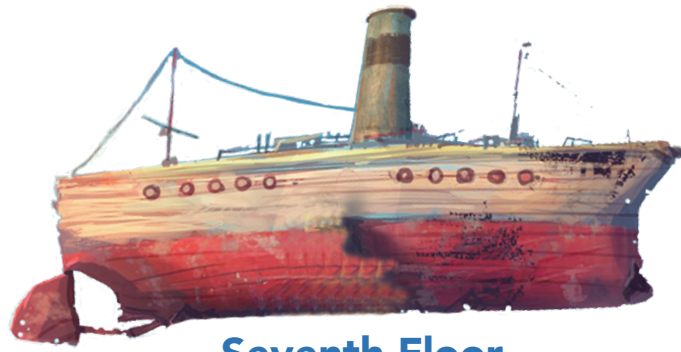


## Curriculum Guide



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Other Middle-Grade Adventures by Keir Graff!

To invite Keir Graff to your school  
for a virtual visit, email  
[keir@keirgraff.com](mailto:keir@keirgraff.com)



## Common Core Connections: Grades 3-6

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1](#)

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3](#)

Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3](#)

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9](#)

Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2](#)

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3](#)

Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7](#)

Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#)

Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9](#)

Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.



## Discussion Starters

### *Chapters 1–3*

- Explain why Brian has to go stay with Uncle Gary, Aunt Jenny, and Nora for the summer.
- Describe Brian's life at Uncle Gary's house.
- Compare Brian's idea of a great summer to Uncle Gary's idea of a great summer.

### Chapter 1

“Of all the places I could have been sentenced to spend the summer—including a desert, jail, the moon, and outer space—my absolute last pick would have been Uncle Gary's house in Boring, Illinois.” (pp. 7–8)

## Chapter 2

“*Well Brian, I said to myself, It looks like you’re a team of one.*”  
(p. 13)

“I knew I was lost. I was a city kid. To me, no two street corners looked alike, but every tree looked pretty much the same. And there were a lot more trees than street corners.” (p. 16)

## Chapter 3

“I didn’t want to say or do anything that would make it harder to go back into the woods because, even if they were filled with hunters and wild animals, they were the only thing that kept Boring from completely living up to its name.” (p. 22)

“Only a few days ago, everything in my life was perfectly normal. Tonight, I was lying in a strange bed, wondering how people who were related to each other could be so different.” (p. 28)





## Chapters 4–6

- What is Uncle Gary's big dream for his "Summer's Cool" computer program? What does Brian think about "Summer's Cool"?
- What does Nora think about Brian at first?
- Compare Brian, Nora, and Cosmo. In what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?

### Chapter 4

"You see, Brian, it's now possible for kids to learn everything they need to know about the world right here, on a screen." (p. 30)

"I wondered why my cousin was the way she was. If I was an only child, I would have been happy to have someone my age around. Maybe she was so used to spending all her time with adults that she had forgotten how to be a kid." (p. 31)

## Chapter 5

“I debated for a second—*go home or go inside?*—but only for a second. *Go inside* was always going to win. I shrugged at Nora, pushed the door open wide, and stepped into the house.

‘Hello?’ I called. ‘Is anybody home?’” (p. 43)

## Chapter 6

“Adventuring isn’t like working in an office, where you know what’s going to happen every day.” (p. 53)

“I smiled at Nora, but she just stared at me with cold reptilian eyes. She wasn’t used to getting outthought, especially by me.” (p. 55)





## Chapters 7–9

- Compare how Nora seems to feel about Brian to how she seems to feel about Cosmo. Why does she treat the two boys differently?
- What kind of a person is Cosmo's Uncle Montague? What are Montague's special talents?
- Why do Uncle Gary and Aunt Jenny dislike the van Dashes?

### Chapter 7

“If I wasn’t so nervous about the inch-long stingers of giant Amazonian wasps, I might have been enjoying myself. I’d rather play soccer than read any day, but the van Dash family library wasn’t like any library I’d seen before.” (p. 59)

### Chapter 8

“I didn’t think swarms of regular-sized wasps were good, and swarms of giant Amazonian wasps were especially not good. On the other hand, I was last in line, and it made me feel better knowing the wasps would probably sting Nora first.” (p. 69)

## Chapter 9

“I hate it when parents act like they’re lawyers. We all knew that Nora and I were in trouble, but instead of just handing out the punishment, he had to walk us through each step like he was convincing the jury we were guilty.” (p. 81)

“I was sorry. Sorry my dad’s dream was coming true, sorry I’d been born into a family with an uncle Gary in it, sorry Illinois even existed so there could be a place like Boring.” (p. 83)





## Chapters 10–12

- What does Brian learn about Matchstick Castle when he finally reads the letter he had accidentally taken from the Castle?
- Describe how Brian feels about Nora at the beginning of the book, and then how his feelings are slowly changing as they work together to help the van Dashes.
- How does Nora describe Uncle Kingsley's book?

### Chapter 10

“If your teacher only exists on a computer, you can’t exactly have class without the computer. I wanted to jump up on the table and yell ‘Hallelujah!’ before backflipping onto the carpet. Instead, I settled for a subtle fist pump and a quiet ‘Yes!’” (pp. 89–90)

“I knew that you were never, ever supposed to open anyone else’s mail—but what if the envelope was already open?” (pp. 94–95)

## Chapter 11

“As a kid, Nora was completely hopeless. She had no idea that the real purpose of life was to *live*—to find out about the world and have adventures. If she wasn’t careful, she was going to end up just like her dad.” (p. 100)

“Listen, Nora. I know you hate breaking the rules, but there are times to follow rules, and times to break them.” (p. 101)

“... maybe it’s time you stopped writing about adventures and had one yourself.” (p. 101)

## Chapter 12

“... they’re grown-ups. Grown-ups know how to solve problems.’

