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Activity Guide

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Mystery on the Docks

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ABOUT THE STORY

Ralph is a short-order cook and an opera lover who works in a diner on Pier 46. One night, two mysterious rats come into the diner. Shortly afterward, Ralph learns that Eduardo, his favorite opera singer, has been kidnapped. The plot thickens when Ralph is kidnapped and finds himself aboard a ship manned by some nasty rats. When he finds Eduardo in the hold, he knows he'll have to work fast. But can Ralph and Eduardo escape their captors?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Thacher Hurd has written and illustrated several books for children, including *Art Dog* and *Mama Don't Allow*, both Live Oak Readalongs. He lives in Berkeley, California.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children if any of them have ever heard opera music. If any have, encourage them to describe the music. Explain that the book they will read is about an opera-loving rat who has a hair-raising adventure.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- “What does Ralph learn from reading the newspaper?”
- “What does Big Al do to Ralph?”
- “Who does Ralph find in the ship's hold?”
- “Why did Big Al kidnap Eduardo?”
- “How does Ralph get away from the kidnappers?”
- “What happens when Ralph and Eduardo start fighting?”
(*Cause and effect*)
- “What kind of personality do you think Ralph has?” Explain your answer.”
(*Evaluate*)

Vocabulary

Have children work in pairs to define each of these words from the story. Then have partners use five of the words in a newspaper article describing Ralph and Eduardo's escape.

accordion	clammy	gangplank
opera	pier	circumstances

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Music: Opera Music

Play selections from operas for the class. As they listen, they can write down their feelings and opinions about the music. Encourage children to share their reactions with the rest of the class.

Language Arts: Write an Article

Have children write a newspaper article about Ralph and Eduardo's escape from Big Al and his men. Remind them to answer the five news questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why?

Science: The Rat

The characters in *Mystery on the Docks* are rats. Have children use encyclopedias or other reference books to find out about real rats. Ask them to write a report on one species of rat. They can describe its habitat, what it eats, and its behavior.

Music: Listen to the Accordion

Ralph's instrument is the accordion. Play some accordion music for the class so they can hear what the accordion sounds like. Encourage them to discuss the kind of music the accordion makes and whether or not they like it.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Opera Stars

Have children research the life of a famous opera star on the Internet. Some names/keywords they can use are *Luciano Pavarotti*, *Enrico Caruso*, *Maria Callas*, and *Beverly Sills*. Children can use the information they find to write a brief biographical sketch of their subject.