

GRADES 4-7

DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOKS

In these fast-paced and entertaining stories, readers will meet friends who work as a team, each contributing a special talent to their adventures. In the process, they face ethical dilemmas, learn how to think quickly, and demonstrate both the courage and cleverness they will need in order to carry out Griffin's plans. In the face of seemingly impossible odds, these friends never give up until justice is served.



Swindle

Griffin Bing is known as The Man With The Plan. Griffin acquires a rare baseball card, only to be cheated out of its true value by an unscrupulous dealer named S. Wendell Palomino—who is quickly nicknamed “Swindle” by Griffin and his friend Ben. After a failed attempt to retrieve the card, Griffin recruits a group of classmates. Each member of the group is able to contribute a specific skill, but even the best of plans can be disrupted by unexpected circumstances. Luckily for the reader, these circumstances create hilarious and heart-stopping adventure.



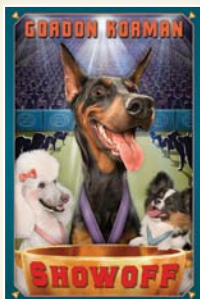
Zoobreak

Griffin's class visits a floating zoo, where his friend Samantha finds her own recently stolen capuchin monkey. Planning a break-in to retrieve the monkey requires the talents of all Griffin's friends. The plan becomes more complicated when Samantha becomes determined to help all the animals escape their terrible conditions. They soon realize that they will need to stage a completely different sort of break-in.



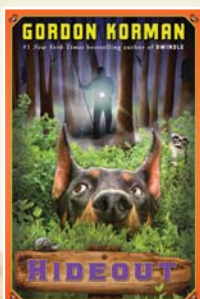
Framed

When Griffin's dental retainer shows up in a locked display case where a valuable Super Bowl ring should be, even The Man With The Plan is stumped. Griffin knows he didn't steal the ring, but who did? First sent to an alternative school and then placed under house arrest, Griffin has to count on his friends to solve the mystery. Which one of the crew can crack this case and clear Griffin's name?



Showoff

Luthor, the huge Doberman, allegedly attacks a valuable show dog at the Cedarville Mall. Griffin soon launches a new plan to rescue the dog from the pound and, using the talents of the rest of the team, finds a way to train Luthor to be a show dog. As usual, the plan doesn't run smoothly, but the kids manage to find a reclusive dog handler to train Luthor for the show, and track down the culprit behind Luthor's supposed attack.



Hideout

Just as the kids are getting ready to leave for summer camp, Griffin's nemesis, S. Wendell Palomino, returns, determined to retrieve his guard dog. To keep Luthor safe, Griffin's friends manage to hide the huge Doberman at different locations throughout the summer. In a rousing climax, they converge on a cabin where Swindle is holding Luthor, just as all six sets of parents arrive to find their missing children. All's well in the end, as Swindle's latest scheme is thwarted and Luthor is returned to his beloved Savannah.

PRE-READING VOCABULARY EXERCISE

1. In *Swindle*, Gordon Korman introduces a lot of words that are associated with crime and wrongdoing. Look up and discuss the meanings of these words in the context of the story: heist, swindle, counterfeit, conspiracy, flimflam, repossess, blackmail, and nemesis.
2. Research information on memorabilia, Doberman Pinschers, “dog whisperers,” and narcolepsy.
3. Before reading *Zoobreak*, research facts about these animals and birds: capuchin monkey, meerkat, ferret, prairie dog, chuckwalla, great horned owl, and loon.
4. Since the floating zoo is located on a boat, there are many nautical terms in the book. Look up the meanings of these words: paddleboat, pylon, starboard, stern, portholes, bilge pump, bulkhead, portside, tarpaulin, and dory.
5. Research the history of Super Bowl III to find out why this particular game was special in the annals of football championships.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *SWINDLE*

