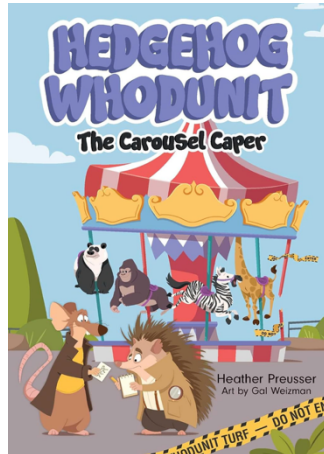


A Curriculum Guide for Educators & Readers



Discussion points, activities, and writing prompts to help educators use the Hedgehog Whodunit series as a classroom read-aloud or as selection for independent reading.

Great for book clubs, too!

About the Author, Heather Preusser

Heather Preusser graduated from Williams College and earned an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast program. In her debut picture book, *A Symphony of Cowbells* (Sleeping Bear Press, March 2017), a Swiss dairy cow loses her bell and disrupts the harmony of the herd. When not writing, Heather teaches high school English, bikes the European countryside, and attempts to learn ridiculously long German words. She and her family reside in Colorado.



About the Illustrator, Gal Weizman

Gal Weizman was born in Jerusalem, dreaming of flying above the white stone houses of her neighborhood like Peter Pan. As she grew older and became more acquainted with the laws of gravity, she had to abandon that plan. Instead, she devised a different way to never grow up: she attended Bezalel Academy of Arts and learned to draw. Gal loves to illustrate animals and creatures, and to see her creations come to life as they experience all those often funny, at times touching, and occasionally awkward situations that inhabit the colorful world of fiction. Her illustrations are bouncing through games and TV shows, they sit on packaging and live in various children's books around the globe... and sometimes, one hides under her drawing board, waiting to be teased out into the light. They are playful creatures, so please be kind to them, she loves them all.



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The Whodunit Wall—Build an Evidence Board

Start this activity before reading and add to it throughout the mystery. Students can use the Whodunit Wall with either book—or create a new board for each—as they track suspects, collect evidence, revise theories, and investigate unfamiliar detective vocabulary.

Just like Hitch and Vinnie, readers won't have all the answers at the beginning of a case. As new clues appear, students can add them to an evidence board and watch their theories change as the mystery unfolds.

The board can be created by the entire class on a wall or bulletin board, or students can make smaller individual versions on poster board or large sheets of paper.

You will need:

- Bulletin board, wall space, poster board, or large paper
- Index cards or sticky notes
- Pencils, markers, or colored pencils
- String or yarn and tape, optional
- Detective vocabulary cards, optional

Set Up the Board and create sections for:

The Mystery

What are Hitch and Vinnie trying to solve?

Suspects & Witnesses

Who have the detectives questioned or encountered?

Research Connection: When a new animal appears in the mystery, students can research one or two facts about the real animal and add them to the board. Does anything they discover about the animal's diet, habitat, behavior, movement, or adaptations help them understand the character—or even interpret a clue?

Clues & Evidence

What objects, sounds, prints, statements, or observations might be important?

What We Think

Who seems suspicious? What might the clues mean?

Questions We Still Have

What information is missing? What do students still want to know?

Instructions:

1. Begin the board when Hitch and Vinnie receive their case. Write the central mystery at the top.
2. As new characters appear, add them to the Suspects & Witnesses section. Students might include:
 - A drawing of the character
 - A handprint, pawprint, hoofprint, or wingprint
 - Something the character says
 - A reason the character might—or might not—be suspicious
3. Whenever an important clue appears, add it to the Clues & Evidence section. Encourage students to distinguish between:
 - What we know: Information the story confirms
 - What we think: A theory or inference based on the evidence
4. Use yarn, arrows, or drawn lines to connect suspects and clues that students think may be related.
5. Revisit the board regularly. As Hitch and Vinnie uncover new information, students can:
 - Add new evidence
 - Change or cross out an old theory
 - Move a suspect
 - Identify a possible red herring
 - Connect clues that did not seem related at first
6. Before the culprit is revealed, give students time to study the evidence board and make a final prediction. Ask them to support their solution with at least two pieces of evidence.
7. After the mystery is solved, return to the board. Which clues mattered most? Which theories turned out to be incorrect? Were there clues students overlooked or misunderstood at first?

