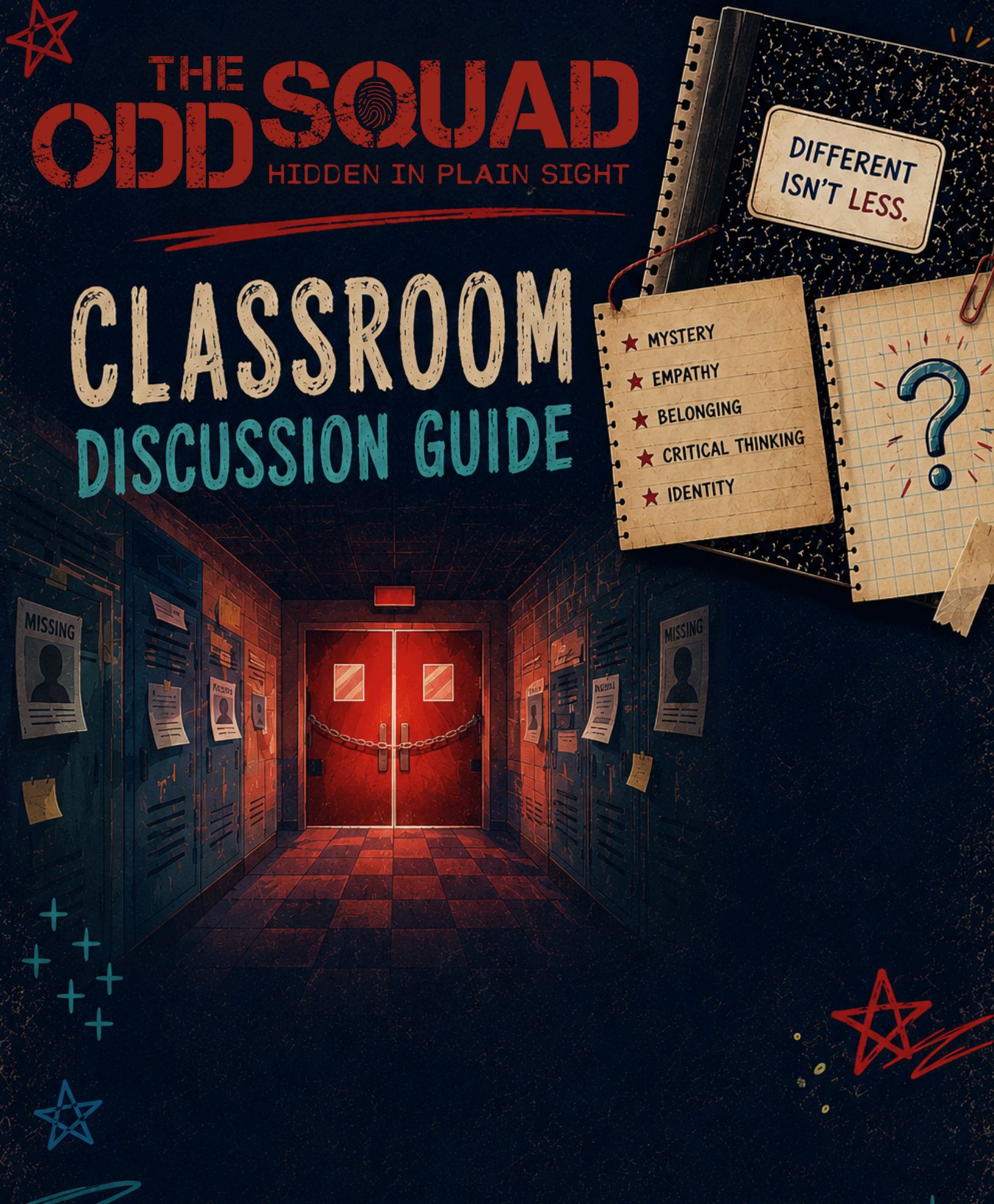
THE ODD SQUAD

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Arbour Middle School has a problem no one seems to notice.

Students are disappearing.

Not transferring. Not moving away. Simply... gone.

The strangest part? Everyone forgets they ever existed.

Everyone except Quinn.

Quinn has always seen the world differently. While his dyslexia makes reading a challenge, it also helps him notice patterns and connections others miss. When a classmate vanishes, and no one remembers her, Quinn knows something is terribly wrong. Teaming up with Harper and Luis, this small group of friends, whose unique minds help them see what others overlook, begins investigating a mystery hidden in plain sight.

