



Discussion Guide

Includes Questions,
Classroom Activities, and
an Exclusive Author Letter



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Just Harriet, Harriet Spies & Harriet Tells the Truth



About *Just Harriet*

There are a few things you should know about Harriet Wermer:

- She just finished third grade.
- She has a perfect cat named Matzo Ball.
- She doesn't always tell the truth.
- She is very happy to be spending summer vacation away from home and her mom and dad and all the wonderful things she had been planning all year.

Okay, maybe that last one isn't entirely the truth.

Of course, there's nothing Harriet doesn't like about Marble Island, the small island off the coast of California where her nanu runs a cozy little bed and breakfast. And nobody doesn't love Moneypenny, Nanu's old basset hound. But Harriet doesn't like the fact that Dad made this decision without even asking her.

When Harriet arrives on Marble Island, however, she discovers that it's full of surprises, and even a mystery. One that seems to involve her dad, back when he was a young boy living on Marble Island. One that Harriet is absolutely going to solve. And that's the truth.

About *Harriet Spies*

There are a few more things you should know about Harriet Wermer:

- She *always* tells the truth.
- She's loving spending her summer on Marble Island, where she is an A+ mystery-solver.
- Okay, maybe she doesn't *always* tell the truth.
- Actually...she has a tendency to lie quite a bit.

Which is why, when one of the guests at her grandmother's bed-and-breakfast finds that their treasured pair of binoculars has gone missing, no one believes Harriet when she said she had nothing to do with it. But this is one time Harriet *isn't* lying—and she knows that if she can find the binoculars and figure out who really took them, she can prove it.

With her cat, Matzo Ball, her grandmother's basset hound, Moneypenny, and Harriet's new friend, Clarence, helping her out, Harriet knows she can crack the case. But when the culprit isn't who Harriet expects, it's up to her to decide how important the truth really is.

About *Harriet Tells the Truth*

There are some things you should know about Harriet Wermer:

- She used to lie a lot, but not anymore.
- Seriously, she only tells the truth now.
- Even though she hadn't wanted to come to Marble Island in the first place, now she doesn't want to leave.

It's the truth. With her mom and new baby brother home from the hospital, it's almost time for Harriet to pack up and head home from Marble Island and all the friends she's made. But Harriet doesn't have time to think about that—not when she discovers that Moneypenny, her Nanu's adorable basset hound, has been poisoned!

Harriet suspects the culprit is one of the guests staying at Nanu's bed-and-breakfast, and she and her best friend, Clarence, are once again on the case. But when someone else falls ill, Harriet's going to have to sleuth harder, spy sneakier, and be willing to see that sometimes the truth is more complicated than it seems.



“Well, my dear,’ said Miss Marple, ‘human nature is much the same everywhere, and, of course, one has opportunities of observing it at closer quarters in a village.’”

—“The Thumb Mark of St. Peter,” from the short story collection
The Thirteen Problems by Agatha Christie

By the time I was eleven, I had moved at least that many times. In addition to moves from one part of the state to another, we also moved from neighborhood to neighborhood within my hometown of Long Beach, California, and sometimes (for reasons still unclear to me), I was moved from school to school, often mid-year.

Maybe it’s because of all these displacements that I fell so heavily in love with settings in stories—particularly small, knowable places. Ramona Quimby’s Grant Park neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. Anne Shirley’s Avonlea. And Miss Jane Marple’s beloved St. Mary Mead.

A village, Miss Marple believes, is a microcosm. It’s a little place with the opportunity to see all the sorts of people, to see all the human dramas acted out in miniature, so to speak.

How I longed for such a cozy place. How I longed to know a place, and to belong to one. So I suppose it’s no surprise that when I set out to write a series for young readers—one that promised, among other things, cozy mysteries—I began first of all with place. Marble Island is a quaint little island just off the coast of southern California, not unlike Catalina Island, just 22 miles away from where I live now, crossable by sea or air.

At the beginning of *Just Harriet*, Harriet Wermer is “displaced” to Marble Island, which turns out to be the perfect place for this inquisitive, curious kid to begin solving the small mysteries of island life (like what the big, old-fashioned key might open), and the big mysteries, too—the human mysteries that can take a lifetime to unravel.

In *Harriet Spies*, our beloved sleuth is again challenged by mysteries great and small: What happened to the Captain’s binoculars? And what does it mean to be a friend?

In *Harriet Tells the Truth*, Harriet faces the most challenging mysteries so far: how can she be so sad about summer ending and getting ready to leave the island, when she didn’t want to come here in the first place? And, even more troubling... who is responsible for the poisonings on Marble Island?

The Harriet books, like all my books, honor and respect the hard work of being a human in the world. Each novel in the series takes an honest look at the cost of dishonesty. They’re funny, and full of furry friends, and also, always, love.

I hope that Marble Island, Nanu’s Bric-a-Brac Bed & Breakfast, and even Harriet herself will feel to readers like a comfortable homecoming, even if it is to places and perspectives they have never seen.



