

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Voices After Midnight

by  
Richard Peck

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### Book Information

Richard Peck, Voices After Midnight  
Quiz Number: 6635  
Dell, 1989  
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181 Pages  
Book Level: 4.3  
Interest Level: MG

Living with their sister and parents in a rented house in New York City during the summer, Chad and Luke uncover a mystery involving the former tenants of the house when the two brothers slip back in time to 1888.

**Topics:** Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Mysteries, Hauntings/Ghosts; Science Fiction, Time Travel

### Main Characters

Al the children's dog, whose behavior throughout the book indicates a mysterious and dangerous situation

Chad the principal character who tells the story; a fourteen-year-old boy with vivid dreams

Heidi Chad and Luke's older sister, a stereotypical teenage girl, who is a somewhat unwilling participant in the rescue of the Dunlaps

Luke Chad's younger brother, who seems to have a "gift" for connecting to the past

Mom and Dad minor characters in the story whose main function is bringing their children to New York

The Dunlap Family (present) minor characters who help the children understand the significance of the rescue

Tyler and Emily Dunlap Chad, Luke, and Heidi's ancestors, who become trapped in an elevator during the blizzard of 1888

### Vocabulary

**authentic** real

**collation** a light meal

**plaque** a commemorative sign

**tintype** an old-fashioned photograph

**venerable** deserving of respect

**vintage** old, recognized, and of enduring importance

### Synopsis

Chad, Luke, Heidi, and their parents travel to New York for a two-week stay because of Dad's job. The one-hundred-year-old town house they have rented appears to be haunted, with the children hearing voices and having odd experiences. Soon, they find themselves unintentionally traveling back into various places in time. Luke, however, is drawn to the idea that there is a purpose they must fulfill. The brothers eventually find themselves at the library, where they learn about the Great Blizzard of 1888. They go to the cemetery and see gravestones belonging to Tyler and Emily Dunlap. With clues gathered from their experiences, they realize they are meant to rescue these people from the past. They travel back to March 12, 1888, and find Emily and Tyler trapped in a cage-like elevator in the same house, one hundred years in the past. Heidi puts on the vintage dress from the attic, making her visible to the Dunlaps. The children then manage to lift the top off the elevator and help the Dunlaps get out.

When the present owners of the town house return, there is a discussion about their ancestors' rescue and the legend of the Mystery Lady. The children realize Heidi was the Mystery Lady. In rescuing Tyler and Emily, they were rescuing themselves, because they are descendants of Tyler, their great-great grandfather.

### Open-Ended Questions

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

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#### Initial Understanding

What did the boys discover at the library?

*It was here that Chad and Luke discover the significance of the newspaper article about the terrible blizzard in 1888. They realize the voices they had been hearing were always talking about being cold, and sounding as if they were trying to survive something. Luke realizes it is the elevator in which they must be trapped.*

#### Literary Analysis

What was the real reason behind Heidi dyeing her hair?

*She at first claimed to want to be like fashion-plate Jocelyn, the girl she met in New York. In reality, however, she was trying to escape the relationship that was developing with Tyler Dunlap from the past. She thought that if she made herself so outlandishly different, he would become disinterested, and she could escape the frightening, yet intriguing situation. She knows that she is being drawn by love. As it turns out, Tyler Dunlap, whom she winds up rescuing, is Heidi's great-great grandfather.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

If Chad and Luke had not gone back to the correct date in history, what would have happened?

*This story is based on a time loop. If the children hadn't been able to go back to the very house on the very date of the blizzard, March 12, they would not have been able to rescue Tyler and Emily. In failing to do this, they would have doomed themselves because they are descendents of Tyler.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Think of someone you know who reminds you of Luke. How would you describe that person?

*On the surface, Luke seems to be a pesty little boy with a lot of energy. In reality, it is his persistence and belief in his causes that make him appear this way. He is also intelligent, able to match clues, and draw conclusions.*

#### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The plot of this story takes the reader back and forth between two different places in time, and various locations within those time frames. In the present time, the characters are in both California and New York. When Chad, Heidi, and Luke travel back in time, they find themselves suddenly in various locations in New York. To help the reader better understand the story, construct two time lines: one for the present and one for the past. Watch for how the two timelines are dependent upon one another.

**Understanding Characterization** Luckily for Chad and his siblings, they were able to return to the present following their involvement with, and subsequent rescue of, their distant relatives. Analyze what might have happened to the characters if they had become "stuck" in the past. In a classic time loop quandary, they could drastically affect the outcome of the future. For example, their knowledge of industrialization could have sped up technology. Also, analyze how they might be forced to live. They might live like the street urchins of *Oliver Twist*, or they might take a chance and try to explain their predicament to people from the past.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Several times throughout the book, the author gives us glimpses of the social norms of Chad's relatives' era. The Christmas scene is vivid with descriptions of past customs. Also, it is revealed that Tyler created a family scandal when he married the parlor maid. To study the past more closely, research an etiquette book from the late 1800s and compare it to our customs today.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** In this story, Heidi is sometimes portrayed as a silly teenager, whom some might call an "airhead." Her brother Chad even calls her an "alien." However, it is she who is ultimately responsible for the rescue of Tyler and Emily. To better understand her character, it would be interesting to rewrite two or three excerpts from the story using diary entries made by Heidi to see the events from her point of

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view.