As clues lead them deeper into the secrets of Arbour Middle School, the group uncovers a program that may be targeting students who think differently. With time running out and more students disappearing, Quinn and his friends must follow a trail of hidden messages, forgotten memories, and dangerous secrets before they become the next students to vanish.

But if everyone else forgets the missing students ever existed, can Quinn and his friends convince the world there's a mystery worth solving before they're erased too?

MEET THE AUTHOR



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Bonicelli is a former educator, author, and parent advocate who believes every child deserves to feel seen, understood, and valued.

After spending more than fifteen years in education, Jennifer saw firsthand how many students struggle when their strengths don't fit traditional expectations. As both a teacher and the parent of a neurodivergent learner, she became passionate about helping children recognize that different ways of thinking are not weaknesses but often superpowers.

That passion inspired The Odd Squad: Hidden in Plain Sight, a mystery series that celebrates curiosity, friendship, self-advocacy, and the power of embracing what makes us unique.

Jenn is also the co-author of the bestselling parenting guides You Can Two: The Essential Twins Preparation Guide and A Dad's Guide to Newborn Twins.

She lives in Colorado with her husband, twin sons, and a growing collection of horses, dogs, chickens, ducks, and other animals.

WHY I WROTE THE ODD SQUAD

"I wrote The Odd Squad for every kid who has ever felt misunderstood, overlooked, or different. I wanted to create a story where the very things that make the characters stand out become the key to solving the mystery. My hope is that readers walk away knowing that different isn't less—it might just be their greatest strength."

— Jennifer Bonicelli

DISCUSSION PROMPT

After reading about the author, think about this question:

What life experiences do you think helped inspire The Odd Squad? How can an author's experiences influence the stories they write?

FUN FACTS ABOUT JENN

- Former educator
- Mom of twin boys
- Horse Girl
- Believes every student has unique strengths
- Loves mysteries and suspense
- Often gets her best story ideas while working in the barn

Common Core State Standards Alignment (Grades 4–8)

The Odd Squad: Hidden in Plain Sight supports Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature, Writing, Speaking, and Listening (Grades 4–8), while reinforcing CASEL Social-Emotional Learning competencies, including Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. Activities included in this guide encourage evidence-based discussion, critical thinking, empathy, perspective-taking, and meaningful conversations about belonging, identity, and neurodiversity.

Reading Literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1 / RL.5.1 / RL.6.1 / RL.7.1 / RL.8.1
- Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly and inferentially.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2–RL.8.2
- Determine themes or central ideas and summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3–RL.8.3
- Analyze characters, settings, and events and how they interact throughout the story.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6–RL.8.6
- Analyze point of view and perspective.

Speaking & Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1–SL.8.1
- Engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.4–SL.8.4
- Present claims, findings, and ideas clearly.

Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1–W.8.1
- Write opinion pieces supported with reasons and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3–W.8.3
- Write narratives using effective technique and descriptive details.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.9–W.8.9
- Draw evidence from literary texts to support analysis and reflection.

CASEL Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

Social Awareness
- Demonstrate empathy and understanding for others.
- Recognize diverse perspectives and experiences.

Relationship Skills
- Work cooperatively with peers.
- Build positive relationships through communication and trust.

Self-Awareness
- Recognize personal strengths and challenges.
- Develop a positive sense of identity.

Responsible Decision-Making
- Analyze situations critically.
- Consider consequences and ethical choices.

Themes Supported by The Odd Squad
- Neurodiversity and inclusion
- Identity and self-advocacy
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Friendship and teamwork
- Belonging and community
- Challenging assumptions and stereotypes

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

Answer these questions before you begin reading the book. They will help prepare readers for the plot, themes, and characters they will encounter throughout the story.