About the Author

Elana K. Arnold is the award-winning author of many books for children and teens, including *Just Harriet*, *Harriet Spies*, *The House that Wasn’t There*, the Printz Honor winner *Damsel*, the National Book Award finalist *What Girls are Made Of*, and the Global Read Aloud selection *A Boy Called Bat* and its sequels. She is a member of the faculty at Hamline University’s MFA in writing for children and young adults program, and lives in Long Beach, CA, with her husband, two children, and a menagerie of animals. You can find her online at www.elanakarnold.com

About the Illustrator

Dung (pronounced Dzung) Ho was born and raised in Hue citadel, Vietnam, where she studied graphic design at the Arts University. She is the *New York Times*-bestselling illustrator of many books for children, including Joanna Ho’s *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners* and Laura Ruby’s *Me and Ms. Too*. She finds inspiration in nature: the beauty of plants, flowers, and leaves. She also loves to draw interesting characters with unique personalities. She now lives in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. When she’s not drawing, she loves spending time cooking (eating), watching movies, and tending her plants. Visit her at www.behance.net/hanhdung or follow her on Instagram [@dunghanhho](https://www.instagram.com/dunghanhho).



Chapter 1: Things You Should Know

- ✿ This story is written in first person narrative, which means Harriet talks directly to her readers. Because the story is told from Harriet's perspective, she could tell the reader anything she wants. So why would Harriet open her story by telling us the things she's not so proud of about herself first?
- ✿ Harriet mentions that she often gets caught in her lies right away, which is embarrassing. Can you think of a time you got caught in a lie and felt embarrassed?
- ✿ Harriet is named after the famous book character from *Harriet the Spy*. Why do you think she is named after that character? Do you know how you got your name?
- ✿ Why do you think Mom doesn't expose Harriet in her lie about the last-day-of-school tradition?

Chapter 2: Not Spying

- ✿ Describe how Mom and Dad are both feeling, based on their words and actions. Do you think Harriet is being understanding or selfish in this moment?
- ✿ Why does Harriet say, "No one dumped me off a pillow, but I felt like they had"? [PAGE 13]
- ✿ Harriet has already admitted that she lies to people. Do you think she also lies to herself? Can you find evidence of that in this chapter?
- ✿ Harriet mentions her grandmother's bed and breakfast, the Bric-a-Brac B&B. Do you know what a bed and breakfast is? How is it different from a hotel?
- ✿ What is Harriet's reaction to hearing about going to Marble Island for the summer? What do you think of her reaction? Have you ever been in a similar situation?

Chapter 3: On the Way to Nanu's House

- ✿ Names are important in this story. Why do you think Harriet names her cat Matzo Ball?
- ✿ Why do you think Harriet decides not to focus on the memory of saying goodbye to her mom, and instead is irritated with her dad for not letting her get three donuts?
- ✿ What do we learn about Harriet when she says that her sad feelings are harder for her to feel than her mad feelings? Do you think this might explain some of her past behavior?
- ✿ Can you think of some examples of Harriet's actions and thoughts that show us she is trying to find ways to feel mad instead of sad?





Just Harriet Discussion Questions

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Chapter 4: Welcome to Marble Island

- ✿ Harriet says she wants her dad to have to carry heavy luggage. In fact, she makes her luggage extra heavy on purpose, by packing rocks. Why does Harriet do this?
- ✿ Why do you think Nanu's dog is named Money Penny?

Chapter 5: Harriet's Hideaway

- ✿ Once she arrives at Nanu's house, Harriet says again that it feels better to be mad than sad. Do you agree with her? Can you think of why she would say this right at that moment?
- ✿ How do you think Nanu feels about Harriet's reaction to seeing the sign on her bedroom door?

Chapter 6: Don't Cry

- ✿ Describe how Harriet treats her dad in this chapter. Why does she treat him as she does? How do you think she feels about her own behavior, deep down?
- ✿ Why are the overalls so special to Harriet? Do you have anything special that was passed down to you from a family member?

Chapter 7: Tip Troller

- ✿ Why do you think Harriet feels mad when she sees the smiling couple coming up the steps to the Bric-a-Brac B&B?
- ✿ What two lies does Harriet tell to the couple? How do you think these interactions affect the couple's first impression of Harriet?
- ✿ Why does the woman staying in Captain's Cove call Harriet a "tip troller"? Is she trying to compliment Harriet, or criticize her?

Chapter 8: Nanu's Shed

- ✿ Nanu has taken Harriet in for the summer. She seems to want to make Harriet feel at home and comfortable. But when she asks Harriet for help polishing the silverware, Harriet slams the box shut. Why does Harriet do this?
- ✿ Harriet is excited to go through the items in the shed, in hopes of finding something interesting. What do you think would be an interesting find?
- ✿ Harriet appreciates how Nanu trusts her to take on the job of cleaning out the shed. But does Harriet deserve that trust? Is Harriet cleaning out the shed to be helpful? Or does she have other motivations?





Just Harriet Discussion Questions

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- ✿ Nanu asks Harriet to let her know if she finds anything special in the shed. But when Harriet finds the key, she decides instead to hide it in her pocket. What do you think about this decision?
- ✿ After Harriet finds the key and decides to hide it in her pocket, she compares herself to her cat, Matzo Ball, whenever he sees a lizard in the yard. What is Matzo Ball's intention when he sees a lizard? How does that compare to Harriet's intention with the key?

Chapter 9: Hans and Gretchen's Ice Cream Parlor

- ✿ There are lots of contest winners posted on the wall of the ice cream parlor. Can you come up with some other competitions that they could celebrate there?
- ✿ Harriet thinks to herself that it's hard to be crabby in an ice cream shop. **[PAGE 82]** Does this explain how Harriet feels about the way Hans and Gretchen speak to her? How does Harriet respond to them? Is this the same or different from the way she interacts with other characters in the story?
- ✿ What do you think Harriet is *really* thinking when she tells Nanu she bets Matzo Ball will be glad to have a nice long break from Dad?

