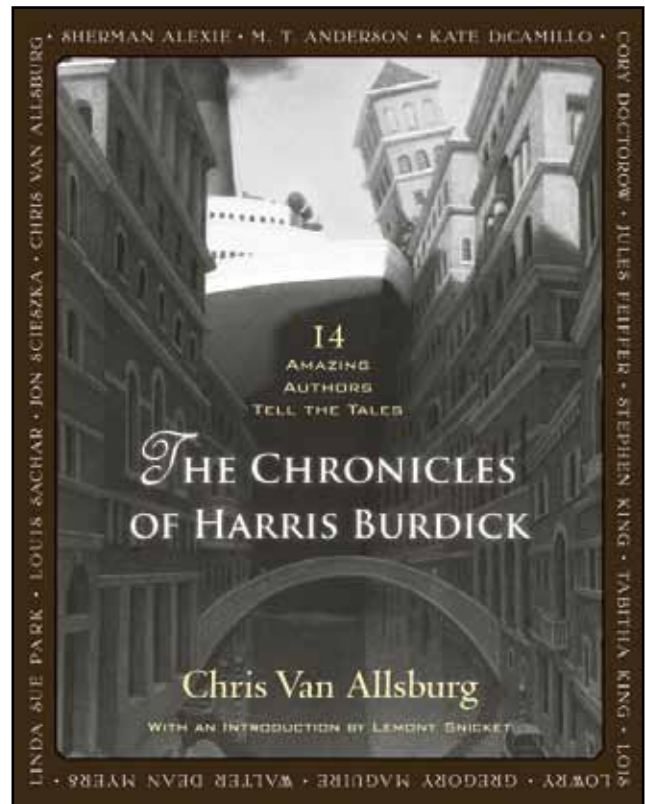


# THE CHRONICLES OF HARRIS BURDICK

## About the Book

This inspired collection of short stories by an all-star cast of best-selling authors is based on the thought-provoking illustrations in Chris Van Allsburg's celebrated *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. For more than twenty-five years, Van Allsburg's extraordinary illustrations in *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* have intrigued and entertained readers of all ages. Each illustration sends off an eerie call for text and continues to pick at readers' brains for a backstory—a tale behind the image. Thousands of children have been inspired to create their own stories to go with these enigmatic pictures.

Now, fourteen of the world's greatest storytellers spin their own tales. Enter *The Chronicles of Harris Burdick* to gather this incredible compendium of stories. Mysterious, funny, creepy, poignant—these are tales you won't soon forget written by authors from the worlds of both adult and children's literature: Sherman Alexie, M. T. Anderson, Kate DiCamillo, Cory Doctorow, Jules Feiffer, Stephen King, Tabitha King, Lois Lowry, Gregory Maguire, Walter Dean Myers, Linda Sue Park, Louis Sachar, Jon Scieszka, Lemony Snicket, and Chris Van Allsburg himself.



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## Projects and Activities

As a pre-reading activity, read aloud the introduction to *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* and share the pictures with the class.

Imagine you have the opportunity to interview Harris Burdick. He is willing to answer twenty questions. List the questions you would ask him.

Create a portrait of Harris Burdick.

Create a storyboard for your favorite story.

For the story you like best, write a few paragraphs explaining what you like most about it. Include comments on literary elements such as characterization, setting, plot, and theme. When you have completed that, write a few paragraphs about the story you like least, using specific examples and explaining in detail what it is you dislike.

Write a continuation for the story you like best.

Write your own original story for the Burdick drawing you find most interesting.

Create a drawing and caption in the style of Harris Burdick. Exchange the drawing with a classmate and write a story about it.

The drawings in *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* have been compared to the fantastical stories of Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*. Serling was well-known for getting many of his best story ideas from dreams. Invite your students to keep a notebook of story ideas that come to them in dreams.

Invite students to work in small groups and dramatize one of the stories, writing a script with roles, stage directions, costumes, props, scenery, etc.