- **Analyze the cover of the book.** What details do you notice about the students, the hallway, and the red doors? What clues does the cover give you about the mystery?
- **The title is Hidden in Plain Sight.** What does that phrase mean? Can you think of a time when you overlooked something that was right in front of you?
- **What makes someone memorable?** If a student suddenly disappeared from your school, what are some things people would remember about them?
- **Have you ever noticed something that others seemed to miss?** What happened? Why do you think different people notice different things?
- **What qualities make a good detective or problem-solver?** Which qualities do you think are most important: curiosity, observation, persistence, creativity, teamwork, or something else?
- **The main characters all think differently from one another.** Why can having different perspectives be an advantage when solving a problem?
- **What does it mean to belong?** What helps people feel accepted and valued in a group, school, or community?
- **Have you ever felt misunderstood?** Without sharing anything too personal, what are some reasons people might feel that others don't understand them?
- **What would you do if everyone around you believed something was true, but you were certain it wasn't?** Would you speak up? Why or why not?
- **Why do you think some people are afraid of differences?** How can learning about others help build understanding and empathy?
- **Imagine you discovered a secret at your school.** Would you investigate it yourself, tell an adult, or ignore it? Explain your reasoning.
- **The Odd Squad is a group of students who work together because of their unique strengths**. What strengths would you bring to a team trying to solve a mystery?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU READ

PART ONE: SOMETHING ISN'T RIGHT

In the opening section of The Odd Squad: Hidden in Plain Sight, readers are introduced to Quinn, Harper, and Luis, three students who see the world in different ways. As strange events begin unfolding at Arbour Middle School, the trio starts noticing clues that everyone else seems to miss. While the mystery deepens, the story also explores friendship, belonging, self-confidence, and the strengths that come from thinking differently.

• Early in the story, Quinn notices details that other students overlook. Why do you think he pays attention to things others miss? How might this become important later in the book?

• Quinn sometimes feels misunderstood because of the way he learns and processes information. Have you ever felt misunderstood? How did it affect you?

• What clues suggest that something unusual is happening at Arbour Middle School? Which clue stood out most to you and why?

• Harper, Luis, and Quinn each have different strengths. What strengths have you noticed so far? How do those differences help them work together?

• Why do you think some students are quick to dismiss Quinn's concerns? What assumptions are they making?

• The story encourages readers to question what they see and hear. Why is critical thinking an important skill when solving problems or mysteries?

• Have you ever noticed something that everyone else seemed to ignore? What happened?

• As the mystery develops, who do you trust most? Is there anyone you are suspicious of? What evidence supports your thinking?

• The characters are beginning to realize they may not fit in with everyone around them. Why is belonging such an important part of middle school?

• If you discovered evidence that everyone else ignored, would you keep investigating or let it go? Why?

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU READ

PART TWO: FOLLOWING THE CLUES

As the mystery grows, Quinn and his friends begin connecting clues, questioning what they thought they knew, and uncovering secrets hidden throughout Arbour Middle School. The deeper they investigate, the more they realize that solving the mystery will require courage, trust, and a willingness to challenge assumptions. In this section, readers are encouraged to think critically, evaluate evidence, and consider the importance of teamwork when facing difficult problems.

- As new clues emerge, which pieces of evidence seem most important? Why?
- How has Quinn's confidence changed since the beginning of the story? What experiences are helping him grow?
- What role does trust play in the Odd Squad's investigation? Why is trust important when working as part of a team?
- Have any of your predictions about the mystery changed? What new information caused you to rethink your ideas?
- Each member of the Odd Squad contributes in a different way. Which character's strengths have been most valuable so far? Explain your thinking.
- Why is it important to consider multiple perspectives when trying to understand a problem?
- The characters begin questioning things that adults and other students accept without hesitation. When is it appropriate to challenge assumptions? When might it be difficult to do so?
- What obstacles stand in the way of the group's investigation? Which challenge would be the most difficult for you to overcome?
- Throughout the story, some characters feel unseen or underestimated. How can assumptions about people prevent us from recognizing their strengths?
- If you were part of the Odd Squad, what role would you play in the investigation? What unique strengths would you bring to the team?
- How has the theme of "Different Isn't Less" appeared in the story so far? Which moments best illustrate this idea?
- Based on the clues you've uncovered as a reader, what do you think is really happening at Arbour Middle School?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU READ

PART THREE: UNCOVERING THE TRUTH

As the mystery reaches its climax, Quinn and his friends must decide what they are willing to risk in order to expose the truth. The choices they make reveal important lessons about courage, identity, friendship, and the value of different ways of thinking. In this section, consider how the characters have grown and what message the story is sending about belonging, fairness, and standing up for what is right.

• As the truth begins to emerge, which clue or discovery surprised you the most? Why?

