

Box of Shocks Study Guide

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The Story

Real life: more terrifying than a tarantula and more dangerous than a wild dog. Oliver has helicopter parents—they love him, but they seriously cramp his style. He decides to fill an old wooden box with souvenirs from some of his outrageous and daring exploits. That way, he'll never forget the zombies, the killer dogs and the crazy cows, and his parents will never know that he once jumped from a bridge with the police in hot pursuit. But the biggest shock comes when Oliver realizes that the most terrifying things of all can't be controlled or contained.

Before Reading the Novel

- What do you think a Box of Shocks is? What would you find inside? Where would you find one? What would it look like? What is the purpose of the box?
- Take a close look at the cover. Think about the title *Box of Shocks*, and speculate as to what this book might be about. What problem or challenges might the main character, Oliver, face?
- In this story, the main character, Oliver, does a number of crazy stunts. Think of the craziest stunt or most dangerous thing you have ever done. Make yourself the main character and write a story about it.

Questions and Activities While Reading the Novel

Each section includes some literal questions, inferential questions, as well as other suggested activities in various curriculum areas.

Chapter 1

Before Reading the Chapter

- Imagine you were digging in the dirt floor of the basement of an old house. What sort of strange things might you dig up? Explain how each object might have gotten there.

After Reading the Chapter

- Why does Oliver like digging in the basement?
- Why don't his parents ever go down into the basement?
- What is Oliver's favourite food in the whole world?
- Why do you think there's an empty box buried in the dirt floor of the house's basement? What could be the story behind the box?
- What do you think Oliver's spectacularly brilliant top secret plan might be?
- If you had to hide this box, what other places could you think of hiding it?

Chapter 2

Before Reading the Chapter

- If you had this Box of Shocks, what would you put in it? What secret things would you hide from your parents?

After Reading the Chapter

- When his mother mentions Hallowe'en, what idea suddenly pops into Oliver's head?
- What very original Hallowe'en costumes has Oliver worn in previous years?
- Why did Oliver feel that he had to lie to his friends about going Trick or Treating?
- Why did Oliver and his friends do the same Trick or Treating route every year?
- When the door of the Milburn house opens, all Oliver sees is the arm and hand that gives him the candy. What do you think the rest of the person looks like? Draw a picture or write a description of whatever it was behind the door.
- Imagine things didn't go so well at the Milburn house. Rewrite this scene, giving a different ending to Oliver's Trick or Treating adventure.

- At the end of the chapter, Oliver asks, “What else can I add to my Box of Shocks?” What do you suggest he does next? What other stunts could he do?

Chapter 3

Before Reading the Chapter

- Oliver is going to do a stunt involving a dog. What dangerous stunt could he pull off involving man’s best friend?
- Take this sentence: *It was a mean dog.* Rewrite the sentence, showing us what the dog looks like and describing how it acts. For example, *It was a six foot tall bulldog named Dogzilla that liked to kick Butcher shop doors down and steal great slabs of beef, swallowing them without bothering to chew.*
- Draw a picture of the meanest dog imaginable.

After Reading the Chapter

- Why doesn’t Oliver like going to piano lessons?
- Why do you think Oliver’s mother allowed him to walk to piano lessons on his own?
- Choose the character of a dog from another book you’ve read. Draw a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting that dog with Spike McChomp.
- If you were Oliver, what would you have done differently in trying to escape from Spike McChomp?
- Imagine that Oliver had been caught by his parents wearing the old lady’s dress. What excuse or story could he come up with to explain the dress?
- Draw an imaginary map of Oliver’s route from Spike McChomp’s yard through back alleys and back yards to his own house. What obstacles would he have to overcome and avoid in sneaking back to his house unseen? Label each challenging obstacle on your map.

Chapter 4

Before Reading the Chapter

- Have you ever pretended to be sick or injured? What did you do to try to convince an adult that you were sick or injured?
- Are there foods your parents forbid you to eat? What are they? Have you ever actually eaten some on the sly?
- Create a recipe for a dish of food your parents would completely forbid you to eat. Have a look at standard recipe formats and write your recipe just like that. Remember to give your recipe a really great, original and outrageous name.

After Reading the Chapter

- At one point in this chapter, Oliver wanted to jump up and shout, “THANK YOU! THANK YOU, DAD!” What made him think about doing this?
- Which is worse: having Spike McChomp chase you or having Mr. Creepy crawl across your arm? Explain your choice.
- Why can’t Oliver tell even his best friends about his Box of Shocks?
- Imagine Oliver’s parents actually discovered his Box of Shocks. When they ask why he keeps a Halloween candy, a spike, a picture of a tarantula and a burger wrapper, how could he explain each? What stories could he make up to explain having each item in the box?

Chapter 5

Before Reading the Chapter

- Oliver is going to spend a few weeks at his cousin’s farm. He thinks there are plenty of opportunities to do crazy stunts on a farm. Think of some possible stunts could he pull off.

After Reading the Chapter

- What two stunts did not work out for Oliver at the farm?
- Why doesn’t Oliver get along with his cousin, Stuart?
- What caused Oliver to lose his balance on the bridge?