Word Detectives

Hitch uses plenty of detective lingo throughout the series. Students can solve the meaning of an unfamiliar word much like they solve a mystery—by looking for clues.

When a new detective word or expression appears:

1. Reread the sentence containing the word.
2. Look at the words and sentences around it for clues.
3. Discuss what meaning would make sense in the situation.
4. Make a class prediction.
5. Confirm the meaning and create a student-friendly definition.

Book One: *Hedgehog Whodunit*

The comprehension questions below focus on key story events and clues to check for understanding, while the discussion questions encourage personal connections and deeper thinking. Either set can be used for whole-class conversations, small-group work, or independent reflection. Feel free to adapt the questions to fit your students' needs and to spark their own ideas—after all, like Hitch, every reader may notice a different clue!

Comprehension Questions

1. What has happened at the Panda Palace?
2. What clue does Vinnie find in the panda's pen, and what is the only ingredient he remembers from it?
3. How has the sign at the penguins' pool been changed, and what happens after visitors follow its new instructions?
4. Why do the penguins tell Hitch and Vinnie to investigate the hippos?
5. What does the changed sign at the Hippos' Home encourage the hippos to do?
6. What clues do Hitch and Vinnie find at the Hippos' Home that suggest the missing panda has been nearby?
7. How do Hitch and Vinnie determine that the hippos did not write the altered signs?
8. What do Hitch and Vinnie see the ring-tailed lemurs carrying, and how do they follow the lemurs to their exhibit?
9. What does the altered sign outside the Lemur Lounge say, and what is happening inside?
10. What evidence proves that the ring-tailed lemurs helped change the zoo's signs?
11. The recipe for Grandma Gansu's Soup Dumplings is an important clue. What does it reveal, and how does that help Hitch crack the case?
12. What agreement did the lemurs make with the panda, and what roles did the penguins and hippos play in their plan?
13. What must the lemurs do as community service after they confess?



Discussion Questions

1. Hitch prefers peace, quiet, and plenty of naps, while Vinnie enjoys excitement and complicated plans. How do their different personalities help them work as a team?
2. Vinnie's gadgets often malfunction, and he sometimes gets distracted by food. What qualities still make him a helpful detective and sidekick?
3. The penguins point Hitch toward the hippos, and the hippos point him toward the lions. Why is it important to investigate evidence instead of believing the first thing someone tells you?
4. Hitch and Vinnie make assumptions about several animals based on their behavior or reputations. Talk about a time when you made an assumption about someone and later discovered you were mistaken.
5. Hitch is uncomfortable with crowds, group photographs, and dancing, but he begins to enjoy the music at the party. Describe a time when you enjoyed something more than expected.
6. The panda says he is lonely because he is the only panda at the zoo. He also wants others to notice his singing instead of only his cooking. What could he have done to make his feelings known to the other animals?
7. The lemur ringleader says they were "just having a little fun." How can you tell when fun has gone too far or is causing problems for someone else?
8. The lemurs try to make the lions look guilty even though the lions were innocent. How might it feel to be blamed for something you did not do?
9. Several animals participate in the plan in different ways. Do you think everyone involved is equally responsible? Why or why not?
10. Hitch and Vinnie sometimes exaggerate or bluff while questioning suspects. Do you think it is ever acceptable to use a trick to discover the truth? Explain your thinking.
11. Instead of receiving a long punishment, the lemurs must repair the damage, clean the exhibits, and put everything back in order. Do you think this is a fair consequence? Why or why not?

Activity: What Makes a Good Detective?

Discuss the qualities and skills a detective needs to solve a mystery. Draw upon detectives students know from books, television, or movies, as well as times when students have had to solve problems of their own.

Example: Good detectives...

- Observe carefully.
- Ask thoughtful questions.
- Keep track of clues.
- Separate facts from guesses.
- Consider more than one possible explanation.
- Change their minds when new evidence appears.
- Work well with a partner.
- Support their conclusions with evidence.