Chapter 10: Bubble Machine

- ✿ What does Harriet's reaction to wetting the bed reveal to us about her character?
- ✿ When Nanu discovers the huge bubble mess in her kitchen, how does she react?
- ✿ Many times we see Harriet caught in a lie. But she is never called out for this by the adults around her. How do you think this affects her future behavior?

Chapter 11: A Keyhole, A Key

- ✿ Harriet is curious about the dollhouse, which Nanu calls The Gingerbread House. Harriet's dad says the real treasure is in The Gingerbread House. What kind of treasure do you think could fit inside the dollhouse, and where could it be hidden?
- ✿ If the symbols on the key are WW, for Walter Wermer, how does that change the mystery?
- ✿ Do you think Harriet is lying to the Captain about knowing what an ornithologist is?
- ✿ What impression do you think the Captain has of Harriet?





Just Harriet Discussion Questions

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Chapter 12: Island Loggerhead Shrikes

- 🌿 The Captain seems suspicious of Harriet when she offers to take the Captain's things up to her room. Is the Captain right to be suspicious? What is Harriet's motivation?
- 🌿 What do you notice that is different about Harriet in this chapter?

Chapter 13: Another Mystery

- 🌿 What does Harriet do when she starts to feel sad?
- 🌿 Why do you think Harriet avoids the feeling of sadness?
- 🌿 What is the other mystery that Harriet is wondering about?

Chapter 14: Moneypenny's Constitutional

- 🌿 What is a "constitutional"?
- 🌿 Why does Harriet say the mysterious house near Nanu's looks like her bad mood? How can a house look like a mood?
- 🌿 How many lies did Harriet tell in this chapter? Are some worse than others?
- 🌿 Harriet finds a book her father had checked out of the library when he was a kid—*The Big Book of Little Things*. Where else in the story is there a connecting clue to Harriet's father and certain objects?

Chapter 15: Inside Sounds and Outside Sounds

- 🌿 Why does Harriet narrow her eyes at the Captain when the Captain says this about Moneypenny: "It's not always easy to make room for new things, if you're set in your ways." [PAGE 141]
- 🌿 What exciting discovery does Harriet make at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 16: Behind the Door

- 🌿 "Her face reminded me of the bark of a tree. It was gnarled and interesting and beautiful." [PAGE 157] Who is Harriet describing here, and what does her description of the woman tell us about Harriet?
- 🌿 Harriet has solved the mystery of what the key unlocks, and she has discovered that the gingerbread dollhouse is a replica of the real house behind the Bric-a-Brac B&B. But what is she still curious about?
- 🌿 Now that you know there is a real house called The Gingerbread House, does it change your idea of what the treasure Harriet's dad mentioned could be? (As he said while they were on the boat ride to Marble Island: "...the Gingerbread House....that's where the real treasure is.") [PAGE 25]





Just Harriet Discussion Questions

continued

Chapter 17: The Gingerbread House

- ✿ Harriet thinks about the three types of lies her father told her about. Which kind does she tell most often? **[PAGES 165-166]**
- ✿ Describe and find examples of Harriet using the 3 types of lies:
 - Fabrication
 - Denial
 - Omission
- ✿ Harriet admits to not liking change. “What if you try something new and it isn’t any good and you’re stuck with it?” **[PAGE 171]** What could you say to Harriet to encourage her to try something new?
- ✿ Why do Hans and Gretchen decide to make gingerbread cones?
- ✿ Harriet finally tells some truths in this chapter. Describe how that makes her feel.

Chapter 18: Mabel Marble

- ✿ What is a centennial birthday?
- ✿ What does Harriet learn about her father in this chapter?
- ✿ Harriet has begun to grow and change recently in the story. Which other two characters appear to be changing?
- ✿ What does it mean to say something “solemnly”?
- ✿ Harriet takes Mabel’s hand as they are formally introduced and thinks back to what her father has said about the treasure. She wonders if the treasure could be a person. Do you think a person can be a treasure?
- ✿ Why is the dusty box of items in Mabel’s basement a treasure to Harriet? What does it help her realize?
- ✿ Harriet’s character grows a lot in this final chapter. In your opinion, what is one of the biggest moments of growth?
- ✿ Harriet wonders, “Why is it sometimes so much easier to say things that aren’t true than to say the things that are true, that are the most true?” **[PAGE 191]** What does this quote reveal about Harriet’s lying?
- ✿ What advice does Harriet give herself at the end of the book to avoid being mad about things? **[PAGE 193]**





