

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Gold Bug

by

### Edgar Allan Poe

### Book Information

Edgar Allan Poe, The Gold Bug  
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Book Level: 9.8  
Interest Level: UG

The discovery of a message in code on a shoreline formerly infested with pirates sends William Legrand and his friends on a hunt for buried treasure.

**Topics:** Classics, Classics (All); Mysteries, Codes; Mysteries, Treasures; People, Pirates; Series, Creative Short Stories; Short Stories, Short Stories (All)

### Main Characters

Jupiter the freed slave who serves William Legrand

the narrator an unnamed friend of Legrand visiting from Charleston

William Legrand the descendant of a formerly wealthy family, who lives on a deserted island and discovers a pirate's treasure

### Vocabulary

**coppice** a thick, brushy area

**obstreperous** uncontrollably noisy

**recluse** a person who lives a solitary life

**vellum** paper made from lambskin or kidskin

**vouch-safed** offered as a special favor

### Synopsis

William Legrand, a descendant of a wealthy New Orleans family that has lost its fortune, is now living in a hut on a small island along with a freed slave named Jupiter. One day the narrator surprises William Legrand with a visit and learns that Legrand has discovered a new species of beetle. Unfortunately, Legrand has sent the bug to be studied by a friend, and he is unable to show the narrator the gold-colored specimen. He does,

however, draw him a picture of the beetle while the narrator warms himself by the fire. When the narrator examines the drawing, he remarks how the bug looks more like a skull than a beetle. Legrand thinks the narrator is insulting his drawing ability, and the narrator leaves so as not to disturb his moody friend any further.

A month later, Jupiter arrives at the narrator's home with news that Legrand is ill. Jupiter believes that Legrand has lost his mind because the gold bug bit him, and Jupiter gives the narrator a note from Legrand requesting that he visit him on the island.

When the narrator arrives at Legrand's hut, he is asked to accompany Legrand on an expedition into the hills. The narrator reluctantly agrees, and his suspicions about Legrand's sanity are fueled by his friend's odd behavior. Legrand leads them to the base of a tulip tree, and he insists that Jupiter climb up carrying the golden bug on a string. Jupiter does as he is instructed and discovers a skull nailed to a branch high above the ground. Legrand then instructs Jupiter to lower the bug through the left eye of the skull. After this is done, Legrand marks the spot where the bug reaches the ground and the three begin to dig a hole that is five feet deep.

Legrand is disappointed from not finding anything buried, and he is about ready to give up his perplexing mission when he realizes that Jupiter probably dropped the bug through the right eye instead of the left. Legrand marks a new spot, and the digging resumes. This time they unearth several human skeletons and a box containing a treasure worth over a million dollars. Legrand goes on to explain that the parchment that he drew the picture of the bug on actually contained a code written in invisible ink. It revealed the location of a famous pirate's treasure. After a painstakingly complicated process, he deciphered the code and deduced the location of the treasure. He used the golden bug to add excitement to their treasure hunt and to get back at the narrator for doubting his sanity. The three characters divide the treasure, and Legrand can rebuild his family's wealthy heritage.

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### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

Why do Jupiter and Legrand's friend think Legrand is crazy when he speaks of going on an expedition into the hills?

*Jupiter and Legrand's friend are unaware of the purpose of Legrand's expedition. The hills are thickly covered with brush, and the task is sure to be very difficult. The two probably fear Legrand is going to lead them into an area that is dangerous. They also think Legrand is suffering from a true physical illness that is making him have wild thoughts.*

#### Literary Analysis

Do you think Jupiter will leave Legrand now that he has a valuable treasure? Why or why not?

*Jupiter will probably not leave Legrand. Jupiter is already a freed slave and could have left Legrand's side whenever he chose. He has become dependent upon Legrand, however, over the course of his life, and he does not have the desire or the confidence to change his habits.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

What role do chance and luck play into this story? What does Legrand discover by luck, rather than ingenuity?

*In the beginning of the story, Legrand is not looking for treasure. He has discovered a new species of bug and luckily had sent it away to be observed by Lieutenant G-. Because he does not have the bug, he has to draw a picture for the narrator. By chance, he happens to draw it on the parchment that Jupiter had picked up in woods after the bug had bitten Legrand. When Legrand's dog jumps on the narrator, he sets the parchment close to the fire, which reveals the death's-head that is drawn in invisible ink. All of these events are caused purely by coincidence, but they allow Legrand to use his intelligence to discover the treasure.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Do you think this story is believable? Is Legrand's method of deducing the treasure's location logical, or is it too improbable that he could decipher the mystery without error?

*Students' answers will vary. Many students will appreciate Legrand's logic and think that his methods are believable, while others may doubt the improbable sequence of coincidences and the ease with which Legrand deduces the treasure's whereabouts.*

### Teachable Skills

**Making Predictions** The story stops before revealing what each character does with his share of the treasure. Have the students choose a character and write a short paper about what they think each character does with his share of the treasure.

**Recognizing Details** Secret messages and invisible ink have been used for many years to pass messages between people. Have the students devise their own codes or look up codes in the library and create messages using them. Then have them exchange messages with a classmate and decode them. To add excitement

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to the project, have the students write messages on white paper with an invisible ink. This can be done by using a cotton swab and either milk or lemon juice. After the messages dry they can be heated using an iron to reveal the hidden message.

**Responding to Literature** Have the students write a short story in which they detail the events leading up to the creation of the treasure map and the burying of the treasure. They should pay careful attention to the details used to decipher the treasure map, and then use these details to construct a story that narrates Captain Kidd's experiences hiding his massive wealth.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** The author drew upon the popular legends of pirates to create his story. Students may not be familiar with the historical period in which these activities were reported to have occurred. Have the students research the history of pirates, particularly Captain Kidd, and report to the class on what they find.