

GENNIFER  
CHOLDENKO



CHASING  
SECRETS

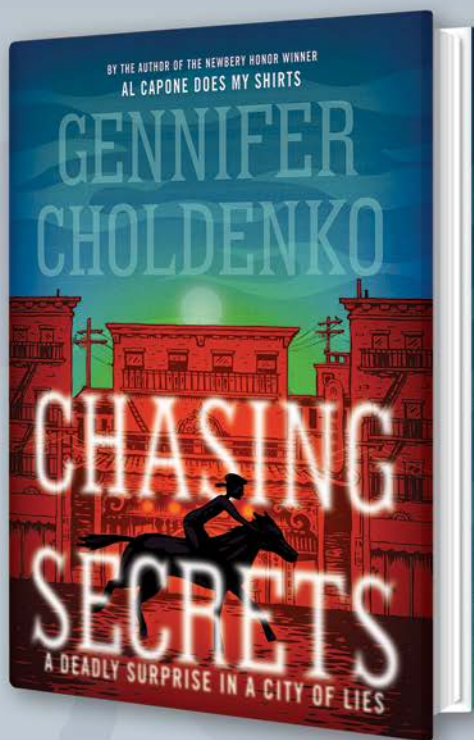
A DEADLY SURPRISE IN A CITY OF LIES

**EDUCATORS' GUIDE**

**INCLUDES COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATIONS**



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★ “This engrossing mystery perfectly balances heart and intrigue, proving once again Choldenko’s talent for packaging history within a story that kids are bound to love.”

—*Booklist*, Starred

Grades 4–7

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

IT’S 1900 IN SAN FRANCISCO, and thirteen-year-old Lizzie Kennedy isn’t like most girls who attend Miss Barstow’s finishing school. She would rather make house calls with her physician father than learn the proper use of calling cards or how to dance. Aunt Hortense keeps a watchful eye on her, but Lizzie has a knack for science and is determined to get to the bottom of the rumor that the plague has hit San Francisco. Papa and Uncle Karl, a powerful newspaperman, assure her that the city is safe, but Lizzie has questions: Why are mobs threatening to burn down Chinatown? Where is Jing, their Chinese cook? When Lizzie discovers Noah, Jing’s son, hiding in his father’s third-floor room in the Kennedy house, she is convinced there is more to the rumor than her family admits. Now it’s up to Lizzie and Noah to piece together the puzzle before it’s too late to save those they love.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask students to define historical fiction. Then have them read the Author’s Note (pp. 265–274) and write a brief narrative about the possible secrets that the title implies.

