

# Iris Blackwood and the Mayan UFO Code

IF / THEN BOOKS · IRIS BLACKWOOD MYSTERY ADVENTURES

*A discussion-and-reading guide for educators using *The Mayan UFO Code* with middle and high school readers. Designed for whole-class read-alouds, small-group reading circles, or independent reading with reflection.*

## 01 About this book

*A 170-page interactive detective mystery for middle school and high school readers, with 53 decision points and 19 endings across four levels of detective achievement.*

**Premise.** Iris Blackwood is recruited as the youngest agent on a global archaeological case: a stolen Mayan artifact called the Mask of Copanapu, an indecipherable code, and a tug-of-war between American and Russian interests. The investigation pulls Iris from local jurisdiction into Mexico, into ancient ruins, and into moral choices about who deserves to know what about humanity's deep past. Every decision shapes who Iris trusts — and what she's willing to give up to keep the truth on the right side.

**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 and high 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 1**    **Accept the case, or stay with Theo?**

The very first choice in the book asks Iris whether to accept a major opportunity — or decline because it would mean leaving her little brother behind.

1. What's at stake on each side of this choice for Iris personally? For the case? For Theo?
2. Why does the author put this fork on page 1, before the reader knows much about the world? What does it set up?
3. Have you ever been asked to choose between an exciting opportunity and a person you care about? How did you weigh it?

**PAGE 71**    **Left or right in the labyrinth**

Trapped in a Mayan tunnel system, Iris remembers a half-recalled rule about labyrinths: always turn left. She has to commit to a strategy.

1. Iris uses partial knowledge to make a fast decision. What does this teach about reasoning under pressure with incomplete information?
2. What's the difference between "a strategy" and "a guess"? Is what Iris does here closer to one or the other?
3. Pick a moment from your own life when you had to act on partial knowledge. What did you do? Looking back, was it the right call?

**PAGE 163**    **Three offers — Moscow, the Copan jungle, or stay home**

After the case begins to unravel, Iris is offered three different paths forward: fly to Moscow with Dr. Consuela, head into the Copan jungle with Enrique Camal, or step away from the case altogether.

1. What does each offer represent — knowledge, adventure, safety? Which path matches Iris's values most? Which matches yours?
2. Detectives often follow the trail; sometimes they walk away. When is each the right choice? How does Iris decide?
3. If you took one of the three paths, what did the book tell you about the other two indirectly? How do unmade choices still shape a story?

## 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.*

---

**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.*

---

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.

---

## 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.

Get in touch: [cthomasprevost@gmail.com](mailto:cthomasprevost@gmail.com)