• Quinn and his friends face difficult decisions throughout the investigation. Which decision do you think required the most courage?

• How have the members of the Odd Squad changed since the beginning of the story? What experiences helped them grow?

• Why do you think the people behind the mystery believed their actions were justified? Do you agree with their reasoning? Why or why not?

• The story explores the idea that people who think differently are often underestimated. How does the ending challenge that belief?

• Which character demonstrated the greatest growth throughout the story? Support your answer with examples from the text.

• How did teamwork help the characters succeed when they could not have solved the mystery alone?

• What role does self-advocacy play in the story? When do the characters speak up for themselves or others?

• Throughout the book, characters are forced to decide whether to stay silent or take action. Why can speaking up sometimes feel difficult? What are the risks and rewards?

• How does the story encourage readers to think differently about intelligence, learning, and success?

• If you could ask one character a question after finishing the book, whom would you choose and what would you ask?

• The Odd Squad's motto is "Different Isn't Less." After reading the book, what does this phrase mean to you now?

• What message do you think the author hopes readers will remember long after they finish the story?

• If you were writing the next book in the series, what mystery or challenge would you want the Odd Squad to face next?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The mystery may be solved, but the ideas explored throughout The Odd Squad: Hidden in Plain Sight continue long after the final page. Use these questions to reflect on the story's characters, themes, and lessons. Consider how the experiences of Quinn, Harper, Luis, and the other members of the Odd Squad connect to your own life and community.

• Which character did you relate to most and why?

• What was the most important lesson you learned from the story?

• How did your understanding of the phrase "Different Isn't Less" change throughout the book?

• The members of the Odd Squad each have unique strengths. What are some of your own strengths that help you solve problems, learn, or connect with others?

• Why do you think belonging is such an important theme in the story?

• Have you ever felt different from the people around you? How did that experience help shape who you are today?

• The book shows that people often make assumptions about others. Why can assumptions be harmful? What can we do instead?

• How did Quinn's differences help him succeed in ways that others could not?

• What does the story teach us about friendship and teamwork?

• If you were a member of the Odd Squad, what role would you play? What strengths would you bring to the group?

• The characters learn that courage isn't always about being fearless. How do the characters demonstrate courage throughout the story?

• What is one way the book changed how you think about people who learn, communicate, or process information differently?

• If every student at Arbour Middle School truly embraced the idea that "Different Isn't Less," how might the school change?

• What is one action you can take to help someone feel seen, included, or valued in your school or community?

• If you could leave readers with one message after finishing this book, what would it be?

WRITING EXTENSION

Throughout The Odd Squad: Hidden in Plain Sight, Quinn and his friends discover that the qualities that make them different are often the same qualities that make them strong. As they work together to solve the mystery at Arbour Middle School, they learn the importance of self-advocacy, friendship, courage, and embracing their unique strengths.

Reflect on the statement: "Different Isn't Less." What do you think this phrase means?

Use examples from the story and your own experiences to explain how differences can become strengths. Consider how the characters in the book grew, overcame challenges, and helped one another because of their unique perspectives and abilities.

YOUR RESPONSE SHOULD:
✓ Explain what "Different Isn't Less" means to you
✓ Include at least two examples from the story
✓ Include a personal connection, observation, or experience
✓ Use details and evidence to support your ideas
✓ End with a lesson or message readers can take away

MAJOR THEMES & CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Explore the book's major themes and discover ways to connect them to meaningful classroom discussions and cross-curricular learning opportunities.

MAIN THEMES

The Odd Squad: Hidden in Plain Sight explores themes that encourage readers to think critically, build empathy, and celebrate different ways of thinking. While the story is filled with mystery and adventure, it also provides opportunities for deeper conversations about identity, belonging, friendship, and self-advocacy.

NEURODIVERSITY

Each member of the Odd Squad experiences the world differently. Throughout the story, readers see how different ways of learning, processing information, and solving problems can become valuable strengths. Students can explore how diverse perspectives help individuals and communities thrive.

BELONGING & ACCEPTANCE

Many of the characters struggle with feeling misunderstood or overlooked. As the story unfolds, readers see the importance of creating environments where everyone feels seen, valued, and accepted for who they are. This theme encourages discussions about inclusion, empathy, and community.

FRIENDSHIP & TEAMWORK

The Odd Squad succeeds because its members learn to trust one another and combine their unique strengths. Readers can examine the qualities that make strong friendships and explore how teamwork often leads to better outcomes than working alone.