🔗 Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5–7.3.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Lizzie and Billy's mother is dead. What is Aunt Hortense and Uncle Karl's role in rearing them? Jing is the cook in the Kennedy household. Discuss his special relationship with Lizzie and Billy. Why does Aunt Hortense move in when Dr. Kennedy is away for a long time? Explain why she is harder on Lizzie than Billy.
- Describe the girls at Miss Barstow's school. Why doesn't Lizzie fit in? How does Aunt Hortense try to mold Lizzie to be like the other girls? Billy tells Lizzie that she doesn't have friends at school because she tries too hard. Debate whether Lizzie tries to make friends. Why is she suspicious when Gemma extends her hand in friendship?
- Lizzie discovers Noah, Jing's son, in Jing's third-floor room. Explain what Noah means when he says, "You know we aren't allowed to be friends" (pp. 91–92). Why is Lizzie willing to help Noah? At what point do they become friends? Lizzie says, "It's been a long time since I've had a friend my age" (p. 6). Why is she more comfortable with Noah than with the girls at school? What is Noah's role in Lizzie's developing friendship with Gemma?
- Explain what Aunt Hortense means when she says that Lizzie is a "work in progress" (p. 123). Aunt Hortense is very pleased when Lizzie becomes friends with Gemma Trotter. Discuss her reaction when Gus Trotter invites Lizzie to the La Jeunesse cotillion. How would Aunt Hortense react if she knew how Lizzie, Gemma, and Gus behaved at the cotillion?
- Jing thinks that Lizzie is her "own worst enemy" (p. 39). Cite passages from the novel that support Jing's opinion. Jing also believes that one learns more from mistakes than from victories. Discuss Lizzie's mistakes and what she learns from them. How do some of her mistakes lead her to victory?
- Compare and contrast Dr. Kennedy and Dr. Roumalade. Discuss Dr. Roumalade's view of Lizzie's father. Why do Aunt Hortense and Uncle Karl allow Dr. Roumalade to treat them when Dr. Kennedy is next door?
- Lizzie likes to make house calls with her father. How does Dr. Kennedy know that Lizzie is more likely to become a doctor than Billy? Why does Aunt Hortense disapprove?
- Why does Aunt Hortense call Uncle Karl Mr. Sweeting? How does this reflect the role of women in 1900? Lizzie overhears Aunt Hortense talking with another lady about getting women the right to vote. Explain why she tells Lizzie, "I trust you'll keep my business to yourself" (p. 118).
- Define trust. Who does Lizzie trust the most? Aunt Hortense asks Lizzie, "Do you think we can ever learn to trust each other?" (p. 168) Debate whether the two have learned to trust each other by the end of the novel.
- Aunt Hortense says, "Secrets tear us apart" (p. 168). How do Billy's secrets tear the family apart? Discuss the secrets Aunt Hortense harbors. Explain what she means when she says, "Still, I try to be as straightforward as I can, which is a challenge, given who I'm married to" (p. 258).
- Contrast Lizzie's and Billy's relationships with their father. Explain what Dr. Kennedy means when he tells Billy, "Courage comes from your heart, not your fists" (p. 174). Discuss how Lizzie shows courage when she follows her heart.



- Explain the significance of the following scenes: Aunt Hortense calling Elizabeth “Lizzie,” Lizzie asking Jing when his birthday is, and Lizzie asking Jing his last name.
- Why do Uncle Karl and Lizzie’s dad deny that the plague has reached San Francisco? How does Lizzie’s quest to find out about the monkey reveal the truth about the plague? Explain why the doctors falsify death certificates of people who died from the plague. What is Dr. Roumalade’s opinion of Lizzie? How is her knowledge of medicine and the drugs used to immunize against the plague such a threat to him and his reputation as a doctor?
- Define prejudice. How are wealthy families in San Francisco in 1900 prejudiced against the Chinese? Aunt Hortense asks Dr. Roumalade, “How can you decide one life is more valuable than another?” (p. 227) How does this question reveal a change in Aunt Hortense?
- How does Billy’s death change Aunt Hortense and her view of Lizzie’s dream of becoming a doctor?
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 5–7.1, RL. 5–7.2, RL. 5–7.3; Craft & Structure RL. 5–7.4, RL. 5–7.5, RL. 5–7.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5–7.1, SL. 5–7.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 5–7.1; Knowledge of Language L. 5–7.3.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Lizzie likes to write poems. Explain to students that an acrostic poem starts with a word or name called a “spine word.” Each letter in that word starts a word of the poem. Have them use Aunt Hortense, Uncle Karl, and Dr. Roumalade as “spine words” and write acrostic poems that describe each character.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5–7.4.
- Choldenko uses similes to create images in the reader’s mind. For example: “The terror in Caroline’s eyes makes my mind spin like a bicycle wheel with no chain attached” (p. 15). Find other examples of similes in the novel. Then have students write a simile that describes Lizzie’s experience in Chinatown when she goes to find Jing.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Craft & Structure RL. 5–7.4; Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 5–7.5.
- “All things come to him who waits” is the motto of Lizzie’s class at Miss Barstow’s school. Ask students to write an essay that explains the motto from Lizzie’s, Gemma’s, or Hattie’s point of view. Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5–7.1; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5–7.4, W. 5–7.5.
- Uncle Karl writes a column for his newspaper that pokes fun at women trying to get the right to vote. Ask students to research the woman’s suffrage movement on the following website: [nwhm.org/online-exhibits/progressiveera/introprogressive.html](http://nwhm.org/online-exhibits/progressiveera/introprogressive.html). Then have them write an article that Lizzie might write called “The Progressive Woman,” ending the article with a paragraph about her dream of becoming a doctor.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5–7.2; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5–7.7, W. 5–7.8.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS continued

