

Discussion Guide

SKELETON CREEK

BY PATRICK CARMAN



Sarah and Ryan are in deep trouble...and deep into a mystery...something that everyone in their hometown of Skeleton Creek seems to want to keep secret.



The last time the two went out to the creepy old dredge abandoned in the middle of the woods, Ryan ended up in the hospital, and in a cast that left him stuck at home, forbidden to speak with or contact Sarah. Sarah is intent on unraveling the mystery of the dredge, and of what happened to Ryan that night, because she has footage that no one else has seen.



The story is told from alternating viewpoints—and in alternating formats. First, you read a chapter of Ryan's journal in the book. Then, at the end of each chapter, there's a website and a password, with which you can go online and continue the story by watching Sarah's video. This exciting new storytelling format will have kids riveted as they try to figure out what these detectives will discover next.



Teachers, use Skeleton Creek to bridge the digital divide and lure students inside the structure of a novel. Use it to open up discussion and exploration of different storytelling formats with which students can experiment.

Discussion Guide to Book 1 Skeleton Creek: Ryan's Journal

1. Describe Ryan as he sees himself. Do you think anyone who writes as much as he has will eventually become good at it? What condition is he in? Why?
2. Over the last year how has Ryan's journal (and the story inside it) slowly become intertwined with his real life in Skeleton Creek? How did the quest begin?
3. "Privacy has long been the religion of our town." (p. 17) Why do you think this is important? What would be the religion of your own town? What is good about living in a small town? What can be a challenge?
4. What do you learn from watching Sarah's footage of the night in the woods? Would you be willing to continue on solving the mystery or not? Why? Which part of the story do you think was more difficult to write: the journal or the script? Why?
5. How is Ryan's dad involved in the mystery of the story? What information does Ryan learn from him about the dredge and Old Joe Bush? Does your town have any local ghost stories?
6. How is Ryan able to make connections between what he discovers from his dad and the videos from Sarah? Who is finding the most information? Do you think any of the details they are discovering are unimportant (in mystery fiction this is called a red herring)?
7. Ryan is constantly admitting that he is paranoid. Do you think his fear is interfering with understanding the truth? Would you be willing to risk your parent's wrath and your own safety to pursue the truth of the mystery? What do they have to lose?
8. What does Ryan learn about the tapping sounds on the video and what they mean? Do you think it connects to Ryan's dad?
9. What passwords does Sarah give Ryan to access the videos? What is the significance of these words? Where do they come from?
10. What do they discover at the dredge at the end of the book? In the end, where are Sarah and Ryan? Predict what you think will happen next and why.

Discussion Guide to Book 2 Skeleton Creek: Ghost in the Machine

1. How did Sarah and Ryan escape from the secret room? What did they learn while trapped down there? What warning did they get? Would you continue with the search?
2. How does Ryan start eliminating suspects from the list they found in the secret room? What surprising facts does he learn about people on the list?
3. Who were Hooke, Boyle, and Newton? How did their discoveries become important to unraveling the mystery of the dredge? How does Ryan uncover the detailed truth about their important work?
4. Sarah's videos elicit more intense responses from Ryan in this book than in the last. Why? Are you more influenced by video or print? Ten years from now, what do you think will have the most influence in entertainment? Why?
5. What clues does Ryan discover in his own house and by his surveillance at the local library? Why are the crossbones involved with the dredge?
6. What does Sarah discover the night of the crossbones secret society meeting? How does she gain access?

7. Why is the element of time even more critical now? What will happen if Sarah and Ryan cannot unravel the mystery? How does this add intensity to the story?
8. In the end, what did Ryan and Sarah discover was the secret behind the deaths at the dredge, and what was the murderer protecting? Who was responsible for the treachery? Who do you think feels most betrayed?
9. Who did you get to know better through this story: Sarah or Ryan? Why? Which part of the story would you most be interested in writing or creating? What have you learned about the creation of stories that you can apply to your own next work?
10. After viewing all of Sarah's videos discuss which ones were most compelling and why. Which ones developed Sarah's character? Which ones advanced the plot? Which ones added suspense and fear to the narrative? What elements created the mood? How can you evaluate a video for its effectiveness?

Activities

LANGUAGE ARTS

Keep a journal, inspired by Ryan's journal, in the style of "stream of consciousness" (in the moment) for at least one day. Try to make your readers feel as if they are standing beside you watching events unfold. Although you may not have a life and death mystery to solve, you may explore other questions: What is school cafeteria meatloaf really made out of? Why does your math teacher keep opening the bottom left-hand drawer of her desk? Does Katy Ryan really like Paul Mills or is she writing love notes to someone else?

-or-

Work with a partner to tell a local ghost story in alternating words and video. Be sure to create intensity between the two mediums (print and video) and make the two parts of the story rely on each other as in Skeleton Creek. Don't forget to let the mystery unfold in more than one episode so your reader/viewer discovers information along the way.

MULTIMEDIA

Try writing a short screenplay inspired by Sarah's personal uploads of her discoveries. What footage would best describe a day in the life of you? What details would be important to capture? What would you let people see from your home? Your room? Yourself? Consider how you will use the elements of video to enhance your production: light, sound, screen angles, and close-ups. Discuss your choices in a journal you turn in with the project.

ART

Create a collage inspired by the events from the novel. Don't forget to use some of the literary allusions from the video passwords, and don't feel compelled to stick with two-dimensional objects either. Explain your choice of symbol, subject, color, form, and texture in a brief artist's statement you also include with the project.

MUSIC

Create a playlist for at least two scenes of the book. Which music would you choose for the background? Why? If lyrics were used, which ones would be best?

HISTORY

Research the history of video and film development. How has it changed in the last fifty years? Predict what you think the medium will do in the next fifty years. Create a time line of at least five important events.

SCIENCE

Develop a PowerPoint presentation, website, or video about Newton, Boyle, or Hooke and their discoveries. Be sure to include at least five important facts about the scientist's life, their accomplishments, and important discoveries.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Carman is the award-winning author of many books, including the Land of Elyon and Atherton series. His books have been translated into approximately two dozen languages.

Noting the connection that his children have to technology, he wanted to find a way to combine the Internet and literature. "Technology holds more weight as a narrative expression in their world," Carman explains. With *Skeleton Creek*, he has created a story in which online videos contribute to the story as much as the printed word.

An entrepreneur like his father, Carman can't remember a time when he wasn't searching for a way to creatively express himself, an urge that led him to start an advertising agency, then create board games, and finally develop and sell a dotcom before finding the thing he was obviously meant to do: write youth fiction.

Carman spends his free time supporting literacy campaigns and community organizations; work-

ing with Agros International, an organization that helps families in Central America and Mexico; reading; mountain biking; fly fishing; doing crossword puzzles; playing Scrabble and basketball; and (more than anything else) spending time with his wife and daughters.

Patrick Carman lives with his family in Walla Walla, Washington. To read more about him, please visit www.patrickcarman.com.



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This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children's author. Visit her website at www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find hundreds of guides to children's and YA literature.