I thought about Dashiell van Dash, Cosmo’s dad, exploring the Amazon jungle and bringing back a crate full of giant deadly wasps. Then I thought about Uncle Gary and his solution for learning.

‘Sometimes I think they create more problems than they solve.’” (p. 108)



## Chapters 13–15

- Describe Roald van Dash and Ivar van Dash. What special talents do they have?
- Why are all the van Dashes chasing a pigeon?
- If you were a part of the van Dash family, would you have rescue Uncle Kingsley first, or would you try to save the house first?

## Chapter 14

“‘He must be very brave,’ said Nora, ‘Or else not very well rested.’”  
(p. 118)

“If Cosmo went to my school, he would have been one of the coolest kids there. But being the only kid living with so many grown-ups made him act a little bit grown-up, too. In that way, I guess he was similar to Nora—maybe that was why she liked him so much.” (pp. 120–121)

“‘. . . van Dashes aren’t quitters. Our family motto is ‘Do great things and let others watch.’ Unfortunately, people aren’t watching as much as they used to.’” (p. 122)

## Chapter 15

“Children can do much more than grown-ups give them credit for. Just because you’re smaller than us, it doesn't mean you can’t be clever, brave, and resourceful.” (p. 132)





## Chapters 16–18

- Describe what Brian, Nora, and Cosmo find as they climb higher in Matchstick Castle.
- Explain what Cosmo means when he says that the “Matchstick Castle isn’t an ordinary house.”
- Where do they find Uncle Kingsley?

### Chapter 16

“‘He was a *financial* failure,’ Cosmo corrected me. ‘Which isn’t the same thing as a *failure* failure.’” (p. 140)

### Chapter 17

“‘Houses don’t talk,’ stated Nora.

‘You’re right.’ I agreed. ‘But the Matchstick Castle isn’t an ordinary house.’” (p. 153)

## Chapter 18

“So what is the next part of the plan?’ asked Uncle Kingsley eagerly.

‘I’m . . . not sure. Do you have any ideas?’

‘Well, just now I had an idea for a marvelous book about three daring young people who rescue grown-ups from frightening situations.’

‘I meant ideas for getting us back down.’” (p. 162)





## Chapters 19–21

- In what ways does Nora feel a strong connection with Uncle Kingsley?
- Describe how Uncle Kingsley stayed alive while he was trapped in the Castle.
- Explain how the van Dashes plan to save their house.

### Chapter 19

“The life of an author is not easy, but if the page calls to you, you must answer—no matter where the story leads,’ Kingsley told her as we started to descend again. ‘And you’re not truly a writer until you have readers.’” (p. 170)

### Chapter 20

*“I don’t have any easy answers, but it’s always important to stand up for what you believe in—and especially your friends. It’s only hard if you don’t try.*

*And I believe in YOU.*

*Love,*

*Dad”* (pp. 180–181)

“I wondered if all the people who lived in Boring were actually boring, or if I was just lucky enough to be related to the only ones who really were.” (p. 183)



## Chapters 22–24

- Why do the van Dashes send Brian down into City Hall first?
- Describe how the van Dashes deal with challenges.
- What do the van Dashes decide to do to try to save their home? How do Nora and Brian react to the van Dash plan?

### Chapter 22

“I was glad I wasn’t a bureaucrat. If I couldn’t play professional soccer, I’d want to be an explorer like Dashiell van Dash—even if no one ever heard of me.” (p. 196)

### Chapter 23

“‘He’s a madman,’ he breathed, somehow sounding disgusted and fascinated at the same time.

I agreed with him. Who else would spend their Friday night planning to destroy someone else’s home?” (p. 207)

## Chapter 24

“All I could think about was Cosmo’s family. Even though their family had built the house and lived in it practically forever, they were about to become homeless because some bureaucrat thought the house wasn’t safe. . . . Instead of tearing it down, they should have made it a national monument or something.” (p. 214)

“Dashiell stood slowly, shaking his head. ‘Here we are debating all sorts of skullduggery, and in walks a boy with a man’s courage. He’s right! Have the van Dashes gotten where they are today by kidnapping and poison? Of course not!’” (pp. 220–221)





## Chapters 25–27

- How does Uncle Ivar prepare the house for battle?
- How does Nora surprise Brian when they are both trying to find a way to get to Matchstick Castle as fast as possible?
- List the ways the van Dashes try to scare or chase off William White.
- How does William White trick the van Dashes into leaving the house?

### Chapter 25

“The only problem with chaos is that it can be a wee bit unpredictable.” (p. 227)

### Chapter 26

“Nora! Brian! I order you to leave that house!” said Uncle Gary through the bullhorn.

Aunt Jenny took it from him. ‘Please—we don’t want to see you hurt.’

I lowered my binoculars. Nora looked like she didn’t know what to do. I didn’t blame her. If my mom was still around, I would have had a hard time disobeying her, too.” (p. 239)

“Welcome back, my love,’ said Dashiell.  
‘Thank you, darling,’ said Anthea. ‘What’s going on here?’  
He leaned over and gave her a peck on the cheek.  
‘Bureaucracy.’  
‘Oh bother,’ she said. ‘If I’d known that, I might have stayed  
in Borneo.’ (p. 244)

## Chapter 27

“Is your entire family present?’ he asked.  
‘It is.’  
The bureaucrat smiled like a big brother who just grabbed  
the last piece of beef jerky. He nodded at Steve, who was standing  
behind the van Dashes. The foreman raised his arm, and the  
crane’s engine fired. The wrecking ball began to rise.”  
(pp. 249–250)

“There was a sound like a thousand garbage trucks falling off  
a cliff into a parking lot. The building swayed, dust fell from the  
rafters, and we all bent our knees and put out our arms for  
balance as the floor rose and fell like a cresting wave.  
‘Cowabunga!’ yelled Cosmo.” (p. 255)



## Chapters 28–29

- Describe what causes a huge hole to open up under the bulldozers. Which van Dash Uncle causes this to happen and HOW?
- Why is William White so determined to tear down Matchstick Castle? What does he want to build there instead?
- Describe how Brian and Nora feel about each other at the end of the book. How have they changed? Have any other characters changed?