- When Oliver jumped off the bridge, do you think this stunt was actually too dangerous? Support your argument with reasons for or against.
- Imagine the cow had cooperated with Oliver's plans. Write the scene to show what happened.
- When Oliver tried to ride the cow and touch the electric fence, he couldn't think of what souvenirs he could keep for his box of shocks. If his stunts had been successful, what could he have taken for souvenirs?
- Have you ever jumped off of something really high? Describe your experience.
- Oliver seems to think the bolt is the very best souvenir for his Box of Shocks. Why does he think this way? Which souvenir do you think is his best? Why?

Chapter 6

Before Reading the Chapter

- Have you ever come home to a big surprise? Was it a good surprise or a bad surprise?
- What would it be like to move from a house you've lived in pretty much your whole life? What would be hard about it? What would be good about it?

After Reading the Chapter

- Why didn't Stuart drive with Oliver back to his hometown?
- What reasons did Oliver have for thinking that breaking into his old house would be dangerous?
- Why did his parents want to move from their old house?
- What reasons did Oliver's parents give why he should like the new house over the old house?

Chapter 7

Before Reading the Chapter

- Make up a plan for how Oliver could rescue his Box of Shocks.

After Reading the Chapter

- Why didn't Oliver rent the skunk from Stenchly?
- Why did he ask Kosmo for help?
- What was the worst idea Kosmo gave Oliver?
- Imagine you are Oliver's friend and he asks you what he should do. What crazy, outrageous plan would you give him to rescue his Box of Shocks?
- Imagine Stenchly had agreed to lend Oliver the skunk. Write a new scene for the book telling what happened. Did it work? Was it a disaster?

Chapter 8

Before Reading the Chapter

- From what he saw in the last chapter, what do you think you know about the family that is now living in Oliver's old house?
- If you were to spy on the family living across the street, what important details would you keep track of?

After Reading the Chapter

- Why doesn't Oliver want his mom to give the kid a ride to school?
- If you could bring one food and one food only for your lunch every day of the week, what would it be? How long do you think it would take to get sick of it?
- Oliver thinks the kid is lucky because he gets to bring whatever he wants for his lunch. Do you think he's right? Support your answer with reasons.
- What do you think the kid's doing going into the bottle depot?
- Oliver thinks the kid is lucky because of his lunch, and how he comes home to an empty house without his homework. Do you think the kid is lucky? Do you think Oliver is right? Give reasons to support your answer.
- Why can't Oliver stand the kid?

- Write a description of the first day of school from the kid's point of view. What did he think of his new class and his new school?

Chapter 9

Before Reading the Chapter

- Oliver thinks it's safe to sneak into his old house during the two and a half hours when the house is empty. Do you think it's safe? What could go wrong? What could Oliver do to ensure that he'd be safe sneaking back into his old house?

After Reading the Chapter

- What elaborate plan did Oliver create so he could get away and sneak back into his old house?
- How was Oliver's old house different now that the new people had moved in?
- Why did Oliver have trouble with the lock on the back door of his old house?
- What can you tell about the new family from what's inside Oliver's old house?
- What do you think happened to his spike?
- What could Oliver do to get his spike back?
- Oliver used to hate his old desk, but now, he thinks his desk isn't so bad. Why has he changed his mind?
- Imagine Oliver couldn't get the window open and he was stuck in the room when the kid came in. Write or act out a scene that tells what happened. What would they say to each other? How would the kid react to having Oliver in his room? What would Oliver do— tell him about his Box of Shocks? Explain about the spike? Or would he make up some other excuse as to why he was in the kid's room.

Chapter 10

Before Reading the Chapter

- Oliver knows a lot more about the kid than he did before. How do you think Oliver will react to him at school? Will he treat him differently?

After Reading the Chapter

- Why is Oliver nervous when his mother drives him to school?
- Why does Oliver keep staring at the kid while he's in class?
- Oliver's mother always says the way you dress shows what kind of person you are. What do the kid's too-small sweat pants, mismatched socks and baggy old sweater say about him?
- Why isn't Oliver jealous of the kid's lunch anymore?
- What clues did Oliver have that the kid wouldn't be home early that night?
- Why do you think the kid works at the bottle depot?
- What won't Oliver's parents let him get an after-school job? Should kids have after-school jobs? Why or why not?

Chapter 11

Before Reading the Chapter

- Oliver's planning another attempt to rescue his Box of Shocks. What could he do to make it safer this time around?

After Reading the Chapter

- When Oliver's in his old house, he can't help himself. He just has to have another look in the kitchen. Why does he feel this way?
- What does he find in the kitchen?
- Make a Venn diagram comparing the bedroom when Oliver lived in it with how the kid lives in it. What is the same about the room? What is different?
- Why did Oliver leave the cookie in the kid's bedroom?
- When Oliver's hiding in the closet, why do you think he covered his ears?
- If the family hadn't left the house, what could Oliver have done to try to escape?
- Why doesn't his Box of Shocks seem important any more?

Chapter 12

Before Reading the Chapter

- After nearly getting caught twice, what should Oliver do about his Box of Shocks?