- Have students write a front-page article and headline for *The Call*, Uncle Karl's newspaper, on the day the plague is confirmed. They should interview Dr. Kennedy, Lizzie, Jing, Aunt Hortense, and Uncle Karl. Tell them to include information answering the questions who, what, when, where, and how.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5–7.2; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5–7.4.
- Dr. Kennedy is away so long because there is a smallpox outbreak. Ask students to use books or the Internet to research the following information: causes and symptoms of smallpox, who developed the vaccine, when the vaccine was first used, and why people were opposed to immunization. Then have them write a brief article about smallpox for a health textbook.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5–7.2; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 5–7.4; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5–7.7.
- According to the Chinese zodiac, 1900 was the Year of the Rat. Lizzie is thirteen and was born in 1887. Ask students to refer to the following website to determine which animal symbolizes Lizzie: [whats-your-sign.com/Chinese-zodiac-signs.html](http://whats-your-sign.com/Chinese-zodiac-signs.html). Then have them use the characteristics described by the Chinese zodiac to write an afterword for the novel that describes Lizzie's life in ten years.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 5–7.3; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5–7.9.
- Read about the rules of etiquette in 1900 on the following website: [home.earthlink.net/~gchristen/Etiquette.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~gchristen/Etiquette.html). Then divide the class into small groups and ask them to cite rules that are followed and broken by characters in the novel.
  - Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 5–7.9; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 5–7.1.

### VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them, taking clues from the context. Then have them use a dictionary to check their definitions.

Such words may include: *fumigated* (p. 1), *dray* (p. 8), *temperance* (p. 8), *cowers* (p. 16), *sanction* (p. 41), *escapade* (p. 41), *forelock* (p. 45), *cordon* (p. 63), *metronome* (p. 79), *clientele* (p. 84), *contagion* (p. 84), *stealthy* (p. 89), *intricate* (p. 103), *providence* (p. 104), *swagger* (p. 125), *scullery* (p. 129), *landaus* (p. 131), *scurrilous* (p. 143), *prudent* (p. 143), *impeded* (p. 153), *imperative* (p. 153), *intervention* (p. 185), *impudent* (p. 237), and *allegations* (p. 255).

- Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use L. 5–7.4.

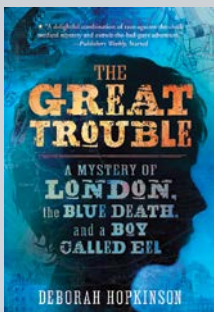
# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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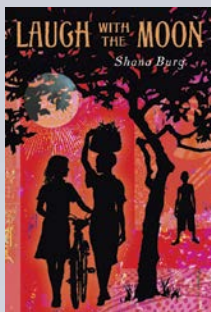


Gennifer Choldenko is the *New York Times* bestselling and Newbery Honor–winning author of many popular children’s books, including *Notes from a Liar* and *Her Dog*, *If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period*, *Al Capone Does My Shirts*, *Al Capone Shines My Shoes*, *Al Capone Does My Homework*, and *No Passengers Beyond This Point*. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she hopes never to see a rat. Dead or otherwise. Visit her online at [GenniferCholdenko.com](http://GenniferCholdenko.com).

## RELATED TITLES



**The Great Trouble:**  
**A Mystery of London, the Blue Death,  
and a Boy Called Eel**  
Deborah Hopkinson  
Grades 5 & up  
PB: 978-0-375-84308-2



**Laugh with the Moon**  
Shana Burg  
Grades 5 & up  
PB: 978-0-440-42210-5

## INTERNET RESOURCES

[pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dm00bu.html](http://pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dm00bu.html)

This site discusses the plague that hit San Francisco in 1900.

[nwhm.org/education-resources/history/woman-suffrage-timeline](http://nwhm.org/education-resources/history/woman-suffrage-timeline)

This official site of the National Women’s History Museum offers a timeline of the woman’s suffrage movement.

[pbs.org/kqed/chinatown/resourceguide/story.html](http://pbs.org/kqed/chinatown/resourceguide/story.html)

This site offers an overview of San Francisco’s Chinatown.

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