### Chapter 28

“I didn’t blame them for being confused. Sometimes, when you see something strange, it takes a little while to believe your eyes are telling the truth.” (pp. 256–257)

“The bureaucrat turned as pale as his name. His lips made an *O* like a goldfish, and I almost expected to see him blow bubbles. When he finally said something, it was in a croaking voice.

‘Safe!’ he said. ‘I was only trying to keep everyone safe . . . I had to knock the house down so nobody would get hurt!’” (p. 264)

## Chapter 29

“‘We had a council to discuss it,’ Cosmo told me. ‘Dad said that since we were doing great things even when nobody was paying attention, maybe ‘Do great things and let others watch’ is a little out of date. Maybe it should be ‘Do great things, even if no one is watching.’” (p. 270)

“Have you ever felt so happy and relieved that you didn’t know what to say and the feelings all filled you up until you could have almost barfed with joy?

That’s how I felt.” (p. 275)

“The gold coin was just like the Matchstick Castle—it was proof you could find amazing things in places you never expected.”  
(p. 276)



# Activity Trio

## "Your Street" Castle

- Activity** Using imagination and inspiration from *The Matchstick Castle*, create your own castle that reflects your family, your culture, your language, your history, your likes—everything and anything that YOU are!
- Options**
1. Use a large piece of paper, poster board, or cardboard. On one side draw the FRONT of your castle. On the other side create the INSIDE of your castle.
  2. For a BIG PROJECT, create your castle out of recycleable/reusable items from around your house.

## van Dash Family Album

- Activity** Paying close attention to the descriptions of each member of the van Dash family, create a van Dash family album. Include descriptions of each family member's special talents.
- Options**
1. Draw each member of the van Dash family as a head-to-toe picture, or just draw the shoulders and head.
  2. Dress up like each member of the van Dash family and take a picture of yourself as each family member to create your van Dash family album.
  3. Make your van Dash family album into a booklet or create one big picture that includes all the family members.

**Links** Whole body printable outline: <http://cliparts.co/clipart/3187142>

Head and shoulders printable outline:  
<http://clipart-library.com/clipart/pc5rEoqLi.htm>

## Map It Out

### Activity

Use the world map as you read *The Matchstick Castle* to draw a circle in each place around the world where members of the van Dash family have had adventures. Make sure you write down the name of the family member.

### Options

1. You can use the attached map or draw one of your own.
2. Use online maps of Illinois to pick a spot where Boring, Illinois would be if it were a real place. Then add the Matchstick Castle to your map as the starting point of all the van Dash family adventures!