Chapter 1: A Visitor to Marble Island

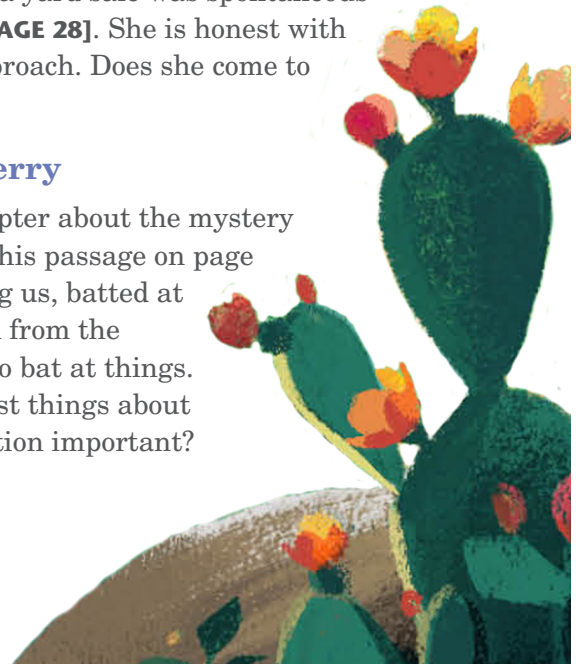
- ✿ Harriet says she’s a “people person.” [PAGE 1] What does this description mean to you? List three qualities of a people person. Are *you* a people person? Why or why not?
- ✿ In *Just Harriet*, it is plain to see that Harriet and the Captain have a somewhat tricky relationship. But in *Harriet Spies*, Harriet observes, “Everything about the Captain is impressive.” [PAGE 4] Do you think Harriet admires the Captain, is intimidated by her, is frustrated by her, or feels a combination of all these things?
- ✿ Though Harriet frequently lies, she almost always tells the truth to the reader of the story. For example, she says: “Sometimes when I’m mad or anxious or bored, I say things that aren’t true. It’s a bad habit, and one I’m trying to break.” [PAGE 10] Besides being honest with the reader of the story, what else could Harriet do to break her lying habit?
- ✿ When Harriet’s father arrives on the ferry boat, Harriet has a strange feeling: “Even though I was happy, my throat felt all tight and full, as if a bunch of words were crowding together and blocking the way, like a traffic jam. And not one of them could get through.” That is a very vivid description. Have you ever felt that way?

Chapter 2: Time Stops for No One

- ✿ “I didn’t want to share my Dad time with *anyone*,” says Harriet. [PAGE 19] And yet, throughout her dad’s visit, Harriet seems alternately happy and sad, or rather, as she says, “mad.” Why do you think the visit gives rise to all these different feelings?
- ✿ Harriet’s decision to have a yard sale was spontaneous “to change the subject.” [PAGE 28]. She is honest with us as she explains her approach. Does she come to regret this sudden plan?

Chapter 3: After the Ferry

- ✿ There is a hint in this chapter about the mystery in the book. Take note of this passage on page 37: “...Matzo Ball, ignoring us, batted at the string that hung down from the window shades. He likes to bat at things. It’s one of the top ten cutest things about him.” Why is this observation important?





Harriet Spies Discussion Questions

continued

- ✿ The Captain fascinates Harriet, who is always trying to figure out what makes the Captain tick. How does this observation support this idea: “She looked unhappy. But the Captain looks unhappy a lot, even when she’s happy. That’s just the way her face is made.” **[PAGE 52]**

Chapter 4: The Yard Sale

- ✿ In this chapter, Harriet shows us again both her admiration and her uncertainty about her feelings for the Captain when she says: “When the Captain whistled, it sounded like a bright, crisp blast. Probably if I asked her to show me how to do it, she would. But I didn’t want her help.” Why do you think Harriet doesn’t want the Captain’s help? **[PAGES 49-50]**

Chapter 5: What Happened to Moneypenny

- ✿ Harriet often finds herself boxed into a corner—especially where the Captain is concerned. She doesn’t always know what to do with her strong emotions. When the Captain doesn’t believe her, Harriet is a combination of mad, sad, and embarrassed. To let her feelings out, she gets mad. And so, by accident, she steps on Moneypenny’s paw, making everything worse. If she had not lost her temper, what might she have done to try to clear up the situation?

Chapter 6: Not the Boy Who Cried Wolf

- ✿ Harriet regrets closing herself off in her room and is glad when her mother calls and gives her an excuse to return to the others. Is there some other way she could have found to save face (fix the situation without embarrassing herself)?
- ✿ How might Harriet’s decision to help solve the mystery of the missing binoculars help her fix her relationship with the Captain? What can she do to convince the Captain not to be suspicious of her?

Chapter 7: Treasure Box

- ✿ “Sometimes, it’s hard to get what you want. But sometimes, it’s easy.” **[PAGE 76]** Think of examples in your life where each of these outcomes has been true.

Chapter 8: In Clarence’s Room

- ✿ Harriet, the close observer of human behavior, makes some interesting observations about what Clarence is like: “He didn’t try to mess with the thing I was building, or offer advice about how I should be doing it differently, or anything like that. And another thing: he was fair about dividing up the magnetic tiles. Not everyone is fair.” **[PAGE 88]** What do these observations by Harriet tell you about what she values in a friend?





Harriet Spies Discussion Questions

continued

Chapter 9: Harriet and Clarence the Spies

🌱 “I hated making promises. Because even though I sometimes don’t remember to tell the truth, I *never* break a promise. So I try to avoid making them.” [PAGE 94] Consider the two traits in herself that Harriet describes here. Clearly, Harriet values keeping a promise more than she values telling the truth. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

🌱 As Harriet walks along the boardwalk with Clarence, enjoying an ice cream cone, she realizes she is having fun. This seems to come as a surprise to her. Does this realization help change her attitude about being on Marble Island?

Chapter 10: Orange Things, Big and Small

🌱 As Harriet pursues her detective work, she realizes she is suspicious of everyone and everything. This creates complications. But Harriet doesn’t always seem able to control her actions or impulses. If you were helping Harriet on this detective mission, what advice would you offer about following up on her suspicions?

Chapter 11: Shed Decorating

🌱 Harriet is sometimes proud of her ability to tell stories (rather than lies). She says, “When you’re as good at making things up as I am, you can sometimes do it without thinking.” Do you think this is a positive quality in her? [PAGE 118]

🌱 When Harriet gets exciting ideas, sometimes she feels the excitement in unusual ways. “A tingly feeling went up the back of my neck, making the little hairs there feel alive.” Have you ever had a feeling like that? If so, what caused it?

