

# Iris Blackwood and the Mystery at the Mansion

IF / THEN BOOKS · IRIS BLACKWOOD MYSTERY ADVENTURES

*A discussion-and-reading guide for educators using *Mystery at the Mansion* with middle school readers. Designed for whole-class read-alouds, small-group reading circles, or independent reading with reflection.*

## 01 About this book

*A 214-page interactive detective mystery for middle school and high school readers, with 61 decision points and 14 endings across four levels of detective achievement.*

**Premise.** Iris Blackwood arrives at a stranded island mansion full of unusual guests, riddling hosts, and at least one person who is not who they claim to be. As a storm rolls in and the power flickers, the cast shrinks by one — and Iris must reason her way through riddles, suspects, and her own instincts to figure out what's really going on at Mr. Thornsby's water-park-and-mansion empire. Every choice she makes shapes who survives, who solves the case, and what version of justice gets to land at the end.

**Format.** Written in second-person interactive structure — the reader makes Iris's decisions as they go. Endings are scored on a four-level Detective Achievement scale (Desk Agent → Junior Detective → Mystery-Solver → Sleuth). A fifth meta-level, Super Sleuth, is unlocked by reaching all three Sleuth-level endings across multiple readings.

**Target audience.** Middle school readers. Reading level approximately Lexile 700–850. Themes appropriate for middle school and high school.

## 02 Themes for discussion

### Agency & consequence

Iris's choices have real consequences within the story. Use this to discuss how

### Bravery vs. recklessness

When is taking a risk smart? When is it reckless? Iris's path repeatedly tests

decisions in life — and characters' decisions in stories — propagate forward.

whether boldness or caution serves her better, and the answer changes by context.

### **Trust & deduction**

Iris must constantly decide whom to trust. The book invites readers to slow down and reason from evidence — to think like a detective rather than react like a victim.

### **Justice & empathy**

Multiple endings explore what justice looks like — punishing the guilty, protecting the marginalized "Island People," weighing the cost of revealing truth.

## **03 Before reading**

*Activate the kind of thinking the book asks for, before students open the cover.*

1. Have you ever read a book where you got to make choices? What did it feel like to be in control of the story?
2. What makes someone a good detective? Brainstorm a list of qualities — then come back to the list after reading and check it against Iris.
3. The book begins with Iris in real danger: trapped in a crate floating on a river. What's the first thing you would do? How might you decide what to try?
4. Look at the cover and the table of contents. What do you predict will happen? What questions do you already have?

## **04 Choice-point discussion questions**

*Pause at these specific decision points in the book and use the questions for discussion or journaling.*

**PAGE 7 Anita's order vs. Saint Hyde Island**

Right at the start, Iris faces a fork: follow Anita's instructions and stay where she's been told, or strike out on her own toward Saint Hyde Island.

1. What do you know about Anita at this point? What might make Iris trust her — or not?
2. Is it a stronger detective trait to follow leads or follow instructions? When does each one serve the case?
3. If you took the Saint Hyde Island path, what did Iris give up by not following Anita's order? Was the trade worth it?

**PAGE 83 Who is the wettest one of all?**

Roger Thornsby asks his riddle: "What gets wetter the more it dries?" Then comes the bigger question — who in the mansion has just been outside in the storm? Iris has six guests to consider, and the answer points toward the culprit.

1. How does Iris use evidence already in front of her to narrow the suspects? Walk through what she sees, hears, and feels in the room.
2. Why do you think the author offers seven possible answers (six suspects plus "ask Theo")? What does each option reveal about the choice-maker — Iris, or the reader?
3. Have you ever guessed wrong in a real situation that mattered? What did you do next? How does Iris's strategy after a wrong guess differ from a right one?

**PAGE 188 After the rooftop rescue**

Aaron Brick has just rescued the survivors. The mansion is in chaos. Iris has to choose: ignore Anita and find the woman whose door she hasn't knocked on, or demand to know where her family is.

