear" the character in the reader's mind. In *The Sword Thief*, the reader is able to "see" into Irina's mind when she thinks, " They will betray you, Alistair, unless you betray them first." The author goes on to state, "Thoughts of human weakness always picked up her spirits..." Should anyone ever trust Irina? Why does she love human weakness? What do her thoughts reveal about Irina?

### **Actions and Gestures**

Do actions speak louder than words? In characterization, actions bring another dimension to a character. When the characters are Cahill's, the actions might just mean more than the words they speak! Amy learns that Ian Kabra's actions can be deceiving in this book. What does this plot twist tell the reader about Amy? Why is she trusting? What does it tell us about Ian Kabra that he manipulated Amy into liking him?

### **Revelations about the Past**

While Dan and Amy are trying to find the 39 Clues with very little luggage, their emotional baggage they carry is enormous! A character's psychological outlook provides the reader with clues about their actions based upon their history. In *The Sword Thief*, the reader learns more about Alistair Oh's past. How do his Uncle Bae's actions in the past to get to the 39 Clues shape Alistair's actions in the present?

### **Dialect or Way of Speaking**

Dialect or the way a character speaks can offer information from not only what part of the world they are from, but also their educational, economic, and social influences. It is from dialect that the reader can "see" Irina Spatsky as an ex-KGB agent. While the way the Eisenhowers speak to one another reinforces their extra large view of life! What does Amy's stuttering tell us about her character? Do you believe that Jonah Wizard is really a gansta?

### **Activities**

It's in the Adjectives In their investigation journal, have students sleuth for clues (and adjectives) about each of the characters. Based upon the descriptions they have uncovered, students will draw a detailed picture of their favorite character.

Dialogue Drama: Students can pair up and create a new character for the series. Using only dialogue, students must paint a picture of this new Cahill without the use of props or costumes.

Dress Up! Based upon the physical descriptions of the characters in The 39 Clues Series, have students dress up as their favorite character and act out their favorite scene.

Revelation Round Up Have students brainstorm revelations and clues about each character's past. As a group, put the revelations in a T-graph labeling one side revelation and the other side prediction. Discuss with students how certain events in a person's past history influence their actions. What predictions can they make about future books based upon this information?

Character Chaos Create name cards of each of the characters in *The Sword Thief*. Place one card on the back of each student. The remaining students will be the clue-givers. They may only tell each "character" one clue about their person. Instruct the students that they are to give clues based upon what they know about the character from the book. See how many clues it takes for the student with cards to figure out their character. This activity can be changed each round so that one time clue-givers may only reveal physical descriptions, the next it might be character behavior. Continue rounds until all students have had a turn to be clue-givers and "characters."