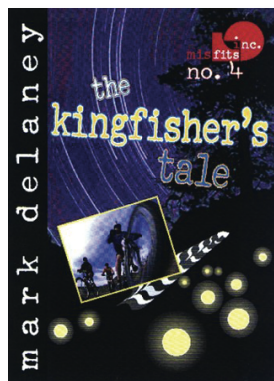


TEACHER'S GUIDE



Misfits Inc., No. 4 The Kingfisher's Tale

Written by Mark Delaney

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Ages 10–14 | Realistic Fiction | Series: Misfits, Inc.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

When the Misfits explore the national forest near Byte's family cabin, they discover several dead kingfisher birds—an endangered species. Suddenly the four teenagers find themselves in the middle of a terrifying ecological mystery and a looming political scandal. As Peter, Byte, Jake, and Mattie investigate what is killing the birds, they are threatened and even shot at. With the help of a young reporter, Rebecca Kaidanov, they uncover a vast political conspiracy and find their own lives in danger.

THEMES

- The environment
- Logging
- “Monkey-wrenching” and militant environmentalism
- Politics and the national forests
- The role of the news media

BEFORE YOU READ

Ask readers to think about and discuss the following questions and issues:

- Are you a people watcher? What can you learn about a total stranger based on what he/she says or does or the clothes he/she wears? How likely is it that the opinions you form this way will be valid?
- Does our society place too much, or too little, emphasis on protecting the environment?
- What are some advantages and disadvantages to living in or near a wilderness area? Keep in mind that some of your answers may be practical while others may be philosophical or emotional.

- Have you ever visited a national forest or national park area, such as Yosemite or the Grand Canyon? Describe the experience.
- Some people believe that mankind is the most important creation and that everything else—oceans, forests, animals—is here for human pleasure and use. Others believe that mankind has a duty to protect, rather than use, these resources. What do *you* think? Can we do both, or are the values mutually exclusive?
- Allowing a logging company to cut down trees in a national forest can provide needed jobs and money to a state, but it can also damage the environment. Should the government permit logging in these areas?

AS YOU READ

Ask readers to consider the following questions:

- Consider the way Tim Breen dies in the book's prologue. How do you think his death will affect the other loggers? How might it affect their attitude toward other people who wish to protect the forest against logging?
- In Chapter One Byte can't quite articulate how she feels about the forest near her family's mountain cabin. What are her thoughts? What do you think she's trying to say?
- In your own words, what is “monkey-wrenching”? What do you think is right or wrong about it?
- What mistaken impression do the loggers have of the Misfits? What is the difference between Jerry Vitale's attitude toward them and Zach Morgan's?
- Consider the work Rebecca Kaidanov's father did as a reporter in the old Soviet Union. How might it

affect the way Rebecca feels about her own work as a journalist?

- What is important about the feather Byte finds? What information do the Misfits learn from it? How does this information turn out to be important later?
- What are your impressions of forensic scientist Marco Weese? Make a list of adjectives that describe him. What does he do or say that made you choose those adjectives?
- Explain why the loggers are so determined to keep their work secret. Who is responsible for the death of the kingfishers? Why?
- Explain William Benedict's role in the mystery.

AFTER YOU READ

After discussing the following issues in class, ask students to write a paper or prepare a presentation for the class on their thoughts:

- A story is generally more interesting when the “villains” are not purely bad. What background does the author provide to make the loggers' actions a little more human and understandable? Do you sympathize with them?
- Logging companies may sometimes bid on the right to cut down trees in a national forest. What do you think of the government's permitting this practice?
- Logging and other development shuts down once an endangered species is found in an area. Should this always be the case? Are some species more important or worthy of protection than others?
- Look at the entire story. What role does each of the Misfits play in the solving of the mystery? Which character or characters have the more important roles in your opinion?
- The story only hints as to the fate of William Benedict. What has he done? What should his punishment be? What should happen to Zach Morgan? To Eli?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- What is the difference between *flora* and *fauna*? To which category do the kingfishers belong? Or the trees the loggers cut down? How are their biological systems different? Are there any similarities? List some examples of how each requires the other to survive.
- The kingfishers mentioned in the novel are a fictional

species. What are some real species of kingfisher? Is their behavior similar to or different from the behavior and habits of the fictional bird? In your research, what information did you learn that surprised you?

- What are some examples of bird species that are endangered? What factors have caused them to become endangered?
- What are the dangers in ignoring the extinction of species?

SOCIAL STUDIES

- What are some of the more important national parks or wilderness preserves? When were they placed under protection? Why? By which President? How much of the United States is currently set aside as protected wilderness?
- When did the environmental movement first become active? What were its earliest goals? What are some of the larger and more important environmental organizations today? In what areas do they focus their energy and resources?
- Who was Julia Butterfly Hill? What did she do? What do you think of what she did? Who are some other people who took extraordinary—some would say crazy—steps to protect the environment?
- What are the requirements of the Clean Air and Clean Water acts? Who is Newt Gingrich? During the 1994 off-year election, what was the position of Newt Gingrich and his Contract with America toward these acts? What was the result of his efforts? Do you agree with his position?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- The novel mentions, in passing, the music of John Denver. Bring in two or three of his environmentally conscious songs. What was he writing about? How would you describe the song's tone? How does it sound to you today—are the ideas still relevant, or do they seem a little silly and naïve?
- Identify one of the several species that have been brought back from near-extinction. Why was that species dying off? What steps managed to save it? (One obvious example is the return of the American Bald Eagle, which is making a comeback after the outlawing of DDT.)
- Kingfishers are remarkably different from the typical bird species in their feeding and nesting habits. What are some other bird species with “unusual” behaviors?

RESEARCH TOPICS

- Have students research the history of the environmental movement. Who are the major figures? What were the early successes and failures? What other important historical events happened during the same time?
- Choose a large modern environmental organization and research its current goals and methods. What is its mission statement? Is it living up to that mission? Some examples are the Sierra Club and the World Wildlife Fund.
- Some environmentalists use highly questionable and even illegal methods. Research one or more of these more militant organizations (one example is Earth First!). What is the organization accused of doing? What do you think of its methods?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Delaney earned a masters degree in comparative literature from the University of California at Irvine. He is the author of the *Misfits, Inc.* series and *Pepperland*. A former bookstore owner, he now teaches high school. Delaney lives in Tennessee.

The Misfits, Inc. series:

Misfits, Inc., No. 1: The Vanishing Chip
Misfits, Inc., No. 2: Of Heroes and Villains
Misfits, Inc., No. 3: Growler's Horn
Misfits, Inc., No. 4: The Kingfisher's Tale
Misfits, Inc., No. 5: The Protester's Song
Misfits, Inc., No. 6: Hit and Run

REVIEWS

“This suspenseful ecological story will appeal to young mystery fans. Readers who don't yet know the Misfits will enjoy meeting them....

[Delaney] keeps the plot moving right along.”

—**KLIATT**

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for
MISFITS, INC., NO. 4: THE KINGFISHER'S TALE
 prepared by Mark Delaney

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