Look closely at Hitch and Vinnie.

- Which moments show them using good detective skills?
- When do they notice an important detail, ask a useful question, or connect two clues?
- Which of their choices make the investigation more difficult, such as Vinnie eating evidence or becoming distracted by food?
- When do these choices (Hitch wanting a nap or Vinnie distracted by food) unexpectedly help them solve the case?

Research Connection: Invite students to research a real-world job that involves investigation, such as a forensic scientist, wildlife biologist, veterinarian, archaeologist, or journalist. What kinds of questions does that person ask? What tools do they use? How do they gather and record evidence? Students can compare what they discover with the qualities on the class's "Good Detective" list.

Activity: Create a Detective Case File

Hitch and Vinnie gather clues, question suspects, follow trails, and reconsider their theories as they investigate the missing panda. In this activity, students will organize and solve a simple classroom mystery of their own.

You will need:

- File folders or folded construction paper
- Blank paper
- Pencils, crayons, or markers
- Envelopes or small bags for clues

- Prepared clue cards
- Optional magnifying glasses
- A classroom object or mascot to serve as the “missing” item

Instructions:

1. Before the activity, move or hide a familiar classroom object. Make sure students understand that the object is part of a pretend mystery and has not actually been stolen.
2. Prepare three to five clues that lead students toward the solution. You might include:
 - A written note
 - A drawing or photograph
 - A footprint
 - A map of the classroom
 - A witness statement
 - An object found near the scene
3. Include one clue that seems important but does not help solve the mystery. Introduce the term “red herring,” which Hitch explains is a clue meant to mislead or distract a detective.
4. Give each student or detective team a case file, or folder. Have them create sections titled:
 - The Mystery
 - What We Know
 - Suspects
 - Clues and Evidence
 - Questions We Still Have
 - Our Solution
5. Reveal the clues one at a time. After each clue, students record:
 - What they think the clue might mean
 - What the clue proves
 - What new questions it raises
6. Invite each team to present its solution. Students should explain not only what they think happened but which pieces of evidence support their theory.
7. Reveal the solution and discuss the investigation. Which clue was most useful? Which clue was the red herring? Did students change their minds as they learned more?

Optional Extension: Students can continue using their case files to invent and exchange original mysteries with classmates. Encourage them to create a simple case with a clear problem, two or more suspects, several clues, and one solution that can be supported by the evidence. Students can trade case files with a partner or another group, work through the clues, and explain how they reached their conclusion. Afterward, the mystery writer can reveal the intended solution and discuss whether the clues led readers in the right direction.

Activity: Sign-Changing Shenanigans

Throughout the story, the lemurs alter zoo signs to change what visitors and animals do. “Please Don’t Feed the Panda” becomes “Please Free the Panda,” while other signs encourage visitors to throw sardines, take selfies, and dance. The small changes create some very large consequences.

This activity asks students to explore how replacing only one or two words can completely change a message.

You will need:

- Chart paper
- Drawing paper
- Pencils
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Optional poster board

Research Connection: Before creating their zoo signs, have students choose an animal and use a nonfiction book or teacher-approved source to research one accurate fact about it. Their original sign should teach zoo visitors something true about the animal or explain how visitors can safely and respectfully observe it. Then students can create the silly, altered version by changing a word or phrase.

Instructions:

1. Review the original and altered signs from the story:
 - “Please Don’t Feed the Panda” becomes “Please Free the Panda.”
 - “Please Throw Trash Away” becomes “Please Throw Sardines.”
 - “Spray Zone” becomes “Selfie Zone.”
 - “Zookeeper Says: Stay Back” becomes “Zookeeper Says: Dance!”
2. Create a two-column chart labeled Original Sign and Changed Sign. Identify which words were removed, replaced, or added.
3. Discuss why signs need to be clear and accurate. What happened when the animals and visitors followed the altered instructions? How did the changes affect others?