Chapter 12: Macaroni and Cheese and Marshmallows

🌱 Harriet is very observant of other people. The things people do, the things people say, *how* they behave, always make a big impression on her. She notices, for example: “Nanu didn’t say it like it was a question. She said it like it was a *statement*. I decided to remember that for later.” [PAGE 135] Why would Harriet want to remember that?

Chapter 13: Close Up

🌱 Going around using the magnifying glass her father sent her gives Harriet a new way of looking at the world. “Pretty much everything I looked at through the magnifying glass had more to it than it seemed.” [PAGE 145] What kind of impact does this new tool have on Harriet’s detective work?





Harriet Spies Discussion Questions

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Chapter 14: You'll See

🌱 Harriet is sometimes aware of the ways her body reacts to thoughts in her mind. For example, she says: “The back of my scalp was itchy with an idea.” **[PAGE 157]** What do you think she means by this? Have you ever had such a feeling?



Chapter 15: A Tour of the Wood

🌱 Sometimes when Harriet wishes things were different than they are, she uses her imagination and her own special view of the world to try to change the situation. She says, “I wanted to squeeze my eyes shut to make her disappear, but I knew that wouldn’t do any good...” **[PAGE 168]** What are some other ways that Harriet uses “magical thinking”?

Chapter 16: The Plot Thickens

🌱 As Harriet learns, it’s hard to make a friend, and sometimes it’s hard to keep a friend. She hurts Clarence’s feelings badly, and though she doesn’t understand at first what she has done, she can tell something is wrong. “...there was a feeling between us that I didn’t like but couldn’t exactly name.” **[PAGE 174]** How do you think Clarence feels in that moment? If you were Harriet, what would you do about that bad feeling?



Chapter 17: A Nightmare

🌱 When Harriet is trying to sneak through the house at night, did you think she would get caught? Why or why not?

Chapter 18: The Confession

🌱 Harriet starts to show us that she has grown and changed—particularly about telling the truth. “...usually, when I make up a lie, it’s to distract me from a scary truth about what it is happening or what I’m feeling. Because the truth is sometimes scary. And lying makes me feel in control.” **[PAGE 195]** Do you understand what Harriet means by saying this? Have you ever felt the same way?

Chapter 19: Close Up, Far Away, and Just Right

🌱 The Captain and Harriet have learned to understand one another, as Harriet makes clear: “She sounded stern, but I knew this was just her science voice.” **[PAGE 225]** How do you think this new level of understanding will affect each of them?



Chapter 1: Island Loggerhead Shrikes

- ✿ This chapter opens with Harriet pointing out some of the difficulties of island life. For instance, she explains how long it can take to wait for a delivery, and the fact that many mainland conveniences are not available on an island. Think about your daily life. What would you miss most if you moved away?
- ✿ Harriet brings up her friend Clarence right away, and shares that the two friends just don't see things the same way. Thinking back to *Harriet Spies*, what examples of this can you recall?
- ✿ Harriet says Moneypenny is an optimist "...because she keeps trying." **[PAGE 4]** In what ways are you optimistic in life?
- ✿ Why do you think Harriet doubts Clarence's ability to understand her feelings? **[PAGE 6]**
- ✿ When we first met Harriet in *Just Harriet*, she lied a lot. Harriet has now come to see that no good ever came from all her lies. She is determined to stop that habit. Do you think she will be successful? Have factors in her life changed to support this new goal?

Chapter 2: Two-Thousand-Pound Movie Star

- ✿ What strong verb does the author use to describe how Harriet and Clarence get into the jeep? **[PAGE 11]** How does that word choice help you imagine how they look and feel as they get in?
- ✿ The Captain works for the Marble Island Conservancy. What does it mean to conserve something?
- ✿ Harriet thinks about how she is riding along on an adventure with two of her favorite people on the whole planet. **[PAGE 15]** She has come a long way in her relationship with the Captain. Have you ever started out a relationship with a lot of conflict, and later had that relationship turn into something beautiful?
- ✿ Why do you think Harriet tries to suppress her true feelings and emotions to herself? At one point, she feels her eyes fill with tears. **[PAGE 17]** Why is she tearing up, and why do you think she won't admit that to herself?
 - ✿ What do you think Harriet is thinking when she folds her arms across her chest and says: "That's enough of the bison." **[PAGE 20]**





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Chapter 3: A Fungus Among Us

- Why do you think Harriet tries to distract the Captain before the Captain can begin talking about how bad visitors can be to Marble Island?
- There are many details in this chapter that will be referenced later in the story. In *Harriet Spies*, Harriet worked to solve a mystery. She will soon be faced with another mystery to solve. What traits does Harriet have that will help her solve a mystery, and what traits does she have that might hinder her investigation?

Chapter 4: The Workshop

- What do you think the “mixed-up feeling” is that Harriet continues to mention? And why do you think she is actively trying to ignore it?
- The Captain tells Nanu that Clarence could be well on his way to a career in science, especially as a “mycologist.” **[PAGE 35]** Based on what Clarence is interested in, and what happened in Chapter 3, what do you think a mycologist is? Check to see if you are correct.
- In this chapter, Harriet meets Horace Wallbacher, one of the visiting poets. Horace gets off on the wrong foot with Harriet, and both characters speak rudely to each other. Do you think one character is more in the wrong here, or are they both equally wrong in their behavior?

