

City of Orphans Teaching Guide

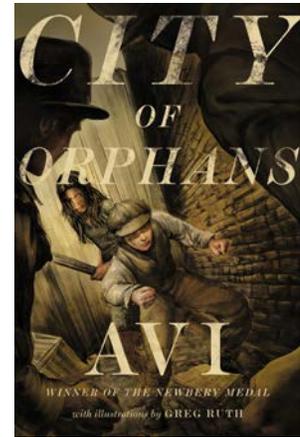
ABOUT THE BOOK

The streets of 1893 New York are full of life: crowded, filthy, dangerous. If you are a newsboy like thirteen-year-old Maks Geless, you need to watch out for Bruno, leader of the Plug Ugly Gang whose shadowy, sinister boss is plotting to take control of all *The World* newsies on the lower East Side.

With Bruno's boys in fierce pursuit, Maks discovers Willa, a strange girl who lives alone in an alley. It is she, stick in hand, who fights off the Plug Uglies – but further dangers await.

Maks must find a way to free his sister Emma from The Tombs, the city jail where she has been imprisoned for stealing a watch at the glamorous new Waldorf Hotel. Maks, believing her innocent, has only four days to prove it. Fortunately, there is Bartleby Donck, the eccentric lawyer (among other employments) to guide Maks and Willa in the art of detection.

Against a backdrop alive with the sights and sounds of tenement New York, Maks, as boy detective, must confront a teeming world of wealth and crime, while struggling against powerful forces threatening new immigrants and the fabric of family love.



TEXT-GENERATED QUESTIONS

1. Avi describes the streets on the Lower East Side of New York, Willa's alley, Mak's tenement, the Tombs, and the apartment of Donck, the private detective, using words that include all the senses. What are the sights, sounds and smells of each? Using each location explain how they are all examples of "hard times"?
2. What are newsies? What is life like for a street rat? How and why do Bruno and The Plug Ugly Gang terrorize only the newsies who peddle *The World*?
3. How is each member of Maks' family expected to help support the family? How does Willa become a member of this family?
4. Who is Bartleby Donck and what is his life like? How is he able to help Maks and Willa? Give all the reasons he decides to help them.
5. Explain the circumstances of Emma's arrest. How was she cleared?
6. Maks is disappointed in the inaction of his parents in helping his sister, Emma. Why don't they help? Why does Maks take on this problem? How is Maks' life different from his parents? Is Maks afraid of anything?

7. When Bartleby Donck meets Maks and Willa in Chapter 33 he comments that justice is blind because “No money. No justice.” Does this story prove or disprove this statement?
8. Willa doesn’t have many memories of her father but she does say, “I don’t think he was a good man.” Explain all the ways Mr. Brunswick is not a good man.
9. Avi’s first line in *City of Orphans* is “Amazing things happen.” How is this a story of “luck,” “chance,” “coincidence”, “accident,” “quirk,” and “miracle,”?
10. There are many stories in *City of Orphans*. How does each character’s story end?

BEYOND THE TEXT

1. Research wasting disease. How are the characters in this story all touched by this disease?
2. This story is told in present tense by an all knowing narrator. Find examples of this folksy style which often uses “I.” What affect does this style of writing have on the story and how the reader gets to know the characters and follow the action?
3. To learn more about Avi, visit his website [avi-writer.com](http://www.avi-writer.com). Find other historical fiction books that Avi has written. Read one and compare it to *City of Orphans*?
4. Avi writes a blog, a treasury of an accomplished writer’s thinking and writing. Follow Avi’s blog at <http://www.avi-writer.com/blog/>.
5. Write a quick book review of this story. Then compare it to a professional review of *City of Orphans* on Avi’s website. Find three ways you could improve your own review writing. http://avi-writer.com/books/awardsreviews/ahr_cityoforphans.html
6. The Waldorf was a very famous piece of New York architecture. Visit <http://nyc-architecture.com/GON/GON017.htm> and discover the history of this hotel.
7. 97 Orchard Street on the Lower East Side is a tenement that was the home to thousands of immigrants at the turn of the century. It has been restored as a living history of the times of *City of Orphans*. Walk through a portal to the past.

Tenement Museum site: <http://www.tenement.org/>

Tenement Museum video walk through on youtube.com (3 minutes):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sotUOd7s_m0&feature=related

7. Jacob Riis, a famous photographer at the turn of the 20th century, documented tenement living and displayed it for the world to see. What can be learned from his photographs found at this site?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZI4KXsaKVE>

8. There are two different worlds in *City of Orphans*: the tenement world and the Waldorf Hotel world. Compare and contrast the two.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

R.CCR.1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

R.CCR.2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

R.CCR.3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

R.CCR.4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

R.CCR.5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

R.CCR.6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text

R.CCR.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

W.CCR.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

W.CCR.5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

W.CCR.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.