4. Invite students to create an appropriate sign for an imaginary zoo exhibit. Their sign might give a direction, share an animal fact, or explain how visitors can behave safely. Some examples: Please do not feed the animals; Do not tap on the glass; Please stay behind the barrier; Do not climb the fence, Do not enter; Staff only; Keep hands and fingers away; and Exhibit closed.
5. Have students make a second, silly version by changing one word or phrase. For example:
 - "Please Walk Quietly" might become "Please Quack Quietly."
 - "Do Not Tap the Glass" might become "Do Not Nap on the Grass."
 - "Watch the Penguins Swim" might become "Watch the Penguins Sing."
6. Students illustrate both versions of the sign.
7. Partners trade signs and identify what changed. They can also explain what might happen if visitors followed the silly version.
8. Display the signs in a classroom gallery titled The Zoo of Sign-Changing Shenanigans.

Optional Extension: Have partners trade only their silly, changed signs first. Without seeing the original, students try to infer what the real zoo sign may have said and identify which word or phrase was probably changed. Then reveal the original sign and compare guesses. Partners can also explain what might happen if zoo visitors followed the silly version instead.

Activity: Leave Your Mark!—Fingerprint Forensics

In Chapter 2, Hitch explains that detectives can search for fingerprints, pawprints, and wingprints by sprinkling powder on a surface and carefully brushing it away. Vinnie puts his own spin on the procedure when he runs out of fingerprint powder and substitutes hot cocoa!

Use this moment to explore the science of fingerprints.

Students will become forensic investigators as they observe, collect, and compare fingerprints.

You will need:

- Unsweetened cocoa powder for prints on light surfaces
- Cornstarch for prints on dark surfaces
- Small bowls or cups for the powder
- Soft makeup brushes or paintbrushes
- Smooth, washable surfaces such as plastic cups, laminated cards, or glass
- Clear tape
- White and dark construction paper
- Magnifying glasses, optional
- Trays or newspaper to contain the powder

Teacher Note: Use only a very small amount of powder and keep it contained on trays or covered tables. Students should brush away excess powder rather than blow on it to avoid sending fine particles into the air.

Instructions:

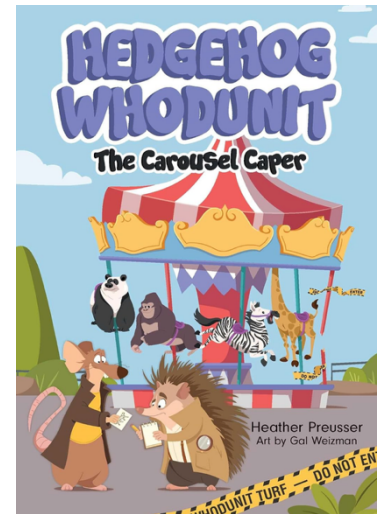
1. Revisit Hitch and Vinnie's fingerprint investigation. What are they hoping a fingerprint might tell them?
2. Ask students to look closely at the tips of their fingers. What do they notice? Introduce the idea that fingerprints contain patterns of ridges that can be used to tell prints apart.
3. Have students press a fingertip onto a clean, smooth surface.
4. Following the directions for your classroom-safe fingerprinting materials, lightly apply powder and gently brush away the excess until the print becomes visible.
5. If possible, place a piece of clear tape over the print, carefully lift it, and attach it to contrasting paper.
6. Use magnifying glasses or close observation to compare several prints. Students can draw what they see and look for similarities and differences in the lines, curves, loops, and other details.
7. Turn the investigation into a mystery. Collect several anonymous sample prints and challenge students to compare an unknown print with the samples. What details can they use as evidence for their match?

Use the fingerprint investigation as a springboard for a conversation about individuality.

- What did you notice when you compared different fingerprints?
- In what ways were they similar? In what ways were they different?
- Besides fingerprints, what are some things that make each person in your class unique?
- How can a group benefit from having people with different interests, talents, ideas, and ways of thinking?

Book Two: *The Carousel Caper*

The comprehension questions below follow the complete mystery, from the first missing carousel animal through the discovery of the meerkats' motivation and the inclusive resolution. The discussion questions encourage personal connections and deeper thinking. Either set can be used for whole-class conversations, small-group work, or independent reflection. Feel free to adapt the questions to fit your students' needs and to spark their own ideas—after all, like Hitch and Vinnie, every reader brings different strengths to solving a problem!