Chapter 5: Blue Caps, Green Caps

- In this chapter, Harriet mentions a line from a poem: “Good fences make good neighbors.” **[PAGE 46]** This is a line from a Robert Frost poem, “Mending Wall.” What do you think that line means?
- Read Harriet’s description of Mabel Marble. **[PAGE 48]** What does this tell you about Harriet’s feelings toward Mabel Marble?
- Mabel Marble tells Harriet that a poem’s job is to find a new way to tell the truth, that each poem is the poet’s truth. Do you think people can tell different truths about the same place, idea, or feeling?
- Harriet ends the chapter with the word “Rude,” in response to her feelings about Horace Wallbacher’s behavior. **[PAGE 57]** What do you think about how Harriet behaved in this chapter?



Harriet Tells the Truth Discussion Questions

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Chapter 6: Sweet and Sour

- One of the things that Harriet admires about Clarence is that he isn't afraid to say how he feels. In your life, do you find it easy or difficult to say how you feel? Does this affect your life?
- Why does Harriet's mood suddenly turn to "sour and bitter and mad"? **[PAGE 63]**
- Harriet said in the first chapter that she was going to actively work on not telling lies. In this chapter, she says hurtful truths. **[PAGE 68]** What could you say to Harriet to help her understand that the truth can cause harm sometimes, too?

Chapter 7: Sick as a Dog

- When Harriet and Nanu find Moneypenny sick in the middle of the night, Nanu tells Harriet to fetch the Captain. Harriet thinks the Captain is "exactly the sort of person you want in an emergency." **[PAGE 75]** What is it about the Captain that makes Harriet feel this way?
- The veterinarian thinks that Moneypenny might have eaten something poisonous. Here begins the mystery. Keep notes on what you think the poison could be, using clues from the story that have been and will be revealed.
- What do you think the orange dust found on Horace Wallbacher's notebook and on Moneypenny's ears could be?

Chapter 8: To Catch a Poisoner

- When Harriet goes to Clarence's house, she spies half of the mushroom he had collected on their outing with the Captain. **[PAGE 88]** Do you think there is a significance the fact that half of the mushroom is missing? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Harriet wants Horace Wallbacher to be the one who gets caught for poisoning Moneypenny?

Chapter 9: An Outburst

- Have you ever felt the way Harriet feels about the prospect of leaving Marble Island? At first, she was so upset to be left there for the summer. But now, she cannot handle the idea of having to leave. Has something like that ever happened to you?
- What is your reaction to Harriet's outburst toward Mr. Wallbacher? **[PAGE 102]** Did she say some true things? Should she have said those things? Has she caused real damage this time?
- What lesson does Harriet learn about telling the truth in this chapter?





continued

Chapter 10: The Plot Thickens

- As the chapter begins, Harriet encounters Mabel Marble in desperate shape. Once again, Harriet reaches out to the Captain in an emergency. Harriet describes herself and the Captain as being “so close that they understand each other without having to say a word.” [PAGE 110] What have they gone through together since they first met to help them reach this point in their relationship?
- When Harriet hears the doctor suggest that Mabel Marble could be suffering from food poisoning, she immediately makes a connection between Mabel Marble’s condition and what happened to Money Penny. [PAGE 113] What makes you think the two situations are or are not connected?

Chapter 11: A Meeting, a Dream, and a Breakfast Tray

- Harriet thinks about her new baby brother, Marson, and realizes that she misses him, even though she has never met him. [PAGE 126] Do you think it is possible to miss someone that you have never met? Does considering the fact that he is her baby brother change your opinion?

Chapter 12: The Case of the Missing Books

- Do you find it as suspicious as Harriet does that all the books on poison are checked out from the library at exactly the same time that Money Penny and Mabel Marble could have been poisoned?
- Harriet does something wrong (goes behind the library desk to snoop) to accomplish something good (find out information that could help in solving how Money Penny and Mabel Marble were poisoned). Do you think her actions are justified? Why or why not?

Chapter 13: A Walk Back

- Harriet sees Clarence’s name as the patron that checked out all the books on poison. What would you say to Harriet right now, as she tries to grapple with the idea that Clarence could be involved in the poisonings?
- When Harriet runs into Horace Wallbacher as she is leaving the library, it is the perfect opportunity to repair the damage she caused. The old Harriet might not have tried to mend this relationship at all. In your opinion, how did Harriet do here?

Chapter 14: Two Jobs

- When Harriet was working to solve the mystery of who stole the Captain’s binoculars in *Harriet Spies*, she was often quick to jump to conclusions. In chapter 14, how does she demonstrate growth and restraint in jumping to conclusions?





Harriet Tells the Truth Discussion Questions

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continued

- After reading Mabel Marble's poem, Harriet continues to toy with the idea of what it means for a poet to tell their truth. Harriet has been thinking that there is only one way to tell the truth. But now she has come to realize that writing a poem can be a way to tell "the truth about the way something felt." [PAGE 155] What does this concept mean to you?
- Harriet thinks that the way you say something can matter more than what words you have actually said. Do you agree with this idea? On what do you base your opinion?

Chapter 15: Trust Your People, Harriet

- What do you think Nanu means when she tells Harriet to trust her people? [PAGE 163]
- Harriet wakes up the next morning and Nanu's phrase pops into her head, causing Harriet to race to Clarence's house. What do you think she is about to say to him?