1. Why might Iris choose family first? Why might she choose the unknown door first? What does each choice say about what she values?
2. When you read both paths (or imagine the one you didn't take), how does the story's mood shift?
3. How is detective work like family-decision-making, and how is it different? Where do they overlap in this scene?

## 05 Detective Glossary & vocabulary

*Iris* uses tools and terms drawn from a Detective Glossary referenced throughout the book. Capitalized words in the prose are glossary terms.

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**Stealth.** Moving without being seen or heard.

**Deduction.** Reaching a conclusion from evidence and reasoning.

**Magnifying Glass.** Tool for examining small clues up close.

**X-Ray Glasses.** Iris's signature gadget, useful for surfaces and identities.

**Convergence.** Where multiple paths meet at the same point in a story.

**Sleuth.** A detective; especially one who works carefully and methodically.

## 06 Classroom activities

### Activity 01

#### Branch your own ending

After students finish one path through the book, have them write a new ending for Iris that branches from a specific decision point. Constraints: must be 200–400 words, must end with a clear "THE END Level X" tag (1 through 4), must be plausible given the rest of the book.

Genres: creative writing, narrative structure · Time: 1 class + homework

### Activity 02

#### Map the choices

Give students a blank flowchart template. Have them retrace their reading path through the book and chart it: every decision page, every choice they made, every ending they reached. Compare maps in small groups — the differences are the discussion.

Genres: visual literacy, comprehension · Time: 1 class

### Activity 03

#### Detective trial

Stage a mock trial of Mr. Lemoney based on the evidence Iris gathers. Students take roles: prosecutor, defense, witness, judge, jury. They must work only from textual evidence — no inventing facts. The trial reveals what students learned about evidence vs. interpretation.

Genres: argumentation, civic literacy, public speaking · Time: 2–3 classes

### Activity 04

#### Author Q&A by mail

Have students write a letter to Chad Prevost (the author) with one specific question about a choice in the book — why did he include this option? what was he thinking when he wrote this ending? Send the best ones via email; some authors respond.

Genres: letter writing, authorial intent · Time: in-class drafting + revision

## 07 After reading: synthesis

*Help students step back from the choices and see the book as a whole.*

1. You experienced one path. The book has 27 endings. What do you think you missed? Which ending do you most want to reach next?
2. Of all the choices Iris faced, which one mattered most to her story? Was it the one you noticed at the time, or one you only see in hindsight?
3. The book's Levels (Desk Agent → Sleuth) suggest some endings are "better" than others. Do you agree with the rankings? What would *your* definition of a great ending for Iris be?
4. Compare interactive fiction (this book) with traditional fiction (a book where you don't make choices). What can interactive fiction do that traditional can't? What does it sacrifice?
5. Iris is twelve. Was her age right for this story? Would the choices feel different if she were eight, or sixteen?

## 08 Standards alignment (suggested)

*A starting list. Adjust to your district / state.*

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STANDARD FAMILY	HOW THIS BOOK FITS
CCSS.RL.4.3 / 5.3	Describe in depth a character drawing on specific details — Iris's traits and how they evolve across her choices.
CCSS.RL.4.6 / 5.6	Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described — second-person POV invites direct examination.
CCSS.RL.5.5	Explain how chapters/sections fit together — branching structure makes structural reasoning concrete.
CCSS.W.4.3 / 5.3	Write narratives — Activity 01 (branch your own ending) directly addresses this.
CCSS.SL.4.1 / 5.1	Engage in collaborative discussions — choice-point discussion questions are designed for small-group dialogue.

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## 09 About the author

Chad Prevost is the founder of **Crossroads Press** and the IF/THEN Books interactive fiction line. He has published 40+ titles across two decades in indie publishing and brings to interactive fiction a literary sensibility honed across that work. *Iris Blackwood and the Curse of Hemlock Island* is the first in the Iris Blackwood Mystery Adventures series.

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