Comprehension Questions

1. What has been stolen from the zoo's carousel when Vinnie first mentions the mystery to Hitch?
2. Why does Hitch finally agree to take the case, even though he would rather stay home and nap?
3. Which two missing carousel animals lead Hitch to wonder whether the thieves are targeting especially fast animals?
4. What is the third wooden animal to disappear, and what unusual event does the real animal report seeing?
5. Why do frightened animals gather at Hitch's Hedgehog Hut, and what plan does Vinnie create to help them feel safe?
6. Who are Ned and Ted, and how do they help Hitch unpack another clue?
7. How do Hitch and Vinnie use two pot pies to lure the culprits? What does the disappearance of both pies tell them?
8. What happens when Hitch falls asleep on the wooden ape during the stakeout?
9. Describe the sound Eamon makes to begin the cabbage-eating contest as well as why that sound is an important clue.
10. What evidence do Hitch and Vinnie find that connects the meerkats to the missing carousel animals?
11. Why did the meerkats remove the cheetah, ostrich, peacock, and ape from the carousel?

12. What community service do the meerkats complete, and how does it make the carousel more inclusive?

Discussion Questions

1. Hitch would rather stay in his cozy hut and nap, but he agrees to help solve the mystery. When have you had to set aside something you wanted to do because someone needed your help?
2. Hitch and Vinnie have very different personalities and ways of solving problems. What strengths does each character bring to their detective team?
3. Hitch and Vinnie make quick judgments about several suspects, including the proud cheetahs, the confused ostriches, and the vain peacock. What can go wrong when we judge someone based only on a first impression?
4. The meerkats plant a wrench in the Ostrich Oasis to make the ostriches look guilty. How can a detective—or anyone trying to discover the truth—decide whether a clue can be trusted?
5. Many of Vinnie's gadgets are broken or do not work the way he expects, but he continues coming up with new plans. What does this show about creativity and persistence?
6. Hitch finally understands the meerkats' motivation when he looks at the carousel photographs from their point of view. Why is it sometimes helpful to look at a situation from someone else's perspective?
7. The meerkats feel overlooked because there is no meerkat on the carousel and few visitors come to their exhibit. Describe a time when you felt left out or unnoticed. What helped you?
8. Feeling excluded explains why the meerkats were upset, but does it excuse stealing the carousel animals and blaming the ostriches? Why or why not?
9. What could the meerkats have done to ask for more attention and representation without causing trouble for the other animals?
10. Instead of giving the meerkats a harsh punishment, Hitch and Vinnie ask them to repair the damage and help create a wooden meerkat for the carousel. Do you think this is a fair solution? Why or why not?

Activity: Sounds Sleuths

Vinnie's night vision camera does not provide a clear picture of the thieves, but it records murmurs, hisses, and barks. Later, Hitch recognizes Eamon's distinctive warning bark and connects it to the recording, turning sound into an important piece of evidence.

In this activity, students will practice careful listening and learn the difference between an observation and an inference.

You will need:

- A screen, box, or desk that can hide objects
- Everyday classroom objects
- Paper and pencils
- Optional audio recorder or tablet
- A Sound Sleuth recording sheet with the headings:
 - What I Heard
 - What I Think Made It
 - Evidence for My Guess

Instructions:

1. Discuss how Hitch uses the barking sound as a clue. Why might sounds be useful when a detective cannot see what happened?
2. Explain the difference between an observation and an inference:
 - An observation describes exactly what was heard: "I heard three quick taps."
 - An inference is a possible explanation: "I think someone tapped a pencil on a desk."
3. Hide an object behind a screen and use it to create a sound. Possibilities include:
 - Shaking keys
 - Tearing paper
 - Zipping a backpack
 - Rolling a marker
 - Tapping a ruler
 - Crumpling foil
 - Opening and closing a book
4. After each sound, students record what they heard before guessing what caused it.
5. Reveal the object and discuss which details helped students make accurate inferences. Did different objects produce similar sounds?
6. Divide students into small groups. Each group creates a three-sound sequence that tells a simple mystery story.

Example:

- A zipper opens.
- Paper crinkles.
- Footsteps hurry away.