Chapter 16: On the Nightstand

- Describe the chain of events that unfold between Harriet and Clarence in this chapter.

Chapter 17: Remembering

- Using clues from earlier in the book, and the clues of berries, a blue sock, and a green sock, and the fact that a tiny difference can determine a poisonous or a safe mushroom, what do you think Harriet's new theory is?

Chapter 18: Good Neighbors Make Good Fences

- What has finally been revealed as the probable cause of the poisonings? Were you surprised by this, or had you begun to put these pieces together as well?
- When we first met Harriet in *Just Harriet* she seemed self-centered, constantly putting her own opinions and needs before others. Would you still describe Harriet as self-centered at this point in the story? Why or why not?

Chapter 19: Mabel Marble's Centennial Birthday

- Are you surprised by the news the Captain shares with Harriet?
- Harriet finally gets to meet her baby brother, Marson! She describes him as ugly and beautiful. Do you think ugly things can also be beautiful? Explore this idea in a discussion.
- Share your reaction to the resolution of the book. Would you change a thing, or is it just right for you the way it is?



Activities

18

to Help Celebrate *Just Harriet*, *Harriet Spies*, and *Harriet Tells the Truth* in Your Classroom, Library, or School

The Power of a Name

Harriet is named after the main character in the classic book *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh. Throughout *Just Harriet*, our Harriet gets irritated when people ask her if her name is like Harriet like from *Harriet the Spy*. She is glad, in *Harriet Spies*, when Clarence's mother doesn't make the same tired joke. Maybe you love your name, maybe you don't, and maybe you've never given it much thought before! For this project, you will need to interview your parents/family. Ask them why you have the name you have. Is there special meaning or significance? If you can't ask someone these questions, take some time to research what your name means. Next, add your own thoughts. How do you feel about your name? Does your name help you stand out or blend in?

Promote the Book with an Interactive Poster!

Return to re-read the descriptions of the Bric-a-Brac B&B in *Just Harriet* [PAGES 36-37; 42] Draw an outline of the Bric-a-Brac B&B on a large paper or poster board. Add details and color your picture. Then think of events that took place in the Bric-a-Brac B&B, or think of favorite parts in the books. Ask for an adult to help you make cut-aways on your picture, creating a lift-the-flap effect. Under your flaps you can attach paper to illustrate and write those ideas you thought up that will entice others to read the book. Now you have created an interactive book poster!

The Importance of Grandparents

Nanu is a central character in these stories. She is kind and patient with Harriet, often going out of her way to make Harriet feel happy. Harriet doesn't remember Dadu because he died when she was little. What do you call your grandparents, or special older people in your family? What makes them special? Write a paragraph telling your friends all about these special people. For an extra special extension, write a card to them, telling them what you love most about them.

Two-Voice Poem

Matzo Ball and Moneypenny take their time adjusting to one another when Harriet and Matzo Ball arrive at the Bric-a-Brac B&B. After a while, they begin to move past their initial feelings of dislike. Choose a point in any of the three books that features your favorite interactions between Moneypenny and Matzo Ball. Write a two-voice poem about the situation from both Matzo Ball and Moneypenny's perspectives.



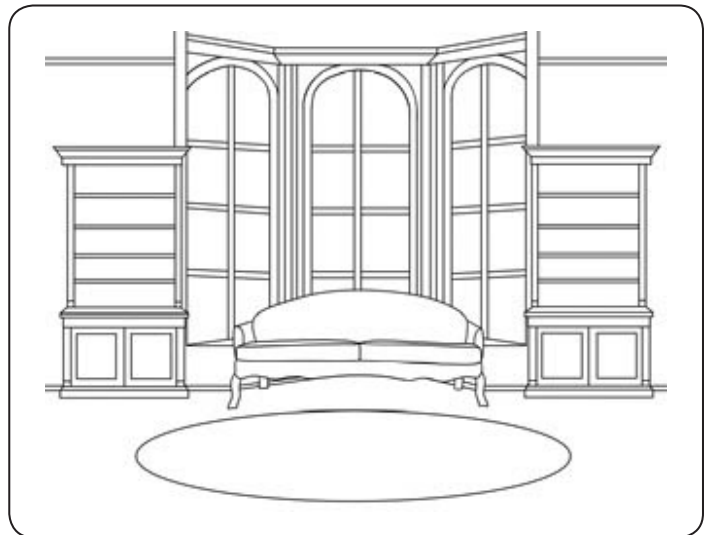
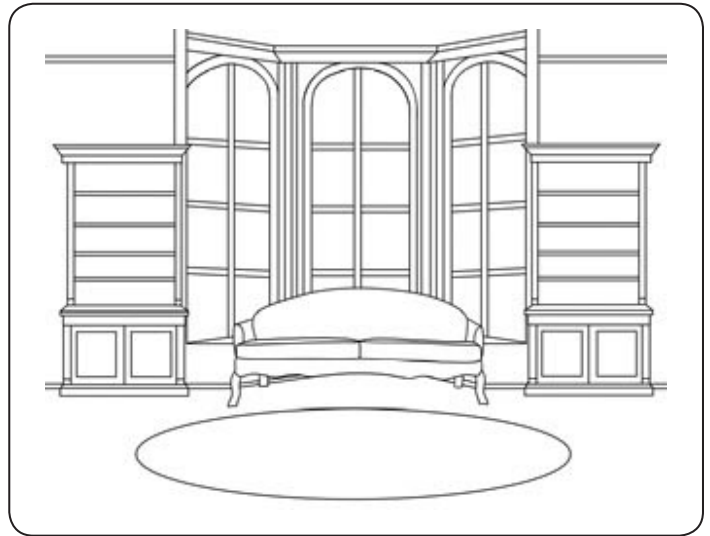


Activities

continued

Design a Dream B&B

“Art is its own reward.” — Nanu [PAGE 145, *JUST HARRIET*] The Bric-a-Brac B&B has a name and themed rooms. Imagine you could design your own dream B&B! What would you call it? Describe what your main sitting room would have in it and how it would be laid out; tell why you made those choices. Nanu serves tea and treats each day. What might you serve at your B&B? When you’re finished planning, write up an advertisement or a brochure, tempting people to come stay at your B&B! It might be wise to include information about attractions in your community. Here are some reproducible drawings to use with this activity.