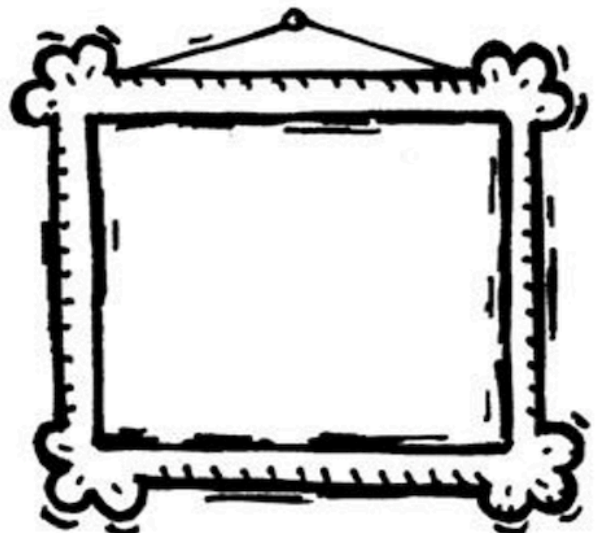
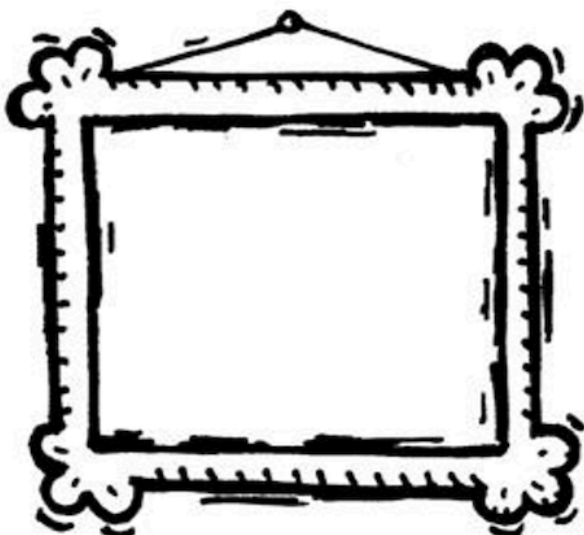
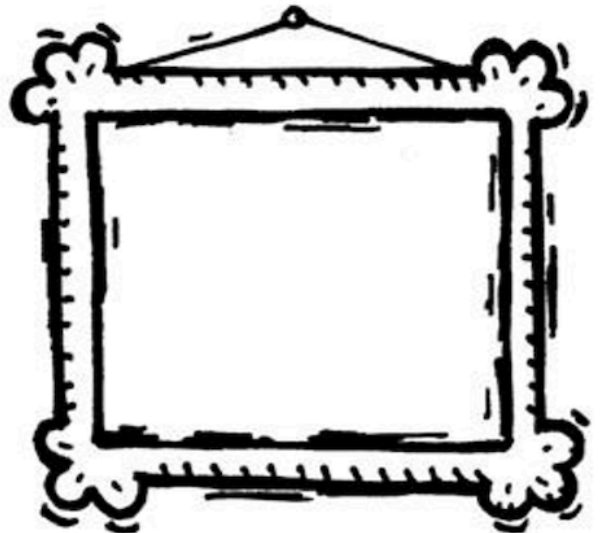
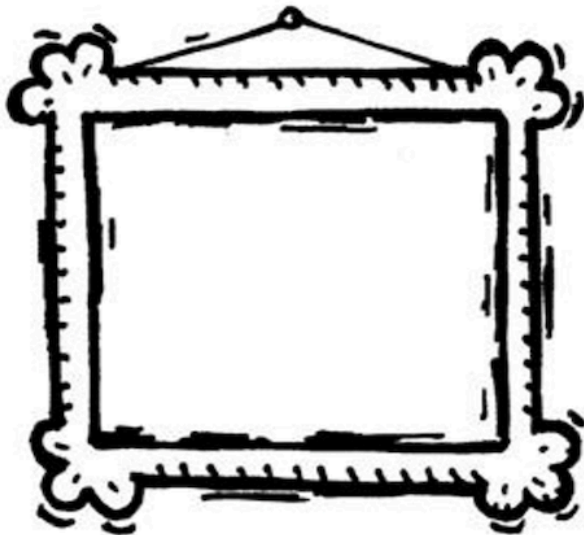
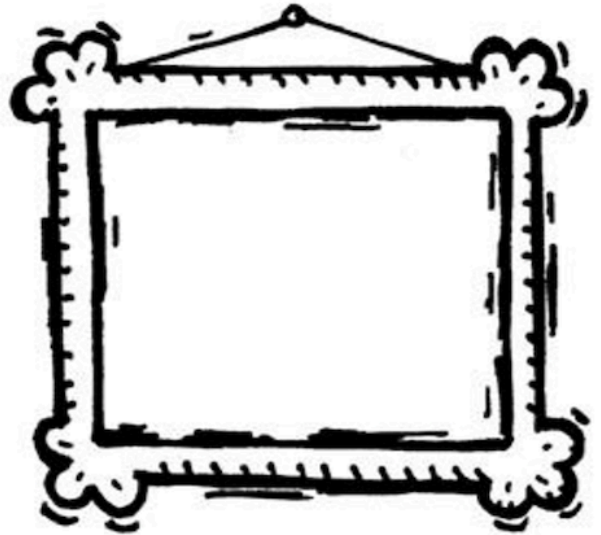
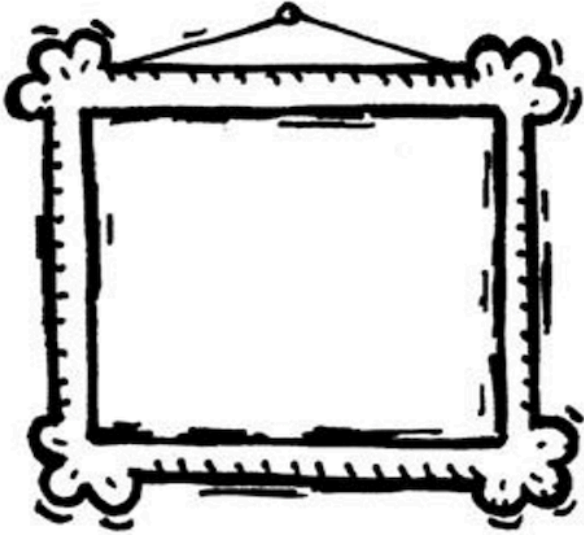
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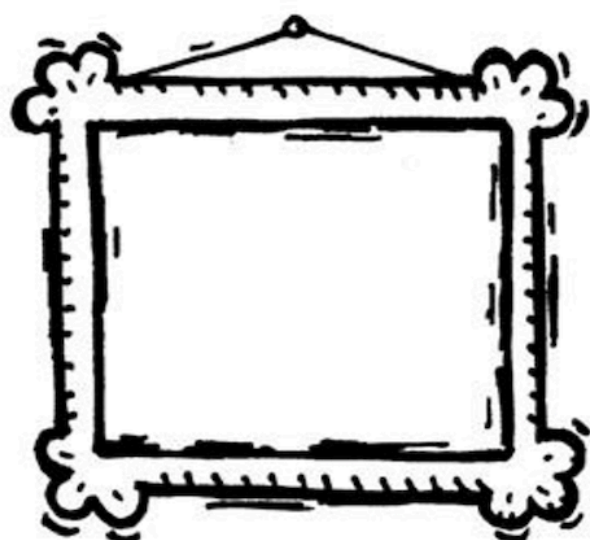