What might have happened?

7. Groups perform or play their sound mysteries without showing the objects. Classmates use the sounds as evidence to propose a solution.
8. Discuss why detectives should describe evidence carefully instead of immediately deciding what it means.

Research Connection: Choose an animal from *The Carousel Caper* and research the sounds it makes and what those sounds communicate. Students can use a nonfiction book, zoo website, animal database, or other teacher-approved source. Afterward, have them share one fact they discovered and consider how that sound might become a clue in a mystery.

Optional Extension: Students choose one three-sound sequence and write out the simple mystery story, adding descriptive details whenever possible.

Activity: Operation Easy as Pie—A Logic Challenge

In *The Carousel Caper*, Vinnie proposes gathering information about the thieves' diets, nighttime activity, ability to hold tools, and need for eyewear. His plan may be overly complicated, but it demonstrates an important detective skill: comparing several pieces of evidence before drawing a conclusion.

In this activity, students will use a suspect chart and a series of clues to solve a brand-new zoo mystery.

The Mystery:

Someone has taken a bag of animal enrichment treats from the zookeeper's cart. The empty bag was discovered near the climbing ropes. Five zoo animals were seen in the area that day. Which animal took the treats?

For this activity, students receive cards featuring several possible animal suspects.

Suspect	Most Active	Diet	Moves By	Can Open a Clip?	Tracks or Other Evidence
Raccoon	Night	Fruit, seeds, insects, and eggs	Walking and climbing	Yes, with nimble front paws	Small, handlike prints
Capuchin Monkey	Day	Fruit, seeds, insects, and eggs	Walking and climbing	Yes, with hands	Handprints
River Otter	Dawn and dusk	Fish and other water animals	Swimming and walking	Yes, with front paws	Webbed footprints
Porcupine	Night	Leaves, bark, and fruit	Walking and climbing	No	Quills may be left behind
Owl	Night	Small animals	Flying	No	Feathers and talon marks

The Evidence/Clues:

Clue #1: The treat bag disappeared late at night.

Clue #2: The bag contained apple slices, sunflower seeds, mealworms, and hard-boiled eggs. Every kind of treat was eaten.

Clue #3: The bag's metal clip was carefully opened. It was not torn or broken.

Clue #4: The bag was placed on a high shelf.

Clue #5: Small, handlike muddy prints were found beside the empty bag.

Instructions

1. Give each student or small group a copy of the suspect chart.
2. Read through the information together and explain that several suspects may match the first clue. Students should wait until they have considered all the evidence before deciding who took the treats.
3. Reveal the clues one at a time. After each clue, have students:
 - Cross out any suspects who no longer match the evidence.
 - Circle the suspects who are still possible.
 - Explain what information helped them eliminate each animal.
4. After the final clue, ask students to identify the culprit and support their conclusion with evidence from the chart.
5. Reveal the solution: The raccoon took the treats. The raccoon is active at night, eats both plant and animal foods, can climb and carefully open the clip, and leaves small, handlike prints.
6. Discuss the investigation:
 - Which clue eliminated the most suspects?
 - Which clue confirmed the answer?
 - Was any single clue enough to solve the mystery?
 - Did your theory change as new evidence was revealed?

Research Connection: After solving the mystery, invite students to create their own logic challenge using different zoo animals. Students should use nonfiction books, library resources, or teacher-approved websites to research four or five animals. They might investigate diet, habitat, active time, movement, physical adaptations, tracks, or other distinguishing traits. Students then use accurate facts from their research to create clues that lead to one clear solution.

Series-Wide Discussion Questions

1. The City Zoo as a Story World

Both mysteries take place at The City Zoo, where familiar exhibits, animals, and locations can return from one adventure to the next. Refer to the maps of the zoo seen on the hardcover endpapers.

- How does the zoo setting make different kinds of mysteries possible?
- Which part of the zoo feels the most important or memorable across the two books? Why?
- How does the zoo feel different after it closes and the humans are gone?
- What new zoo location would make an interesting setting for another mystery?

- What non-zoo location would make for an interesting setting for another mystery?

