

HARPERCOLLINS PRESENTS

# CLASS ACTS

\*\*\* FICTION IN THE CLASSROOM \*\*\*

## Curiosity House: The Shrunken Head

by Lauren Oliver and  
H. C. Chester



Blessed with extraordinary abilities, orphans Phillipa, Sam, and Thomas have grown up in Dumfrey's Dime Museum of Freaks, Oddities, and Wonders. But when a fourth child, Max, joins the group, it sets off an unforgettable chain of events.

When the museum's most prized possession, an Amazonian shrunken head, is stolen, the four are determined to get it back. But their search leads them to a series of murders and an explosive secret about their pasts.

### MEET THE AUTHORS

**Lauren Oliver** is the author of the teen novels *Before I Fall*, *Panic*, and *Vanishing Girls*, and the Delirium trilogy: *Delirium*, *Pandemonium*, and *Requiem*, which have been translated into more than thirty languages and are *New York Times* and international bestselling novels. She is also the author of three novels for middle grade readers: *The Spindlers*; *Liesl & Po*, which was an E. B. White Read-Aloud Award nominee; and *Curiosity House: The Shrunken Head*, co-written with H. C. Chester, and a novel for adults, *Rooms*.

**H. C. Chester** is a collector of unusual relics who came into possession of the artifacts of the Museum's estate and discovered the story of the four children.

### Common Core State Standards

In this activity, students work on Common Core reading standards related to setting, genre, and foreshadowing. They also practice Common Core writing skills related to researching a topic and informative/explanatory writing. Specific standards are listed in parentheses at the end of each part of the activity.

**SETTING THE STAGE:** Dime museums, popular in the 19th century, featured curiosities and typically had a low-cost admission fee. The most famous owner of a dime museum was American showman and businessman P. T. Barnum. To give students background into this novel's setting, provide time for small groups to research Barnum and his famous American Museum, which he opened in the 1840s in New York City. Have groups share their findings as you list the main facts on a classroom chart. As students read *Curiosity House: The Shrunken Head*, have them note on the chart similarities and differences between Barnum's real "dime museum" and the one featured in the novel. (RL.4.3; RL.5.3; RL.6.3; W.4.7; W.5.7; W.6.7)

**ACTIVITY:** Authors of mysteries like *Curiosity House: The Shrunken Head* often use the technique of foreshadowing to create suspense. Share with students the characteristics of foreshadowing listed in the box. Then, with students following along in their copies of the book, read aloud the introduction on page 1. Ask students to identify an example of foreshadowing on this page ("...a story of wondrous weirdness, of magic and monsters...and of four of the most extraordinary children in the world."). Discuss clues it might be giving about what will happen later in the text. After the discussion, fill in a copy of the graphic organizer with the day's reading assignment. Then make a copy of the page for each student to complete independently or with a partner. Discuss students' work as a class or in small groups. Then have each student store the organizer in a folder. Repeat this activity throughout the reading of the book. Be sure students understand that, as they read, they will need to revisit their organizers to fill in the "Event" column. (RL.4.1; RL.5.1; RL.6.1, 5)

#### Foreshadowing

- a literary technique used by a writer to create suspense
- often used in mysteries and crime fiction
- is used to give clues to the reader about what will happen later in the story

**WRITING ABOUT THE TEXT:** Have each child review her completed organizers and choose three or four examples of foreshadowing. Then have the student write a short essay about how the authors of *Curiosity House: The Shrunken Head* used foreshadowing to create suspense and a sense of mystery and intrigue. As an extension, challenge students to reread the book's epilogue and identify clues that they think foreshadow what might happen next to the four children now that the mystery of the shrunken head has been solved. (W.4.2, 3; W.5.2, 3; W.6.2, 3)

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## Finding Examples of Foreshadowing

As you read, fill in the second and third columns of the chart.  
Then, as you discover the event a clue points to, fill in the "Event" column.

Reading assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Event	Clue that the event would happen	Page no. of clue