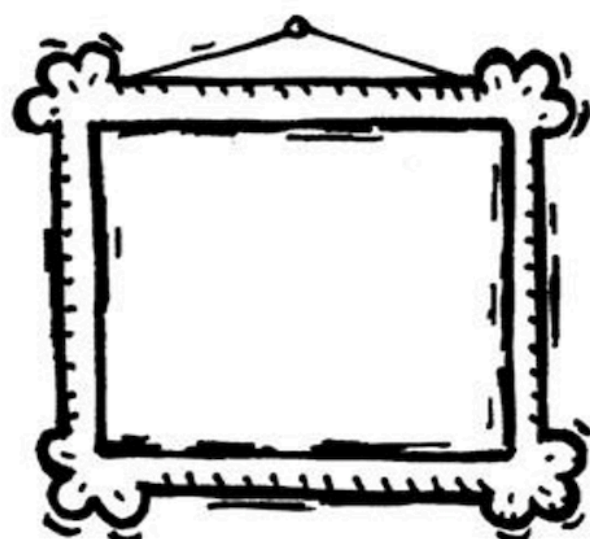
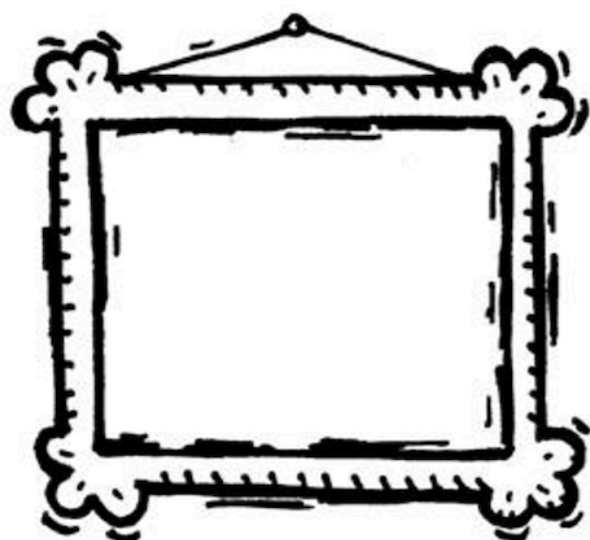
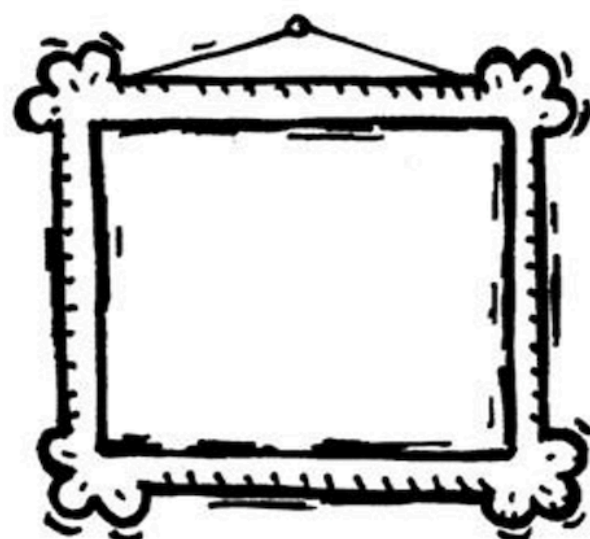
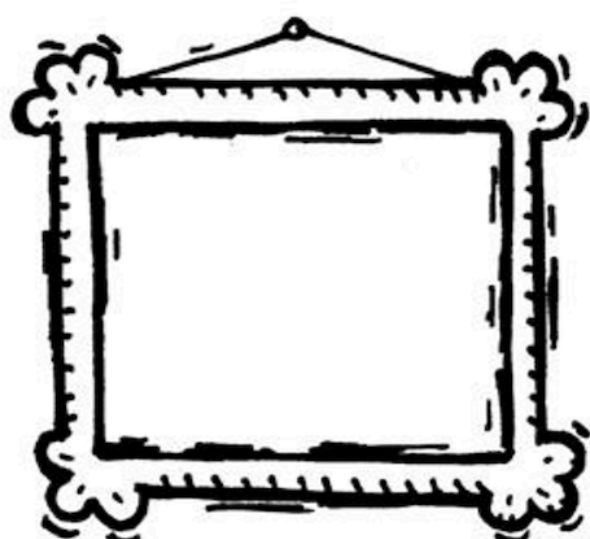
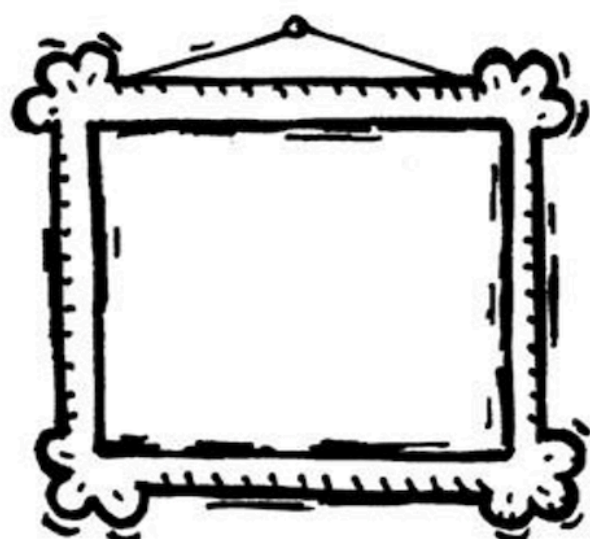
World map, labeled with countries: <https://bit.ly/34qqMbY>