CRITICAL THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

At its core, The Odd Squad is a mystery. The characters must gather evidence, evaluate information, identify patterns, and challenge assumptions in order to uncover the truth. Readers are encouraged to think critically and recognize the importance of asking questions.

SELF-ADVOCACY & COURAGE

Throughout the novel, characters learn to speak up for themselves and others, even when it feels uncomfortable or risky. Students can explore how self-advocacy, perseverance, and courage help people overcome obstacles and create positive change.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Find meaningful connections between The Odd Squad: Hidden in Plain Sight and your classroom curriculum through the activities and discussion ideas below.

LANGUAGE ARTS

- **Character Analysis:** Compare and contrast Quinn, Harper, and Luis. How do their unique strengths contribute to solving the mystery? How do the characters grow throughout the story?
- **Theme Analysis:** Analyze the phrase "Different Isn't Less." How does this idea develop throughout the novel? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- **Making Inferences:** Mysteries require readers to draw conclusions using clues and evidence. Track clues throughout the story and explain how they help uncover the truth.
- **Point of View:** How would the story change if it were told from another character's perspective? Rewrite a scene from the point of view of a different character.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

- **Understanding Differences:** Discuss how the characters' differences influence their experiences. How can understanding different perspectives strengthen a community?
- **Self-Advocacy:** Identify moments when characters speak up for themselves or others. Why is self-advocacy an important life skill?

STEM & TECHNOLOGY

- **Artificial Intelligence and Ethics:** Technology plays an important role in the story. Discuss the benefits and risks of using technology to make decisions about people. What responsibilities come with developing and using AI?
- **Pattern Recognition:** The characters rely on observation and pattern recognition to solve the mystery. Explore how pattern recognition is used in fields such as science, mathematics, technology, and engineering.

CIVICS & COMMUNITY

- **Fairness and Inclusion:** What responsibilities do schools and communities have to ensure everyone feels included and supported? How can individuals help create a culture of belonging?
- **Standing Up for What's Right:** The characters must decide whether to remain silent or take action. Discuss examples from history, literature, or current events where people demonstrated courage by speaking up against injustice.

BUILD YOUR OWN MYSTERY BOARD

Plan your own mystery using the template below. Then, gather clues, ask questions, and solve it!

MISSING



WHO OR WHAT IS MISSING?

1. THE MYSTERY

What is the mystery?
Who or what is at the center of the case?

2. THE SETTING

Where does your mystery take place?

3. THE SUSPECTS

Who might be involved?
List your suspects.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

4. THE CLUES

What clues might help solve the mystery?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

SKETCH IMPORTANT EVIDENCE



5. THE BIG QUESTIONS

What questions do you need to answer?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

6. YOUR THEORY

Who (or what) do you think is responsible?
Why do you think so? Explain your theory.

7. SOLVE THE CASE!

How does your mystery get solved?
What is the final clue or discovery that explains everything?

CASE CLOSED?

☐ YES!
☐ NOT YET...





Every great mystery starts with curiosity.
Ask questions. Follow the clues. Uncover the truth.

SUPERPOWER STRENGTHS

The Odd Squad knows that different doesn't mean less. It means you bring something important to the team.

ODD SQUAD DETECTIVE

Everyone has strengths.
Discover yours. Own them. Use them for good.

1. WHAT ARE STRENGTHS?

Strengths are the things you're good at, the qualities people appreciate about you, and the ways you make a difference.

List words that describe your strengths.

- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____
- ★ _____

2. MY TOP STRENGTHS

Choose your top 3 strengths and explain how each one helps you.

1. **STRENGTH:** _____
   HOW IT HELPS: _____
2. **STRENGTH:** _____
   HOW IT HELPS: _____
3. **STRENGTH:** _____
   HOW IT HELPS: _____

3. STRENGTHS IN ACTION

Think of a time you used one of your strengths to help solve a problem, help someone, or overcome a challenge.

What happened?

_____

_____

_____

Which strength did you use? _____

How did it make a difference?

_____

_____

4. HOW I HELP THE SQUAD

Imagine you are part of the Odd Squad.
What unique strengths do you bring to the team?
How would you help solve the mystery?



GOOD CLUES START WITH YOU.