*This guide was written by Edward T. Sullivan, a librarian and writer.*

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



## “Introduction” by Lemony Snicket

What do you think of Mr. Snicket’s theory regarding Burdick’s disappearance and authorship of the stories? Is it sound? Do you have an alternative theory?



*A tiny voice asked, “Is he the one?”*

## “Archie Smith, Boy Wonder” by Tabitha King

Why does Archie have to go to summer school?

Why does Archie’s mother call him a “boy wonder” (p. 2)?

Who do you think the two tiny voices belong to?

One voice is described as having “a range of colors to it” (p. 4). What literary device is this an example of?

What do you think Archie will find if he goes to the park tomorrow to look in the bushes?



*Two weeks passed and it happened again.*

## “Under the Rug” by Jon Scieszka

Grandma is fond of saying things like: “Look before you leap,” (p. 9) “Let sleeping dogs lie,” (p. 9) and “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” (p. 10). What are these expressions examples of? Discuss the meaning of each of the expressions Grandma uses. Have each student come up with five other expressions they have used or heard other people use and share them with the class.

What does the narrator discover about Grandma’s advice to “Never sweep a problem under the rug” (p. 10)?

How does the narrator put Grandma’s advice, “Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today,” (p. 12) to good use?

## “A Strange Day in July” by Sherman Alexie

What are some of the things Timmy and Tina do that make them so strange?

Do you think what Timmy and Tina tell the old woman is cruel? Why do you think they tell her the story?

Why do Timmy and Tina decide to pretend they are triplets?

Why do Timmy and Tina become jealous of Mary Elizabeth?

What do you think Mary Elizabeth will do to Timmy and Tina?



*He threw with all his might, but the third stone came skipping back.*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



*Even with her mighty engines in reverse, the ocean liner was pulled further and further into the canal.*

### “Missing in Venice” by Gregory Maguire

Why do you think Linus gets “lost on purpose” (p. 29) in Venice?

How does Linus get lost “for real” (p. 29)? How does getting lost make him feel?

What is unusual about the old woman’s boat?

What does the Queen of Gingerbread mean when she tells Linus “the rest is your job” (p. 38)? What must Linus do? What does Linus most want to see?

What does it mean for Linus and Candy when the ocean liner shrinks small enough to fit in the molasses jar?



*If there was an answer, he’d find it there.*

### “Another Place, Another Time” by Cory Doctorow

Gilbert calls time “a tyrant” (p. 45). What literary device is that an example of? Why does Gilbert hate time?

Gilbert asks, “Why can we move through space in *almost* any direction, but time only goes in one direction, at one speed? Why can’t we go faster? Slower? Backwards?” (p. 47). Discuss with the class the expressions we have about time and how we think about it. For example, what does it mean to “save time” or “make good time”? What are examples of things we do that seem to make time “go fast” and “go slow”?

According to Gilbert, how is time like looking out toward the ocean?

What answer do you think Gilbert will find in the “infinite sideways” (p. 58)?



*His heart was pounding.  
He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn.*

### “Uninvited Guests” by Jules Feiffer

Why is Henry startled but not surprised when a singing mouse appears in his studio?

What about Henry’s house indicates that he might suffer from a hoarding disorder?

Why do you think Henry’s wife and children never returned from their vacation?

What was most irritating to Henry’s wife, Wilma? What was Wilma’s last act before leaving with the children?

Why does Henry say he is a better children’s writer than he ever imagined?

What do you think Henry will find on the other side of the door?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



*The fifth one ended up in France.*

### “The Seven Chairs” by Lois Lowry

Before reading this story, have students use print or electronic resources to learn about the Second Vatican Council.

What startles the maintenance man in the hospital?

Why do you think only girls are able to hover?

What makes Mary Katherine “a piece of work” (p. 104)?

How does MK feel about and use her peculiar ability?

What does MK discover when she is twelve years old?

What does MK discover many years later in the cathedral?

What do you think will become of MK?



*It all began when someone left  
the window open.*

### “The Third-Floor Bedroom” by Kate DiCamillo

Why does Pearlie consider herself a prisoner?