Printable black-and-white world map:

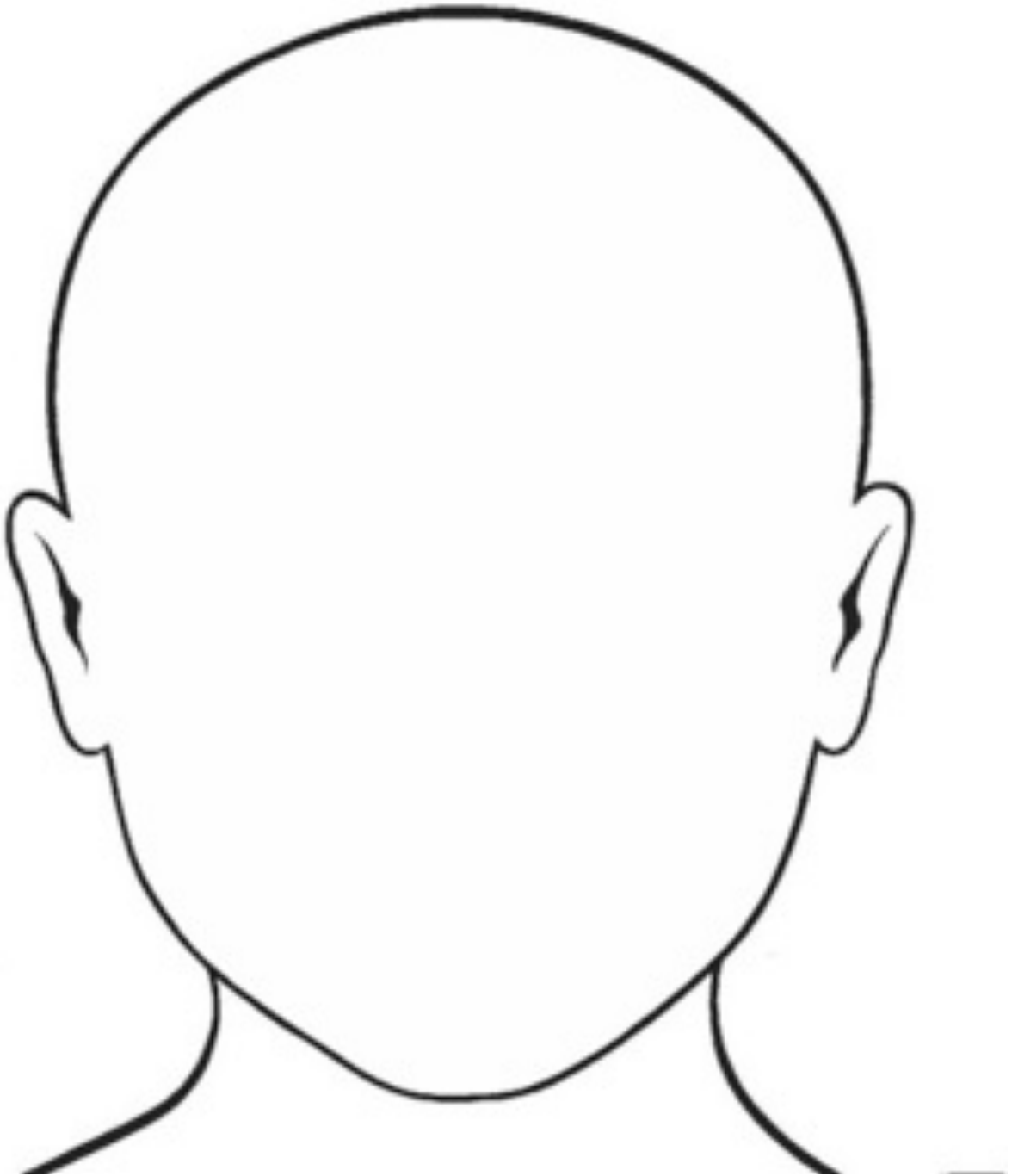
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## van Dash Family Album