2. Hitch's Storytelling Voice

Hitch does more than solve the mysteries—he also tells the stories. He speaks directly to readers, explains detective terms, shares opinions, and frequently adds funny comments and corrections.

- What do you learn about Hitch from the way he tells the stories?
- How do you think Hitch sounds when he talks out loud?
- How does Hitch's version of events reflect his personality?
- Describe a moment when Hitch's actions reveal something that he does not admit aloud.
- How do you think Vinnie's voice sounds when he talks?
- How might one of the mysteries sound different if Vinnie narrated it?

Optional Extension: Read a short passage out loud as a class, where students practice trying out different voices for both Hitch and Vinnie.

3. Real Animals in a Fictional Mystery

The series includes real information about animal bodies, diets, habitats, speeds, behaviors, and adaptations. These facts may become clues, create obstacles, or inspire jokes.

- Which animal fact from either book surprised you most?
- How does the author turn real animal information into part of the fictional story?
- Which facts are important to the mystery, and which are included mostly for humor or interest?
- What real fact about another zoo animal could inspire a future *Hedgehog Whodunit* mystery?

4. Patterns Across the Series

The books share familiar elements: Vinnie arrives with a new problem, Hitch resists taking the case, the investigation leads them through the zoo, and Hitch hopes to return home for a nap. At the same time, each mystery introduces new animals, clues, and complications.

- What events or jokes repeat in both books?
- Why do you think readers enjoy encountering familiar patterns in a series?
- What should change from book to book so that each mystery still feels new?

- Based on the patterns you have noticed, what do you predict will happen in the next book?

Activity: Caught in the Act!—A Living Picture Challenge

Hitch and Vinnie encounter plenty of memorable characters, suspicious situations, and laugh-out-loud moments as they investigate mysteries around The City Zoo. In this activity, students will use their bodies, facial expressions, and positioning to create a “tableaux,” or silent, frozen “living picture,” of a scene from the series. Their classmates will use visual clues to identify the moment being depicted.

You will need:

- Open space for students to pose
- Optional scene cards
- Optional simple classroom props

Instructions:

1. Explain that a tableaux is a frozen picture created with people instead of paint or photographs. Once students are in position, they may not move or speak.
2. Divide students into small groups of three to six.
3. Give each group a scene from the Hedgehog Whodunit series. Allow groups a few minutes to decide:
 - Which characters are needed
 - Where each character should stand or sit
 - What each character might be feeling
 - What facial expressions, poses, and body positions will make the scene recognizable
4. Encourage students to think carefully about levels and spacing. Some characters might crouch, stand tall, curl up, reach, point, or turn away. Every person in the tableaux should contribute an important detail.
5. One group at a time, have students form their tableaux and freeze.
6. The audience studies the living picture and tries to identify:
 - Which book the scene comes from
 - What is happening
 - Which characters are being portrayed
 - What visual clues helped them figure it out
7. Once the scene has been identified, ask the performers to explain why they chose their poses and expressions.
8. For an additional comprehension challenge, ask the class:
 - What happened immediately before this moment?
 - What happens next?
 - Why is this moment important to the mystery?

Suggested Scenes:

Book One: *Hedgehog Whodunit*

1. Vinnie bursts into the Hedgehog Hut with news of the missing panda while Hitch would rather nap.
2. Hitch and Vinnie investigate the penguins as sardines fly into the exhibit.
3. The hippos pose for selfies after someone changes the sign at Hippos' Home.
4. Hitch and Vinnie arrive at the Lemur Lounge and discover the dance party.
5. Hitch realizes that the unusually large performer onstage is the missing panda in disguise.

Book Two: *The Carousel Caper*

6. Vinnie races with a cheetah while Hitch tries to time them with a stopwatch.
7. Hitch and Vinnie discover that another wooden animal—the ostrich—is missing from the carousel.
8. Frightened zoo animals crowd into the Hedgehog Hut while Hitch and Vinnie try to figure out how to keep everyone safe.
9. Hitch wakes up on the wooden ape and realizes it is being carried away from the carousel.
10. Vinnie competes in the cabbage-eating contest while Hitch begins connecting the clues that point to the meerkats.