Why does Pearlie describe the wallpaper in her room as “relentless” (p. 118)?

How does Pearlie get sick?

What does Pearlie do when the doctor accuses her of being “feral” (p. 120)?

In the letter to Martin dated April 8, 1944, Pearlie talks about hyperbole. Have students come up with ten examples of hyperbole and share them with the class.

Pearlie writes about the wallpaper bird breaking free and flying out the window. Do you think this really happened, or did she just imagine it?

Pearlie believes the break in the wallpaper pattern is proof of something. What do you think it is proof of?



*She lowered the knife and  
it grew even brighter.*

### “Just Desert” by M. T. Anderson

What happens to Alex Lee when he turns ten?

What happens to Alex when he decides to ride his bike to the Haunt Shack?

What is strange about the neighborhood Alex finds past Lunt Street?

What makes Alex think the UPS man is not really a UPS man? Who do you think he really is?

Why does Alex decide to take the pumpkin home?

What happens when Alex’s mother goes to cut the pumpkin?

What secret do Alex’s parents reveal to him?

How do you know you are real? How can you prove it?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



*So it's true he thought, it's really true.*

### “The Harp” by Linda Sue Park

Before reading the story, introduce students to the quote: “Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, / To soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak” from William Congreve’s play *The Mourning Bride*. Invite students to share their interpretations of the quote.

What does the old magician find to be the hardest part of his job?

What do Emma and Frances think of magic?

What spell does the magician cast upon Emma and Frances?

How would you describe the relationship Brian has with his father?

Why is Brian anticipating the worst summer of his life?

Why does Brian prefer Dougie to all the other dogs at the shelter?

What does Gramps tell Brian to listen for in the woods?

What is the “real music of the woods” (p. 83) that Brian hears?

What happens to Brian when the harp music, stream music, and woods music all come together? How does what happens to him relate to the William Congreve quote?

What do you think Brian will do with the magician’s cape?



*He had warned her about the book.  
Now it was too late.*

### “Mr. Linden’s Library” by Walter Dean Myers

What does Mr. Linden do now that he is no longer a merchant seaman?

What does Peter, Carol’s friend, tell her about Mr. Linden?

What do books mean to Mr. Linden?

What does Carol discover about the book Mr. Linden is reading?

Mr. Linden tells Carol that there are a few books “that capture more of the mind than one would want to surrender, books that are better off never read, never opened” (p. 98). How is this true of the book Mr. Linden reads and that Carol takes home with her when he dies?

Do you think Carol will ever be able to put down the book and not open it again?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



*He swung his lantern  
three times and slowly the schooner appeared.*

### “Captain Tory” by Louis Sachar

- When did Paul lose his father? What is the one vivid memory Paul has of him?
- Why does Paul think of his mother as a “smart cookie” (p. 147)?
- What does seeing Captain Tory out his window every morning mean to Paul?
- Why does Paul get anxious when he doesn’t see Captain Tory one morning?
- How does Captain Tory change Paul’s life?



*She knew it was time to send them back.  
The caterpillars softly wiggled in her hand, spelling out “goodbye.”*

### “Oscar and Alphonse” by Chris Van Allsburg

- What is the Farkas Conjecture, and what connection does Alice’s father have to it?
- What is Alice happy to do that is unusual for a girl her age?
- What does Alice discover on the leaf in the stream?
- What is it that the caterpillars know the answer to?
- How does Alice’s family react when she tells them that the caterpillars gave her the calculations?
- What happens before the problem is completely solved?
- Do you think that when the caterpillars transform into butterflies they will still communicate with Alice?



*It was perfect lift-off.*

### “The House on Maple Street” by Stephen King

- What strange things do the Bradbury children discover about their house?
- Why are the children afraid of Daddy Lew?
- What does Trent discover in the cellar?
- What terrible thing happens at Lew’s faculty party?
- What do the children discover their mother has been lying about?
- How does Trent get Lew to go back to the house?
- What does the house lifting off mean for the Bradbury children and their mother?

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