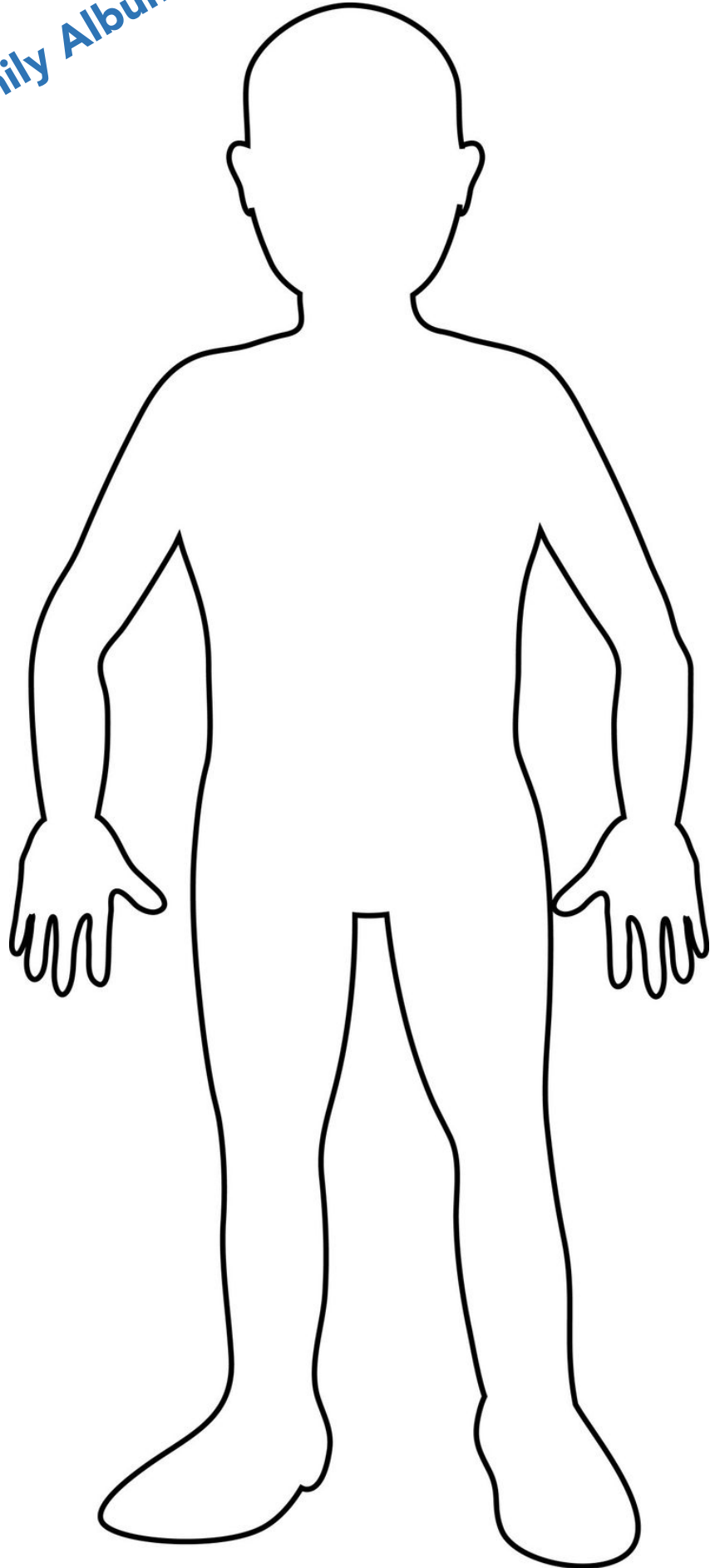




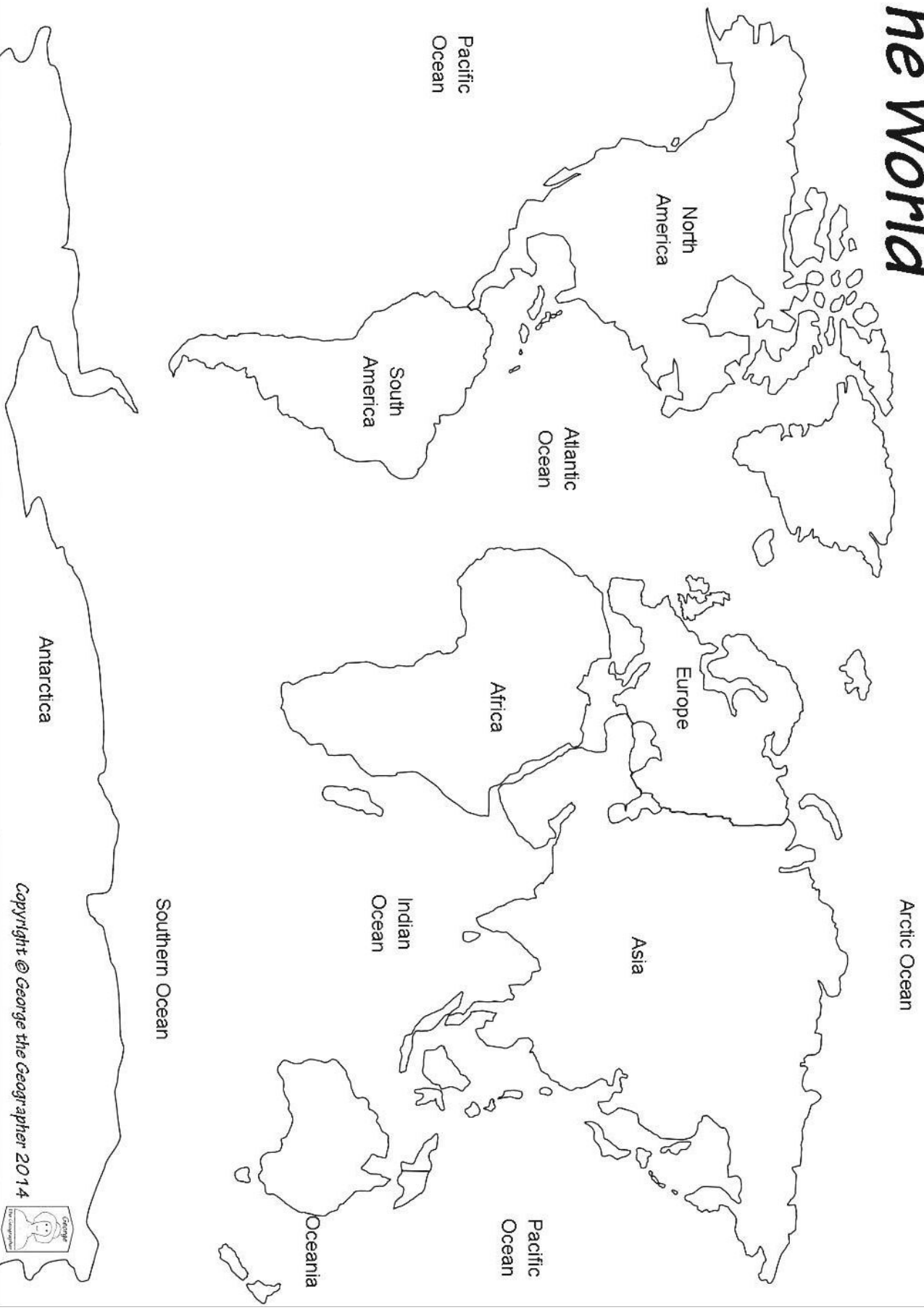
## van Dash Family Album



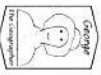
van Dash Family Album



# The World



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## Writing Prompts



Compare your experiences being taught online to being taught in person in a classroom. What are the **CHALLENGES** of each way of learning? What are the **BENEFITS** of each way of learning?