After Reading the Chapter

- When Oliver goes to school early, he tells his father “*There’s something I need to do. Some research.*” *It’s not exactly a lie.* What does he mean by *not exactly a lie*?
- Why did Oliver leave a cookie in the kid’s locker?
- Why didn’t Oliver tell his parents what he was doing for the kid?
- Reggie tells a tall tale about his grandma, a crow and a car wash. How much of this story do you think might have been true? What parts was Reggie making up?
- Make up your own tall tale. Take something that actually happened, then exaggerate the facts and make things up to add to your story. You can write your story or tell it. When other people hear or read your story, have them guess which part of the story was true.
- For two days in a row, Oliver forgets to wave goodbye to his parents when they drop him off at school. Why does he forget?
- Earlier in the story, Oliver couldn’t stand the kid. Now, he’s leaving food for him. Why is Oliver acting differently toward the kid?

Chapter 13

Before Reading the Chapter

- What do you think Oliver’s plan is?
- Imagine you are in Oliver’s class. Complete the assignment his teacher, Mrs. Franzen, has given.

After Reading the Chapter

- Why was Oliver suddenly so eager to visit Grandpa Golley?

- What job did Oliver do at Grandpa Golley's?
- Why do you think the parrot doesn't talk? What would you do to try to remedy this?
- Oliver tells his dad that he's taking Bubbles out for a walk. Can you think of a better excuse he could made up?
- Why does his dad give him a mischievous smile when Oliver makes up an excuse?
- Why doesn't Oliver just leave Bubbles at the back door of the kid's house?
- Why do you think Oliver wants to bother helping the kid with his school project?
- What other things could Oliver do to help the kid out with his life?

Chapter 14

Before Reading the Chapter

- Predict what will happen when Oliver tries to deliver Bubbles to the kid's house.
- If you were in Oliver's shoes, what would you have done to help the kid out with his assignment?

After Reading the Chapter

- Make a list of the ways this visit by Oliver to his old house was different than the first two times.
- Why do you think the parents and kid came home unexpectedly?
- Why was Oliver's dad there when he slid off the roof? How did he know to be there?
- Why did the kid put Bubbles in his mouth?
- How did using the side door to get into the house actually save Oliver?
- What do you think happened in the room after Oliver made his escape?
- Rewrite or retell this chapter from Bubbles's point of view.

Chapter 15

Before Reading the Chapter

- Oliver's clearly in big trouble for disobeying his parents. When he returns home, how do you think his parents will react?

After Reading the Chapter

- When Oliver is telling his parents why he was over at their old house, he decides not to lie for a change. Why does he suddenly decide to tell the truth?
- Even though Oliver tells his parents the truth about what happened that night, why doesn't he tell them about his Box of Shocks? Should he tell them about it?
- Even though Oliver's parents knew he was going over to the neighbours' house, why did they let him go?
- After the events in this chapter, how does Oliver see his parents differently?
- Why does the kid join Oliver at the front of the classroom during his presentation?
- Until now, Oliver never acknowledged Diggory's name. Why did he just refer to him as "the kid"?
- From Diggory's presentation, what do Oliver and the class learn about his life?
- If you were Mrs. Franzen, what sort of grade would you give the two boys for their presentations? Explain why you would give this grade.

Chapter 16

Before Reading the Chapter

- This is the last chapter. How will this story end? What will happen to the Box of Shocks?

After Reading the Chapter

- Why do you think Oliver is so desperate to see Diggory the next day?
- After Oliver gets home from school, what tells you that he's upset about Diggory's disappearance?

- What do you think happened to Diggory and his family?
- Oliver says Diggory is just like his Box of Shocks. What does he mean by this?
- Why does Oliver still creep through the hallway and up the stairs if he knew no one was going to show up?
- Why does Diggory leave those items and the note in the Box of Shocks?
- Why does Oliver put his Box of Shocks back in its hiding place even though he could have taken it to his new house?

After Reading the Novel

- Draw a Venn diagram that compares Oliver's life with Diggory's life. How are their lives different? How are they similar? What do they have in common?
- In what ways did Oliver change during the story? How does he see his parents differently? How does he see his own life differently?
- Imagine you are Oliver writing a letter to Diggory. What would you say in the letter?
- Oliver and Diggory look somewhat alike. What do you think they look like? Draw a portrait of each boy showing similarities and differences.
- Make your own Box of Shocks.
Take an old box of some sort (maybe a cardboard box or a wooden one if you can find one). Decorate the box. Gather up a collection of odd objects and put them inside. Write a series of stories telling how each object came to be in your own Box of Shocks. The stories don't have to be true (although they could be!)
- Make a class Box of Shocks
As a class project, make a class Box of Shocks. Collect a bunch of unusual objects and place them in the box. For each object inside, have everyone write a story of how that object came to be in the box. Compare the various stories.
- *A Box of Shocks* Sequel
What do you think could happen in a sequel to this story?
-What would happen to the Box of Shocks?
-Would Oliver and Diggory meet up again? If so, where?

- Would someone new move into the old house?
- Would someone else discover the Box of Shocks?