

These notes are for:

- 10+yrs
- Upper Primary, Lower Secondary

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- History

Example of:

- Junior Fiction
- Historical Fiction

Experience of:

- Reflecting on text
- Shared reading/viewing
- Reading & Writing
- Speaking & Listening
- Viewing & Creating
- Research

Values addressed:

- Doing Your Best
- Honesty and Trustworthiness

Themes:

- Family
- Mystery
- Detectives
- Victorian London
- Spiritualism

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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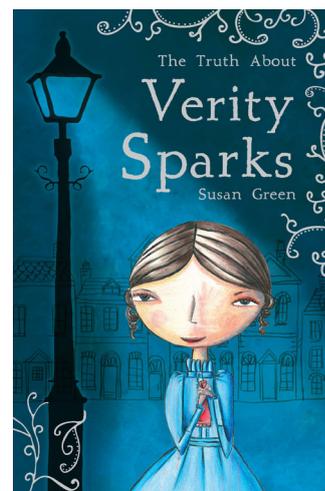
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The Truth About Verity Sparks

The Truth About Verity Sparks

Written by: Susan Green
 ISBN: 9781921720277
 ARRP: \$16.95
 NZRRP: \$18.99
 Pages: 304
 August 2011



Outline:

Verity Sparks is good at finding lost things, but will she be able to uncover the truth about her own past?

Verity Sparks is a thirteen-year-old orphan working as a milliner in Victorian London. But Verity is no ordinary girl – she has an almost perfect memory and possesses the talent of Teleagtivism. She can easily find things that are lost! When Verity is wrongly accused of theft and dismissed from her job, she goes to live with the Plushes – a slightly bohemian family who run a Confidential Inquiry Agency. Verity helps them solve cases and slowly becomes one of the family. But patches of the truth about her past begin to surface, along with the special talent that Professor Plush is helping her explore. Who were her real parents? Is she the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter? Who is sending poison pen letters about Verity to the Plushes? Who doesn't want them to learn the truth about Verity Sparks? An adventure/mystery with a dash of the supernatural thrown in, *The Truth About Verity Sparks* is packed with chases through the dark alleys of London, seances in high-class dining rooms, pet pythons named Anthony and Cleopatra, murdered opera singers and much, much more.

Author Information:

Susan Green grew up by the beach and in country Victoria. She always wanted to write and illustrate books, but only put away her art studies and teaching to concentrate on writing when she won a short story competition. She has published several children's books, but *The Truth About Verity Sparks* is her first book with Walker Books Australia.

How to use these notes:

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the text *The Truth About Verity Sparks*. Multiple copies of the text are recommended for shared reading. This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes were created by Jenny Wood

Susan Green's inspiration for *The Truth About Verity Sparks*:

"My inspiration for Verity came quite suddenly.

I was walking around one of the inner suburbs of Melbourne one day. The Victorian-era houses and buildings reminded me of London, and suddenly the character of Verity – a little girl alone in a big city – popped into my head. She was sharp-witted and funny, honest and brave, and very, very persistent; even though I was in the middle of another book at the time, Verity just kept bugging me until I gave in and wrote her story."

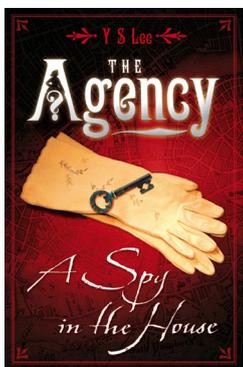
Classroom Ideas for *The Truth About Verity Sparks*:**ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Before reading *The Truth About Verity Sparks* look at the front and back covers. What do you think the story will be about based only on these clues? Write a synopsis of the story based on your own ideas of what the story is about.
- On page 23, SP explains that "the name Verity ... comes from the Latin *veritas*, and it means 'truth.'" Why do you think the name Verity is suitable for both the main character and the title of the book?
- Write down what you think the term genre means. Draw a mind map of all the different words and ideas associated with genre.
- From your own research into genre, online and in your library, what do you think the conventions of the following genres are:
 - mystery
 - historical fiction
 - paranormal fiction
- How do each of the three genres that *The Truth About Verity Sparks* touches upon (mystery, historical fiction, and paranormal fiction) intersect in the novel? Do the genres work well together or do they clash? Do you think having multiple genres confuses the reader's expectations? Is this a good thing?
- On page 65, the Professor calls Verity a telegativist because of her ability to see objects and find them. What other magical abilities can you imagine? How would they work? What would you call the ability?
- *The Truth About Verity Sparks* touches on many aspects of Victorian English life including class systems, the city of London, poverty and slums, art and culture, travel, scientific inquiry, justice systems, working conditions and manners. Choose one of these areas to research and write a report about what life in Victorian England was like in respect to this aspect.
- At several times throughout the novel Verity is expected to have a female chaperone with her, yet at other times she is walking around London alone. Make a list of all the situations where Verity is expected to be chaperoned, and a list of the situations where Verity is alone in her adventures. Do you think the expectation of a chaperone is tied to class? How? Why would a girl from a middle or upper class family be expected to be chaperoned? Why do you think girls and young women today are no longer expected to be chaperoned?

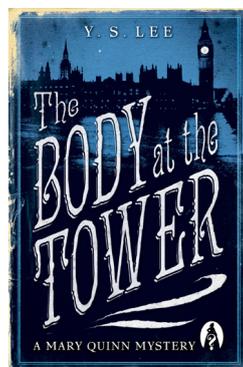


- Draw a comic strip of the story of *The Truth About Verity Sparks* focusing on the main characters and plot events.
- Research spiritualism in Victorian England online and in your library. What were the popular beliefs held about communicating with the spirits of the dead? How are these beliefs portrayed in *Verity Sparks*? How do you think these scenes fit in with the rest of the novel?
- On page 118, Mrs Morcom states “it is unusual for a woman to earn her own living as I do.” Research women and gender roles in Victorian England. What was a woman’s social and legal status? What makes Mrs Morcom such an unusual woman for the period?
- What are the steps that the Confidential Inquiry Agency takes to solve a mystery? Draw a flow chart plotting each step they take to solve each mystery in the book. Write your own mystery short story. Before you start writing, plot out how you would go about solving the mystery. What do you need to learn to solve it, and what do you need to do in order to obtain the information you need?
- James Tissot and his wife Kathleen were real people in Victorian England. Research them online and in your library. Who were they and what did they do? How does using real people in a work of fiction impact on the novel and how you perceive it?
- Write the rest of the article referred to on page 239. What details do you know from the novel and what will you need to add? Design your newspaper article so that it would resemble an actual article from an English newspaper in the Victorian period.
- Research and draw your family tree going back at least three generations.
- Do a botanical drawing of an Australian native plant. Take in the minute details of the plant and label all of its parts.
- Write a review of *The Truth About Verity Sparks*. Think about the different forms a book review can take and choose one style to base your review on eg. newspaper review, online blog review, book report etc.

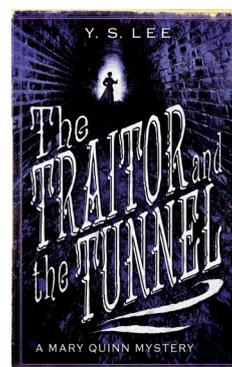
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