5. DIFFERENT ISN'T LESS. IT'S POWERFUL.

What makes you different? How can that difference become your superpower?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Your strengths are clues.
Your differences are power.
You belong.
You matter.
You've got this!

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT CHALLENGE

The best detectives notice what others miss. Take a close look, trust your brain, and uncover the details!

Look closely at the image or scene provided by your teacher.
Use your observation skills to find the clues that are hidden in plain sight!

STEP 1: SCAN THE SCENE

Take a quiet moment to look at the image.
What do you notice right away?
List 5 things you see.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

STEP 2: LOOK DEEPER

Now, look closer. Search for details others might miss.
Check off the types of things you find in the scene.

- ☐ Hidden objects
- ☐ Unusual colors
- ☐ Small details
- ☐ Things out of place
- ☐ Patterns
- ☐ Clues or symbols
- ☐ Facial expressions
- ☐ Body language
- ☐ Written words
- ☐ Shadows or reflections
- ☐ Textures
- ☐ Other: _____

DETECTIVE TIP

Look...
Think...
Connect!

Slow down. Details tell stories.

Sometimes the smallest clue makes the biggest difference!

STEP 3: WHAT MIGHT IT MEAN?

Choose 3 details you found that seem important or interesting. Explain why you think they matter.

DETAIL 1: _____

DETAIL 2: _____

DETAIL 3: _____

STEP 4: MAKE CONNECTIONS

How might these details be connected?
What story could this scene be telling?

STEP 5: DETECTIVE CONCLUSION

Write a short conclusion about what you think is really going on.

REFLECTION

What strategy helped you the most today?

- ☐ Looking slowly
- ☐ Searching for patterns
- ☐ Thinking like a detective
- ☐ Asking questions
- ☐ Other: _____

ODD SQUAD DETECTIVE

GREAT DETECTIVES:

- ✓ Observe carefully
- ✓ Stay curious
- ✓ Never stop wondering



CLUES ARE EVERYWHERE. ★ SO ARE ANSWERS. ★

DIFFERENT ISN'T LESS POSTER

Create a classroom poster celebrating different ways of thinking.
Use words, drawings, and symbols to share your message!

IDEAS TO INCLUDE:

- ☆ What makes us unique
- ☆ Different strengths
- ☆ How we help each other
- ☆ Kind words
- ☆ A powerful message

YOUR POSTER SPACE

WORD BANK

Unique ★ Brave ★ Creative ★ Kind ★ Curious ★ Smart ★ Thoughtful
Strong ★ Helpful ★ Important ★ Valuable ★ Amazing

DIFFERENT MINDS. STRONGER TOGETHER. ★



ODD SQUAD DETECTIVE

EVERY STRENGTH MATTERS.
EVERY VOICE COUNTS.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Continue exploring themes of belonging, empathy, friendship, critical thinking, and neurodiversity through these recommended reads.

BOOKS THAT EXPLORE SIMILAR THEMES

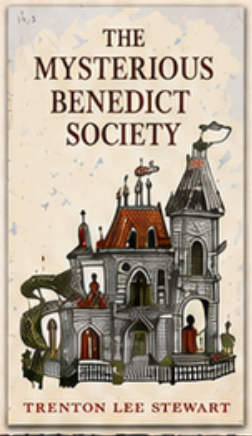
Fish in a Tree
By Lynda Mullaly Hunt



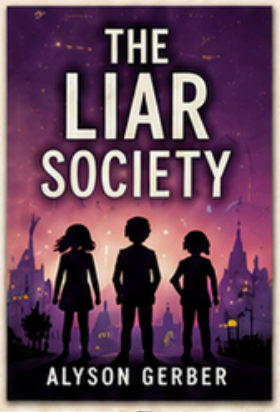
Show Us Who You Are
By Elle McNicoll



The Mysterious Benedict Society
By Trenton Lee Stewart



The Liar Society
By Alyson Gerber



Wonder
By R.J. Palacio



Masterminds
By Gordon Korman



DISCUSSION EXTENSION

After reading one of these books:

- What themes connect to The Odd Squad?
- How are the main characters similar or different?
- Which book's message resonated with you most?
- What can we learn from people who see the world differently?

ODD SQUAD DETECTIVE

DIFFERENT MINDS. ★ STRONGER TOGETHER. ★ SOLVING MYSTERIES. ★ CHANGING THE WORLD.