

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

by

E.L. Konigsburg

Book Information

E.L. Konigsburg, From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

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Book Level: 4.7

Interest Level: MG

Claudia and her brother Jamie run away from home and take up residence in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; Newbery Medal; SLJ Best Book

Topics: Family Life, Brothers; Family Life, Running Away; Family Life, Sisters; Places, Museums; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Power Lessons Vocabulary, Grades 4-6; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

Claudia Kincaid the principal character in the story, an eleven-year-old girl who likes everything in order and finds herself always making careful plans

Jamie Kincaid Claudia's nine-year-old brother, whom she has chosen as her companion; also the money manager who likes things complicated and unpredictable

Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler the narrator in the story, an eccentric, wealthy woman who becomes involved with Claudia and Jamie when they seek her help with a mystery

Saxonberg Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler's lawyer, to whom she addresses the details of her story; also Claudia and Jamie's grandfather

Vocabulary

flattery excessive praise

inconspicuous not readily noticeable

inconvenient giving trouble or annoying

Renaissance period, beginning in the 14th century in Italy, marked by the flowering of arts and literature

sarcophagus a stone coffin

Synopsis

Claudia Kincaid is an eleven-year-old girl growing up in a suburb of New York. She is the oldest of the four Kincaid children and the only girl. She decides to escape the injustices of her family life, such as having to empty the dishwasher and set the table on the same night, while her brothers get out of chores. But Claudia doesn't like discomfort, so she decides to run to a comfortable place ... the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. She chooses to bring her second youngest brother, Jamie, along on her adventure.

While they are living at the museum, the children are drawn to a mysterious statue of an angel on display there. From the headlines, Claudia and Jamie learn there is a debate over the possibility that Michelangelo was the sculptor of the piece. Claudia sets out to solve the mystery, but suffers a great disappointment when she finds out the museum already knows about the stonemason's mark she "discovers" on the bottom of the statue.

Claudia realizes she also ran away to find something different about herself. She believes the statue will somehow make her different and does not want to give up on the mystery so easily. She convinces Jamie that they must go see Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler in an attempt to get some information about the statue she once owned.

Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler agrees to share her information with the children but makes them find it on their own, among her many files. When they find a document that connects Michelangelo to the

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statue, Claudia realizes that having a secret makes her different. Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler makes a bargain with Claudia and Jamie; they must keep the secret to themselves, and she will leave the valuable document to them in her will. Claudia's search is over. She and Jamie return home to Greenwich with memories of a grand adventure, and a few lessons learned along the way.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What does Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler mean when she says some people learn all too well how to be near but never part of a group?

She may be making a reference to her reclusive lifestyle and her inability to get close to people.

Initial Understanding

What do Claudia and Jamie feel they can give Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler in return for her generosity to them?

They offer the experience of being part of a family.

Literary Analysis

Cite at least one example as evidence that Claudia and Jamie changed during the course of the story.

*Claudia acts on a hunch in going to see Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler instead of planning each detail.
Jamie places less importance on money when he agrees to buy tickets to Hartford without first asking the price.*

Inferential Comprehension

Although the story ends shortly after the children meet Mrs. Frankweiler, do you think they will keep their end of the bargain, or tell the secret?

Claudia needs the kind of adventure she gets from secrets, and Jamie has learned a valuable lesson about not cheating when the stakes are high. Evidence in the book suggests they will not tell the secret.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The setting of this story in a large museum lends itself to some interesting situations for Claudia and Jamie. Have the students write a one-page scene depicting Claudia and Jamie in a different public building, such as a shopping mall, bank or bowling alley. The students should make use of the unique "props" associated with the setting they choose to show some aspect of the characters' daily lives within that setting, such as sleeping, changing clothes, or obtaining food.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Throughout the story, historical periods are brought up briefly in the different exhibits at the museum. Have the students work in small groups to research a particular historical period in the book, such as ancient Egypt, the Italian Renaissance or early European culture. Based on their research, the groups can then make a brief presentation, which should include visual aids, perhaps of art work that represents the period they have chosen or clothing fashions from the period.

Making Predictions At the end of the book, Claudia and Jamie begin planning future visits to see Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. As a writing assignment, have the students write a short story about one of these visits. They can create a mystery from one of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler's "files" for Claudia and Jamie to solve, or they can have the characters leave the estate and experience things that would be uncharacteristic of them. It might be fun to portray the three on a

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picnic in the rain or on a wilderness camping trip.

Responding to Literature The angel statue made an impact on Claudia and touched her life, as many works of art do in real life. Have the students create their own sculptures using any materials they choose (i.e. modeling clay, pen and ink, tag board). They should title their work, and the pieces may be displayed around the classroom. As a discussion activity, the students can give feedback on how a particular piece makes them feel, or how they interpret the piece.