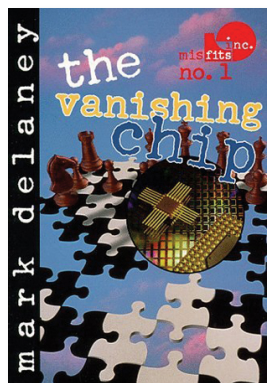


TEACHER'S GUIDE



Misfits Inc., No. 1 The Vanishing Chip

Written by Mark Delaney

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

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ABOUT THE BOOK

A multimillion-dollar computer chip vanishes in front of a dozen people. If Peter, Byte, Jake, and Mattie can find out how it disappeared, why, and who was behind the theft, they can save an innocent man. But someone wants to stop them. Through clever sleuthing, a perilous car chase, and a hair-raising escape, the Misfits outwit an internationally known mastermind.

THEMES

- Teamwork, unity, friendship
- Computers, holograms
- Deductive reasoning, logic
- Chess

BEFORE YOU READ

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

- How would you define friendship?
- What does it mean to be a misfit? Which is more common: the teenager who is like everyone else, or the teenager who is different? Is it hard to be different?
- Would you pretend to be someone you're not if it meant you would have more friends? Is being popular more important than being true to yourself?
- If someone you knew were being treated unjustly, would you go to great lengths to help him or her? If helping this person might cause you real pain or difficulty, would you try anyway?

AS YOU READ

Ask readers to consider the following questions:

- Peter, Byte, Jake, and Mattie are alienated from the other students at school. In what way is each character alienated? Has alienation been thrust upon them, or have they somehow chosen it for themselves?
- Each Misfit has a special talent. What are these talents? How do the talents help the Misfits solve the mystery?
- A character who undergoes a fundamental change during a story is said to be *dynamic*. Which character in the story is the most dynamic? Why?
- Roarke, Krohg, and Finnerman commit a crime together. How are each of these villains different in their evil? Is one more or less evil than another?
- Technology is used throughout the story. What examples of the uses of technology, for both good and bad purposes, do you find?

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:

- Peter confesses to Byte that his arrogance was responsible for placing the Misfits in danger. Should he resign as leader of the group? Would one of the other Misfits make a better leader? What are the qualities of a good leader?
- For his participation in the crime, Finnerman's only punishment is the loss of his job. Was that outcome

just? If people confess their crimes and try to make up for the harm they've done, should society still punish them? Should we consider the seriousness of the crime before we forgive the criminal?

- Trace the mystery from its end to its beginning. What specific clues led to the finding of the chip? To Finnerman's involvement? To understanding how the chip disappeared?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

- What do the letters in the word *laser* stand for? What is a laser? What are common uses for them?
- Computers continue to get faster and better at storing and retrieving information. How do today's computers differ from very early ones? What might tomorrow's computers be able to do that today's cannot?
- How does the speed of a microchip and the storage capacity of a computer affect the functions that the computer can perform?
- Holograms are a relatively new technology. Have you seen an example of a hologram in real life or in movies? What are some possible uses for holograms? In school? In the workplace?
- In what ways do we use science/technology for good? In what ways do we use it for evil? Can an invention be good or evil in and of itself?

SOCIAL STUDIES: LAW & GOVERNMENT

- Our legal system sometimes allows a criminal to go free when he or she testifies in court against another criminal. Why does the law allow this practice? Who are some criminals who have gone free because they testified against others? After testifying, what typically happens to them?
- Peter's father is an FBI agent. What is the difference between the work the FBI does and the work done by a city police department?
- Initially, Peter's father explains that he can't investigate the disappearance of the chip because it is not in the FBI's jurisdiction. What is *jurisdiction*? Why does the law separate jurisdictions?

PSYCHOLOGY

- Each Misfit, in a sense, has his or her own way of disappearing. Mattie vanishes into crowds, Peter loses himself in chess and logic problems, Jake sits alone in

his room with his music and Superball, and Byte retreats into her computer world. What are some other ways in which teens escape from the stresses of everyday living? Is it common for teens to indulge in such escapes? Are such escapes necessary? At what point does escaping become unhealthy?

- Finnerman helps rescue the Misfits because his conscience makes him feel guilty. What exactly is *conscience*? Is guilt a healthy emotion? Can it be unhealthy?

MATH

- Peter uses the math term *calculate* to describe how he determines his chess moves. In what way are games like chess or checkers mathematical?
- What does it mean to say that an image is three-dimensional as opposed to two-dimensional? What are common examples of two-dimensional and three-dimensional images?
- Peter draws conclusions from the events, people, and objects he observes: If *A* leads to *B*, and *B* leads to *C*, then *A* must lead to *C*. Does Peter's way of thinking remind you of any mathematical operations?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Have students imagine that they are the parent of one of the Misfits and have just learned about the danger the Misfits went through. List feelings that might be going through a parent's mind at such a time (e.g., anger at the child for having endangered him- or herself, relief at the child's safety, pride at the child's accomplishment). Discuss how the student, as a parent, might react to the information. Would they punish their child? Reward him or her? Make him or her stop seeing that particular group of friends? You may then wish to focus on specific parents in the novel: Would Mattie's grandfather react any differently from Byte's mother or Peter's father?
- Have a mock trial for Finnerman, Roarke, and Krohg. Present the evidence for each crime they have committed (there are many!), and determine the relative guilt of each villain. What punishment should each man receive? Allow a student judge and jury to decide whether or not it is proper to free Finnerman.

RESEARCH TOPICS

- Explore how the Internet developed and speculate about its current or future impact on society. How might it change the way we communicate with one another? The way we purchase goods and services?

Our forms of entertainment?

- Explore the laser. What is a laser? How does it work? What are its many uses?
- Trace the development of the modern computer. What were the early ones like? What technological advances made it possible to reduce them to the size of a notebook?

REVIEWS

“Readers will enjoy the technological theme and the fact that the young people solve the crime and catch the thief.” —*School Library Journal*

“The fast-moving story line appeals to teens who feel they are misfits trying to fit in. Great for reluctant readers.”
—*Book Report*

“The Vanishing Chip is smartly written, the characters are believable, and the action is heart-pounding.”
—*Chicago Tribune*

This moves along at a fast clip, with lots of action and some up-to-date information about computers and holograms thrown in. It's a fun, quick read, and... students will look forward to *No. 2, Of Heroes and Villains...*
—*KLIATT*

AWARDS

- Children's Book Sense Picks —Book Sense Spring 2008
- Sunshine State Young Readers' Award (nominee grades 6–8) —FAME
- South Carolina Junior Book Award (nominee) —South Carolina Association of School Librarians
- Best Books for Young Teen Readers —R. R. Bowker

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

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for
MISFITS, INC., NO. 1: THE VANISHING CHIP
 prepared by Mark Delaney

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