



The Invention of Hugo Cabret

By

Brian Selznick

When young Hugo Cabret's father is killed in a fire, his alcoholic uncle brings Hugo to live with him in his old apartment above a train station in Paris. Here he teaches Hugo how to maintain the clocks in the station. When his uncle fails to return home one day, Hugo decides to secretly continue his uncle's work to keep from being sent to an orphanage. He sneaks in and out of the apartment, scrounging or stealing food. Since Hugo is very good at keeping the clocks running, no one is the wiser.

Poor Hugo has one treasure that belonged to his father - a mechanical man that was damaged in the fire that killed him. Hugo steals parts to repair the automaton from a toymaker whose shop is in the train station. One day the toymaker catches him and makes Hugo come every day to help repair toys and keep the shop swept in payment for what was stolen. Here he meets the toymaker's goddaughter, and together they uncover some secrets about the toymaker which will change everyone's lives.

This innovative book by Brian Selznick won the 2008 Caldecott Medal. The story is uniquely told in words and pictures.

Vocabulary

Using context, try writing a reasonable definition for each of these words. Look them up to see how well you did!

horologist

Most people think that the skills of the horologist will no longer be needed since we use digital clocks.

automaton

Soon all our houses will be cleaned by an automaton.

debris

The whole neighborhood worked to clean up the debris after the hurricane.

accumulate

The dust seemed to accumulate under the bed more than any other place.

dexterity

The clockmaker needs great dexterity putting together all the tiny parts of a watch.

cascade

A cascade of flowers brightened up the back-garden wall.

calibrate

Every day, Hugo would carefully calibrate each of the clocks in the train station.

armoire

She packed up all her winter clothes in the armoire for the summer.

guttural

We were shocked to hear the guttural noises coming from the cornered man.

croissants

For breakfast we all had juice and hot croissants with jam.

Activities

1. The Invention of Hugo Cabret is unlike most books. It is part novel, part picture book, part graphic novel and even has elements of a movie. The book looks very long at over 500 pages, but much of the story is told through pictures drawn by the author. How do these pictures move the story along? What do you think about this technique?
2. The toymaker plays a card game called Solitaire. This a game that is played by an individual. It has been around for hundreds of years. In England it was called Patience. If you don't already know how to play Solitaire, find out the rules. Most people play on their computers or phones but try playing it with cards like Georges did.
3. Find a book of card tricks and learn to do some like the toymaker.
4. Georges Melies was a real person. Research his life. Discuss with your teacher what parts of the book were fact and which were fiction.

5. You can actually watch one of Georges Melies movies. Just go to youtube.com and search for A Trip to the Moon. Compare it to the latest movie you watched. Are there any similarities? In what ways has movie making changed?
6. The automaton introduced in the book was not created by Hugo Cabret. Why do you think the book is titled, “The Invention of Hugo Cabret”?
7. In the Acknowledgement section of the book, the author says that he spent time at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia where he was able to see the Maillardet automaton. This automaton came to the museum in 1928 where it was repaired. It can draw four pictures and write three poems. At the end, it signs the name of its creator – Maillardet. You can watch this automaton perform on youtube.com. Just search for Maillardet’s automaton.
8. Some parts of the story are strictly told through pictures. Try writing words for the pictures at the end of Chapter Nine in Part 1 or for the pictures in Chapter Nine of Part 2. What affect does this have on the story? Which do you like better?
9. The Invention of Hugo Cabret was made into an award-winning movie in 2011. Watch the movie.
10. After watching the movie, write a movie review. To do this, you may have to watch the movie more than once and take notes so that you can back up your opinion of the movie with examples. Pay attention to things such as camera work, lighting, and costumes as well as how the actors perform. What are some themes of the movie and how are they developed? How closely does the movie follow the book? Your review should include:

Introduction – As in most writing, you want a strong “hook” to begin with. You may immediately state your opinion, make a cultural reference, or ask a question. This section should include the name of the movie, when it was released, the director and stars.

Plot Summary – This should be very brief. Do not include spoilers or how the movie ends.

Analysis – You should be able to move beyond plot analysis and focus on other elements such as cinematography, acting, tone, etc. This is where it is important to have examples to back up your opinion.

Restate your general thoughts and assessments. Make your recommendation about seeing the film. Give the movie a star rating or a grade.

Teacher's help:

Vocabulary

horologist – a person who makes clocks

automaton – mechanical device that operates on its own; a robot

debris – remains of something broken; rubble

accumulate – to gather or collect

dexterity – skill in using one's hands

cascade – a waterfall or anything that resembles a waterfall

calibrate – to check or rectify the graduations of an instrument in order to measure correctly

armoire – a large wardrobe

guttural – harsh sound

croissants – a buttery, crescent shaped roll