Optional Extension: Instead of assigning a scene, give each group a different chapter. Groups must decide for themselves which moment from that chapter would make the strongest tableaux.

After the audience identifies the scene, ask the group to explain why they chose that moment. Was it the funniest moment? The most important clue? A turning point in the mystery? A moment that reveals something important about a character?

For an even bigger challenge, arrange the finished tableaux in chapter order to create a living picture timeline of the mystery. Students can move from one frozen scene to the next as the class retells the story from beginning to end.

Choose Your Mystery Challenge

Now that students have followed Hitch and Vinnie through two mysteries at The City Zoo, it's their turn to create a whodunit of their own!

Students can choose from three writing challenges. Each one asks them to use what they have learned about mysteries, clues, characters, and satisfying solutions, while offering a different level of creative independence. Or a fourth option to create as a class.

Every Mystery Should Include:

- A mystery or problem that needs to be solved
- A detective or team of detectives
- At least two possible suspects
- Clues that help readers piece together what happened
- At least one moment when the detective must think carefully about what the clues mean
- A solution that makes sense based on the evidence
- A final reveal that explains what happened and why

Students may also choose to include a “red herring,” or misleading clue, to make their mystery more challenging.

#1 Clue Finder: Add to the Case

Step into the world of Hedgehog Whodunit and write a new scene that could fit into one of the existing books.

Choose a moment from either mystery or imagine something new happens.

You might:

- Introduce a new zoo animal Hitch and Vinnie need to question.
- Add another clue for the detectives to investigate.
- Give Hitch and Vinnie an unexpected obstacle.
- Introduce a new suspect who seems guilty—but may not be.
- Add a funny twist involving one of Vinnie's gadgets or plans.

Your scene should sound as though it belongs in the story while adding something new to the investigation.

Challenge yourself: Can your new scene include a clue that connects logically to the solution of the original mystery?

#2 Case Cracker: Hitch and Vinnie's Next Case

Hitch may want to hang up his detective badge, but trouble has a way of finding him.

Write the beginning—or, for a longer project, the complete story—of Hitch and Vinnie's next adventure.

Create:

- A new mystery for them to solve
- A new collection of clues
- New suspects or witnesses
- At least one wrong turn or surprising discovery
- A solution that Hitch and Vinnie can prove with evidence

You may keep the story at The City Zoo or send Hitch and Vinnie somewhere completely new.

Think about the patterns readers have come to expect from the series. What might stay the same? What will make your mystery feel different?

Challenge yourself: Include a real animal fact that becomes important to solving the mystery.

#3 Master Sleuth: Create Your Own Whodunit

Build a mystery world completely from scratch.

Invent:

- Your own detective or detective team
- A setting
- A mystery
- Several suspects
- A trail of clues
- A culprit and motive
- A surprising—but logical—solution

Before drafting, work backward from your solution. Decide what really happened first. Then determine which clues your detective—and your reader—will need to figure it out.

Remember: A satisfying mystery should make readers say, "I didn't see that coming—but the clues were there all along!"

Challenge yourself: Include a red herring that seems important at first but does not actually lead to the culprit.

#4 Work Together: The Whole-Class Whodunit

The class can also create one mystery together.

Begin by deciding: What is the mystery?

Then build the story one piece at a time:

1. Create the detective or detective team.
2. Decide where the mystery takes place.
3. Invent three or four suspects.
4. Decide secretly what really happened and who is responsible.
5. Work backward to create clues that point toward the solution.
6. Add a red herring or unexpected complication.
7. Plan the detective's investigation.
8. Decide how the truth will finally be revealed.

Small groups can take responsibility for different scenes or chapters before combining them into one class story.

When the mystery is complete, read it aloud to another class and see whether the audience can solve the case before the final reveal.

Case Closed: Reflect on Your Writing

After completing the mystery, ask students to reflect:

- Which clue are you most proud of?
- How did you make sure your solution matched your evidence?
- Did you plant any clues that readers might not recognize as important at first?
- What was the most challenging part of writing a mystery?
- What did writing your own whodunit help you notice about the way Heather Preusser creates Hitch and Vinnie's mysteries?