Drawings by Brandi Marquis






Activities

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continued







Channel Harriet

Now that you've spent so much time with Harriet—learning what she thinks about, seeing how she reacts to situations, and how she interacts with people—choose one of the prompts below and write a scene from Harriet's perspective. Try to make your portrayal of Harriet as close to her authentic self as possible.

-  Harriet is at the grocery store with Dad. Dad has a list of things he wants to get for Mom, since she is on bedrest. They are walking through the bakery section of the store...
-  Harriet is playing a game with Nanu. It's a game that was a favorite of Harriet's dad when he was a kid. Harriet isn't winning right now...
-  Harriet is boarding the ferry boat home with Dad after her summer on Marble Island. What is the return trip like? Will she ask for a snack? What will they talk about?...

Just Right Verbs

Author Elana K. Arnold often uses “just right” verbs to describe her characters and their activities. For example, in Chapter 1 of *Harriet Tells the Truth*, the author writes that the Captain “tromped” down the stairs. **[PAGE 10]** Choosing the right verb to describe a movement can completely change how the reader imagines what you are describing. Think of the following characters and match a just-right verb to describe the way they would move in a situation of your creation:

-  Nanu
-  Harriet
-  Clarence
-  Moneypenny
-  Matzo Ball
-  Mabel Marble

Concrete Poetry

When you write a concrete poem, you write the poem in a particular shape. Sometimes a poet writes their poem in the shape of the subject, or in the shape of an object that ties in nicely with the mood or topic of the poem. Choose a place, scene, or character from either of the books and write a concrete poem. A poem about Harriet could be in the shape of a child, or in the shape of overalls, or a key. A poem about Moneypenny could be in the shape of a dog.

A poem about Nanu could be in the shape of a B&B. Take time to ponder your subject before you begin writing. Imagine the perfect shape to write your poem in. Then, start writing and have fun!



Activities

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continued

Creative Writing

Imagine a child finds a mysterious old key. The child could be you, in a place you are familiar with, or it could be someone you create, in any setting you choose. Describe in detail what the key looks and feels like. Will the key open a door? A box? A chest? And what happens when the key is used? Try this out in different types of stories, such as fantasy, science fiction or historical fiction.

Be a Citizen Scientist

The Captain is on Marble Island to count endangered Island Loggerhead Shrikes for the summer, which will be data that is used by scientists. Visit [CitizenScience.gov](https://www.citizen-science.gov) to find out ways that you can take part in data collection that can help scientists in your state and around the world.

Research Like a Scientist

Are there any threatened plants or animals in your state? Select one species that interests you and create a mini-research project to share your findings. What is threatened? Where can it currently be found? What does this plant or animal need to thrive? What are the threats to its survival? Draw an illustration or diagram of the threatened plant or animal.

Create a Nature Guide

Learn about the local birds, animals, or plants in your area. Sketch images, write descriptions of how they act or grow, what they eat, where they live, noting if they are native or were introduced from one of the 4 W's. Share your book with your family, friends, teachers, and school and local librarians!

Fungus Among Us!

In *Harriet Tells the Truth*, mushrooms are at the center of a mystery. Mushrooms can be beautiful or ugly, delicious or deadly, common or rare. Learn about the mushrooms growing in your town or state. Create a poster with drawings, and create a key to tell if they are safe to touch or eat, and whether they are common or rare in your area.

Three Good Things

Clarence is probably the best friend Harriet has ever had. As they get to know each other in *Harriet Spies*, and as they get to know each other even better in *Harriet Tells the Truth*, Harriet shares with readers how much she admires Clarence. She reflects on the things that make him a great friend. **[HARRIET TELLS THE TRUTH, PAGE 39]** Think of a friend or family member you admire and enjoy being around. Think of three good things about that person. Write those things down, and then share those reasons with that person in a card or letter.





Activities

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continued

More Stories For Those Who Love *Just Harriet*, *Harriet Spies*, and *Harriet Tells the Truth*

Ways to Make Sunshine by Renée Watson (published by Bloomsbury)

“Cilla Lee-Jenkins” series by Susan Tan (published by Square Fish)

“Clementine” series by Sara Pennypacker (published by Disney/Hyperion)

“Ramona” series by Beverly Cleary (published by HarperCollins)

This Discussion Guide was written by Nicole Levesque, an elementary school teacher in Bath, Maine. Nicole earned her BS in Elementary Education from the University of Maine at Farmington and her MS Ed. in Literacy Education from the University of Southern Maine. She served on the Maine Student Book Award Committee for 9 years and has spent five years serving as a Cybils Award Round One Judge in the fiction picture book and board book and early chapter book categories. She is the author of the blog **Bluestocking Thinking**.

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