

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## A Message from the Match Girl

by  
Janet Taylor Lisle

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### Book Information

Janet Taylor Lisle, A Message from the Match Girl  
Quiz Number: 16872  
Orchard Books, 1995  
ISBN 0-531-08787-5; LCCN  
121 Pages  
Book Level: 4.0  
Interest Level: MG

Georgina and Poco try to help their friend who is suffering from an identity crisis and receiving strange messages from his dead mother.

**Topics:** Family Life, Mothers; Family Life, Orphans; Horror/Thriller, Ghosts/Spirits; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship

### Main Characters

Angela Harrall a friend of Walter, Poco, and Georgina who currently lives in Mexico

Georgina Rusk Walter's seemingly more outspoken friend

Granny Docker the woman who has cared for Walter since he was a baby

Miss Bone a retired schoolteacher

Poco Lambert Walter's seemingly quieter, shyer friend

Walter Kew a nine-year-old boy, who searches for his past

### Vocabulary

**hypnotic** sleep producing

**knoll** a mound

**languorous** lethargic

**rousing** exciting

### Synopsis

Walter Kew is a nine-year-old orphan. He has lived with Granny Docker since he was a baby. Granny has always told him that his parents were killed in a terrible accident, but Walter has always found it strange that there are no pictures or letters from his parents.

One day Walter hears what he believes is his mother calling to him from beyond the grave. When Walter tells Granny he must know something about his mother, she gives him an old, faded photograph of a woman holding a baby against her shoulder. Walter realizes the photo was taken in a nearby park, near a statue of the Little Match Girl, and he goes to the park with his two friends, Poco and Georgina, to visit the site. Soon after, he receives in the mail an envelope containing three matches. Walter decides this is a message from his mother, and he and his friends return to the park and find an envelope containing a baby's mitten that looks like the mitten in the photo.

Walter is convinced his mother is trying to give him a part of his past, while Georgina and Poco are not sure what is happening. Poco is very comfortable with the unexplained, while Georgina thinks something is seriously wrong with Walter's mind.

The three friends discover that Walter is not really Granny's grandson, but that she found him as a small baby, in a very large casserole dish, on her porch. As Walter finds more items that seem to belong to his past, the mystery deepens. In the end, the mystery remains unsolved, but Walter is no longer so insecure and self-effacing.

### Open-Ended Questions

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

#### Initial Understanding

Why did Poco and Georgina find it hard to go to Angela's house and talk to Miss Bone?

*They remembered the bad things that had happened there the previous winter, and they didn't know how Miss Bone would react or what she would say.*

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### Literary Analysis

Which of the three friends is most likely to welcome an unexpected adventure? Support your answer.

*Poco is outgoing, not afraid to speak up, and comfortable with things she does not understand, so she is the most likely of the three to relish a new adventure. (Walter is quiet and tends to become almost invisible in social situations, and Georgina often has second thoughts about a proposed plan.)*

### Inferential Comprehension

How did Walter's being left on Granny's doorstep affect how he felt about himself?

*Correct answers include that he felt abandoned, wanted to know about his past, and wanted to know that he belonged.*

### Constructing Meaning

Why did Georgina "hang back" in public places?

*She didn't like the unexpected or taking chances, and she was afraid of making a fool of herself.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** The statues in Andersen Park are based on characters from Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales: the Little Match Girl, the Steadfast Tin Soldier, the Ugly Duckling, the Snow Queen, and Thumbelina. Have the students research Andersen's tales and make their own sculptures of one of his other fairy-tale characters. Display the sculptures with signs indicating the name of the character and the title of the story from which the character was taken.

**Making Predictions** At the end of the book, several questions remain unanswered. (What happened to the waitress? What is the significance of the silver-colored ring they found on the Match Girl statue? Who were Walter's birth parents?) Have the students write an outline for a sequel to the story using at least one of these unanswered questions to help weave the plot together.

**Recognizing Feelings** Although Walter expresses many feelings throughout the story (sadness, fear, anger, etc.), loneliness is probably the most prominent feeling associated with him. Have the students watch a short video and identify as many emotions as they can. Which emotion is the most prominent? How does this feeling relate to the plot of the video?

**Differentiating Fact and Opinion** Each of the three main characters in the story has definite opinions of who or what is behind the appearance of the envelopes. In the story, they often express their opinions as facts. Have the students pick three ads from magazines or newspapers and identify the claims that are made. Which claims can be proven? Which statements are opinions?