



Discussion Guide

Includes Questions, Classroom Activities,
and an Exclusive Author Letter

About the Book

From the award-winning author of A Boy Called Bat comes a new young middle grade series in the tradition of Ramona and Clementine, starring an unforgettable girl named 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.



Award-winning author of *A Boy Called Bat*

Elana K. Arnold



Dear Reader



About the Author

Elana K. Arnold is the award-winning author of many books for children and teens, including *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*. She is a member of the faculty at Hamline University's MFA in writing for children and young adults program, and lives in Huntington Beach, CA, with her husband, two children, and a menagerie of animals. You can find her online at www.elanakarnold.com

“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 new 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.

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.



Discussion Questions

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 at 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 & 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?





Discussion Questions *continued*

- 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?

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 Moneypenny?

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?





Discussion Questions continued

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?
- 🌱 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?





Discussion Questions continued

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?

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?



Discussion Questions continued



- 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 Nanu's 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]

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



Discussion Questions continued

- ✿ 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]**





Activities TO HELP CELEBRATE *JUST HARRIET* IN YOUR CLASSROOM, LIBRARY OR SCHOOL

The Power of a Name: We learned in chapter 1 that Harriet is named after the main character in the classic book *Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh. Throughout *Just Harriet*, she gets irritated when people ask her if her name is like Harriet like from *Harriet the Spy*. 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. **[PAGES 36-37; 42]** Draw an outline of the B&B on a large paper or poster board. Add details and color your picture. Then think of events that took place in the B&B, or think of favorite parts of the story. 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 this story. 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.

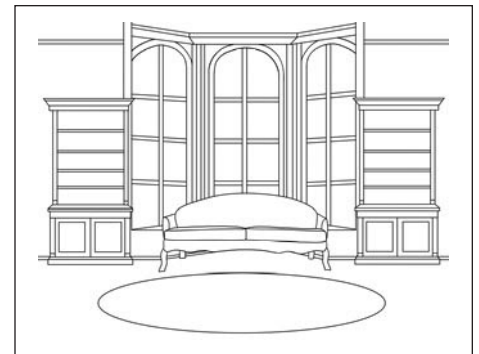
Two-Voice Poem: Matzo Ball and Moneypenny are not happy to see each other when Harriet arrives at the Bric-a-Brac B&B. **[PAGE 41]** They have several interesting interactions throughout the book. By the end of the book, they have begun to move past those initial feelings of dislike. Choose a point in the book 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.



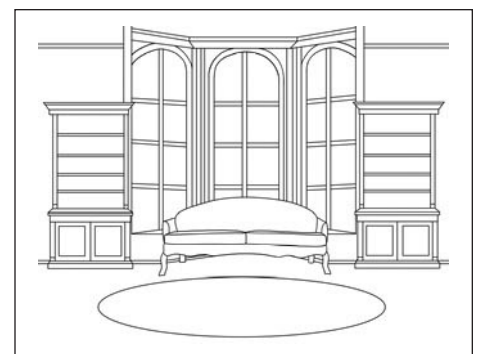
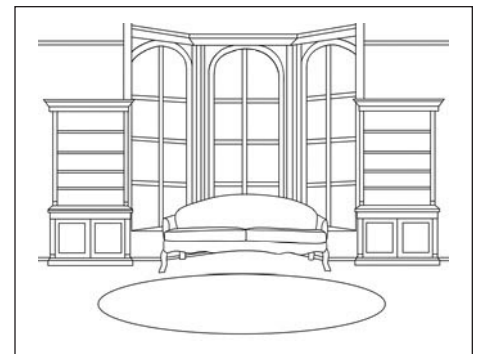
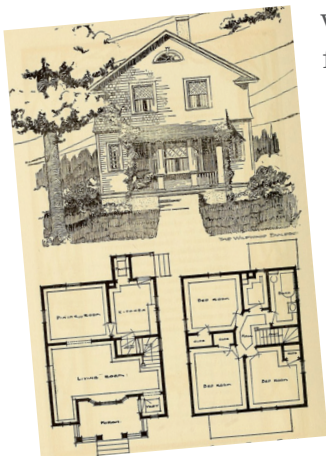
Activities continued

Design a Dream B&B: “Art is its own reward.” –Nanu [PAGE 145]

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? Look back to read the description of Nanu’s B&B. [PAGES 36-37; 42] 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.



Here’s an example of a house not *too* different from the Bric-a-Brack B & B, along with the floor plan.





Activities 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?...

Concrete Poetry: When you write a concrete poem, you write the poem in a particular shape. Sometimes poets write their concrete poem in the shape of the subject, or in the shape of an object that ties in nicely with the mood or topic of their poem. Choose a place, scene, or character from the book 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!

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.

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.



Activities continued



Make a GingerBird House! You could use a gingerbread base with walls made of graham crackers. Or you could cover a wooden birdhouse with these ingredients.

Ingredients to use as decorations:

Dried apples or oranges
Raisins
Nuts
Seeds
Cereal
Cranberries
Crackers

Attach decorations with:

Peanut butter or other nut butter

More Stories For Those Who Love *Just Harriet*:

Here are a few books and series that readers who resonate with *Just Harriet* might enjoy.

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)