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *ZOOBREAK*

1. Compare the friendships that are affected by separation (or by impending separation) at the beginning of the story. How is the theft of Cleopatra similar to Ben leaving for school? What is the main element they have in common that makes Griffin angry?
2. Describe each of the characters who take part in the zoobreak and what role they have to play. Are the kids doing the right thing in planning to rescue Cleopatra on their own? Do they have any choice?
3. Why do they allow Darren to be part of the plan? How does he let them down? Why is he important to the story?
4. How do they decide which animals to take with them? Research which habitat each animal needs and then decide whether or not you think it makes sense for the kids to care for them at home.
5. Compare the characters of Mr. Nastase and Klaus. When does Klaus realize that he does not agree with his boss?
6. Search the website of the Long Island Zoo. Use the map of the zoo to plan a location for each animal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *FRAMED*

1. Why does Dr. Egan distrust Griffin and his friends before he even knows them? Why are Griffin's friends reluctant to take part in his first plan to send emails to Dr. Egan?
2. What role does Luthor play in this story? Why does he charge into the football game at the school? Compare Luthor's punishment to what happens to Griffin.
3. Why does Judge Koretsky send Griffin to John F. Kennedy Alternative Education Center, otherwise known as JFK (or as Griffin calls it, Jail For Kids). Do you think this is a fair decision? What is Griffin's reaction to the experience?
4. Griffin makes a list of all the suspects who may have stolen the ring. Do you think each of them has a real motive? What does he mean by setting up a sting operation?
5. How does Operation Stakeout use the talents of each of Griffin's friends? Why doesn't the plan work?
6. A red herring is defined as “something that distracts attention from the main issue.” Gordon Korman provides several clues to make you think that certain characters in the story might have taken the Super Bowl ring. Which ones did you think were guilty?

7. Why doesn't Griffin believe Samantha's theory about the pack rat when she first tells him about it? How does Shank convince him that the theory might be true, and how does Shank help to find the rat?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *SHOWOFF*

1. Why does Ben create a list of rules for his six-week sleepover with his best friend?
2. Why does Samantha have to deliver her beloved Luthor to the dog pound? Why do her parents take her away from home?
3. What makes Griffin decide to rescue Luthor from the pound? How do he and Ben overcome their fear of Luthor without Savannah to calm him?
4. Why did Dmitri Trebezhov leave the dog show circuit? How do Griffin and Ben find him? Why does Dmitri agree to train Luthor?
5. Why doesn't Mr. Drysdale tell Samantha about Griffin's phone call? Why does he think of Griffin as "the king of cockamamie ideas"?
6. How does Griffin involve Melissa, Pitch, and Logan in the plans for the dog show? What skills does each friend have to offer that would help carry out Griffin's plan?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *HIDEOUT*

1. Why does S. Wendell Palomino want Luthor back? What does Griffin mean when he says that the plan is Swindle's revenge (p. 15)?
2. Discuss why Ben thinks that "when Griffin wasn't worried, it was usually time to start worrying" (p. 25). Why isn't Griffin worried about his plan for Operation Hideout?
3. How does the story of the mechanical monster in Ebony Lake fit into Griffin's plan for hiding Luthor? Why does Malachi Moore quit working for Swindle?
4. Why does Griffin have to move Luthor to Camp Ta-Da!, and how do Melissa and Logan find a place to hide him there? How does Luthor's presence change the camp experience for each of them? Why do the other campers agree to hide Luthor?

5. Compare Pitch and Ben's experiences at Camp Endless Pines—and their attempts to hide Luthor—to what happens at the other camps. How does each character contribute to the final rescue of Luthor at Swindle's cabin?
6. Discuss the statements the friends make in the epilogue about their summer vacation experience. How do these comments reflect the personality of each character?