What can or should people do if rules and laws are **UNFAIR**?

Compare a **BORING** life to a life filled with **ADVENTURE**. Are there times when boredom is good? Are there times when adventure is difficult?

If you were offered the chance to go on an adventure hike for two weeks, and could only bring what you could fit in a **backpack**, what would you take with you?

When you feel **FEAR**, what are some things you do to help you feel better?

# Online Resources

## Unusual Homes

The van Dashes' castle is an amazing, exciting, and sometimes dangerous place to live. While the Matchstick Castle might not be a real-life place you can see or visit, there are many unusual houses that really do exist!

Take a look at a few examples before dreaming up and drawing your own uniquely amazing fantasy home!

Houses: <https://www.zillow.com/blog/unique-homes/>

Castles:

<https://designrshub.com/2012/12/modern-and-medieval-castle-designs.html>

## Real-Life Adventurers

Cosmo's whole family is made up of people who live for adventure—and they aren't the only ones! Many people throughout history have headed out into the world hoping to experience new and exciting things.

Explore some videos of current adventurers, and think about what makes an adventure an ADVENTURE. Do adventures need to be big to be exciting?

Adventurers: <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/videos/adventures-in-exploration/>

## Amazing Mazes

One of the first things Brian and Nora learn about the Matchstick Castle is how easy it is to get LOST inside it! The many rooms, floors, hidden passageways, and other secrets makes the Matchstick Castle the best maze ever!

People have been creating—and getting lost in—mazes and labyrinths for over 4000 years. Like the Matchstick Castle, mazes and labyrinths can be exciting, frustrating adventures.

A familiar kind of maze that many people enjoy are cornfield mazes that start opening up in October. Farmers grow fields of corn and then cut in paths designed to get people very lost.

What kinds of mazes have you experienced? What kind of maze or labyrinth could you possibly BUILD?

Mazes: <https://www.rd.com/list/impressive-mazes/>

Labyrinths: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/walk-worlds-meditative-labyrinths-180957823/>

### **Marvelous Virtual Museums**

When Brian and Nora step into the Matchstick Castle, they feel like they've entered a wild and crazy museum: they are surrounded by all the amazing things the van Dash family adventurers have brought back from their travels.

Museums give us a way to see into the past, to understand our world and ourselves better, and even to take a peek into the future.

Even if it isn't always possible to go to a museum in person, there are MANY wonderful museums that have created virtual, online tours. Try out a few virtual museum trips. Maybe you'll get inspired to create your own museum!

<https://www.purewow.com/family/virtual-museum-tours-for-kids>

<https://www.weareteachers.com/virtual-museum-tours/>



## Q&A with the Author Keir Graff

### ***What kinds of books do you write?***

I write funny, fantastical novels for readers who love adventures!

### ***What are your favorite things to write about?***

I am inspired by seeing unusual homes and imagining the people and stories inside. In *The Tiny Mansion*, Dagmar is smooshed into a tiny house with her whole family. In *The Phantom Tower*, identical twins Colm and Mal move into a creepy old apartment building that has a curse on it—and its own ghostly twin. And in *The Matchstick Castle*, Brian and his cousin Nora discover a HUGE and dangerously dilapidated wooden house that is home to a forgotten family of adventurers.

### ***What is your own home like?***

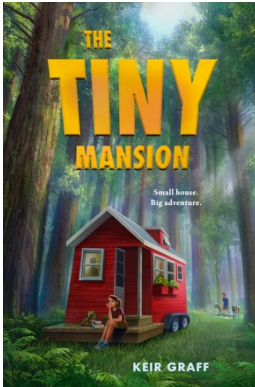
I live in the creepy old apartment building that inspired me to write *The Phantom Tower*! (You can even find a floor plan to my apartment in the front of that book.)

### ***Where are you from?***

I grew up in Montana, which is why I love forests so much. Now I live in Chicago, which has forests of buildings, not trees!

Find answers to more questions at [www.keirgraff.com/about/qak](http://www.keirgraff.com/about/qak)

## Middle-Grade Books by Keir Graff



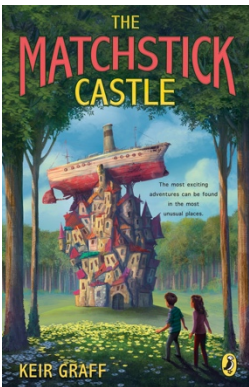
### The Tiny Mansion

After a sudden financial setback, Dagmar's family is evicted from their apartment and forced to spend the summer crowded into a tiny house under the towering redwoods of Northern California.



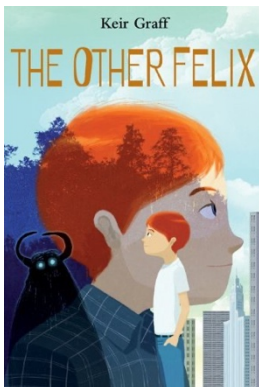
### The Phantom Tower

Identical twins Colm and Mal move to Chicago for a fresh start after their dad's death, only to discover their new building has a curse on it—and a ghostly twin of its own.



### The Matchstick Castle

Brian's summer in Boring, Illinois, is just as bad as it sounds until he gets lost in the woods and discovers a huge, dangerously dilapidated wooden house that is home to a family of explorers.



### The Other Felix

When Felix falls asleep, monsters chase him, and they're getting closer every night. Then he meets a boy who looks just like him and knows how to fight the monsters.

Learn more at [www.keirgraff.com/books-for-kids](http://www.keirgraff.com/books-for-kids)



# **The Matchstick Castle**

Curriculum Guide

2020

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