COMPARING THE NOVELS

1. Compare Griffin and his father. How are they similar and how are they different? Why doesn't Griffin ask his parents for help in each of these situations? How do Mr. Bing's inventions help Griffin in each of the first four books?
2. All of these books involve a plot element in which one main character may have to leave town. Compare the situations that affect Griffin in *Swindle* and *Framed*, Ben in *Zoobreak*, and Samantha in *Showoff*. In the last book, all six of the friends leave home for camp. How does each of these situations affect the plot?
3. Luthor is an important presence in each of the books. Compare his role in *Swindle* to that in *Zoobreak* and *Framed*. In *Showoff* and *Hideout*, Luthor becomes a main character. Discuss how the dog changes, why he is different with Samantha, and how the other friends learn to cope with him when Samantha is not there.
4. What are the ethical dilemmas that face Griffin and his team in each story? What would you do if you were faced with these problems?
5. At the conclusion of *Framed*, Griffin learns that "there was something more important than having the right plan. It was having the right friends." Discuss the theme of friendship in these stories. Which of the characters finds it most difficult to make friends and how does each one change? Which of the characters in these books would you want for a friend?



SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Balliett, Blue

Chasing Vermeer (Scholastic, 2004)

Calder and Petra become fast friends as they try to solve the mystery of a stolen painting. Their adventures continue in *The Wright 3* and *The Calder Game*.

Broach, Elise

Masterpiece (Henry Holt, 2008)

A lonely boy and a talented beetle team up to foil the robbery of a famous painting.

Funke, Cornelia

The Thief Lord (Scholastic, 2002)

A disparate band of homeless children in Venice is organized by a boy who calls himself “The Thief Lord” and claims to steal from wealthy homes.

Gutman, Dan

Honus and Me (HarperCollins, 1997)

Twelve-year-old Joe finds a valuable baseball card in an attic and then travels back in time to the 1909 World Series. Each of Joe’s adventures involves a different player in the Baseball Card Adventure series.

Kehret, Peg

Terror at the Zoo (Puffin, 2001)

After hours, Ellen and her brother Corey are trapped in the zoo with an escaped criminal.

Preller, James

The Case of the Stolen Baseball Cards (Scholastic, 2001)

This easy-to-read story in the Jigsaw Jones Mystery series involves valuable baseball cards.

Roy, Ron

A Thief at the National Zoo (Random House, 2007)

This story in the Capital Mysteries series takes place at the Washington Zoo.

Selznick, Brian

The Invention of Hugo Cabret (Scholastic, 2007)

Hugo lives behind the walls of a Paris train station, surviving by his wits and what he can steal. However, his secret life is about to be discovered.

WEBSITES

akc.org/breeds/berman_pinscher/index.cfm

Learn more about Doberman Pinschers on the American Kennel Club site.

baberruthcards.net

Find out how much vintage Babe Ruth baseball cards are really worth.

dogbreedinfo.com/doberman.htm

Learn more about Doberman Pinschers.

cesarmillaninc.com/dogwhisperer/

This is the official website of a television show about a “dog whisperer.”

ninds.nih.gov/disorders/narcolepsy/detail_narcolepsy.htm

Learn more about narcolepsy, the condition that makes Griffin’s friend Ben fall asleep at odd times.

longislandgamefarm.com/

The Long Island Game Farm Wildlife Park and Children’s Zoo has a fascinating website, with a map of the grounds.

nfl.com/superbowl/history

This is the official site for Super Bowl information from 1967 to the present.

saguaro-juniper.com/i_and_i/mammals/rodents/packrat/packrat.html

This site features images of a packrat in the wild.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Korman's writing career began in seventh grade when he wrote his first published novel, *This Can't Be Happening at Macdonald Hall*. Since then, he has written more than sixty books for kids and young adults, ranging from humor to adventure, and has more than fifteen million books in print. He is the author of two books in the international bestselling series *The 39 Clues*. Each year he travels extensively, visiting schools and libraries. A native of Canada, Gordon now lives with his family on Long Island, New York. For more information, visit his website at gordonkorman.com.



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Swindle

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\$16.99

Paperback:

978-0-439-90345-9
\$6.99

Zoobreak

Hardcover:

978-0-545-12499-7
\$16.99

Paperback:

978-0-545-12500-0
\$6.99

Framed

Hardcover:

978-0-545-17849-5
\$16.99

Paperback:

978-0-545-19763-2
\$6.99

Showoff

Hardcover:

978-0-545-32059-7
\$16.99

Paperback:

978-0-545-32060-3
\$6.99

Hideout

Hardcover:

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