



Curriculum Guide



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Other Middle Grade Adventures by Keir Graff!

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Common Core Connections: Grades 3–6

3rd 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.

4th 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.

5th 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).

6th 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

Chapter 1

“The first time I saw Brunhild Towers was the day we moved in. Even though it wasn’t that long ago, I saw a lot of things differently back then. I thought old people were boring. I thought learning history was a good way to fall asleep. I thought dying was simple.” (p. 1)

How do Colm and Mal feel about moving to Chicago?

“I know what you’re thinking: I’m crazy, because you can’t talk to dead people. But you’re wrong. You *can* talk to them. You’re only crazy if you expect them to answer you.” (p. 3)

Why are Colm, Mal, and their mom moving?

Why do you think their mom never talks about money?

Chapter 2

“Lots of twins have reported unusual psychic connections, from being able to read each other’s minds and finish each other’s sentences to just knowing how the other one is feeling. I knew Mal and I could have this power, too, if he stopped being so uptight about it and let me read his mind. But he kept it zipped up like a winter coat.” (p. 10)

In which ways are Colm and Mal similar? In which ways are they different?

Why doesn’t Brunhild Tower have an elevator button for the 13th floor?

“I’m not afraid of unlucky numbers, but I still think there are a lot of things we don’t know, if you know what I mean.” (p. 14)

Chapter 3

“Old buildings are full of surprises.” (p. 17)

Describe Colm and Mal’s new apartment.

Why does Colm have trouble falling asleep during their first night in their new apartment?

“Mal may be scientific and rational, but I’d rather be a little superstitious. I don’t believe in vampires and werewolves and stuff like that, but it might be nice if ghosts existed. That way, Dad could always be with me—haunting me in a good way—even if I forgot him.” (p. 22)

Why does Colm keep his Dad's cell phone?

Chapter 4

What is in the cardboard box that Mal finds inside his closet?

What does Colm hear when he steps into the closet of the extra room near the kitchen? Where does he think the sounds are coming from?

“Everyone thinks identical twins are, well, identical. But even though Mal and I look the same, we're different in lots of ways. And the biggest way we're different is that Mal loves school.”
(p. 27)

Who is Professor Parker and what does he look like?

“Some people just don't like to live in older buildings like this.’
“On the other hand,’ added the Professor, stroking his beard like it was a pet, ‘some people find it impossible to leave. I hope you'll be happy here.’” (pp. 30-31)

Why does Professor Parker give Colm the creeps?

“I glanced at the control panel and saw the 14 button wink out as we arrived at our floor. But I was taking off my shoes in the apartment before I realized what else I had seen.

“A button for 13.” (p. 32)

Chapter 5

What is “Malandia” and what is Mal adding to it?

“If you want to see what a building is like, look around,’ I told Mal.” (p. 35)

What do Colm and Mal find in apartment 1403?

“Do you think the other empty apartments are unlocked, too?’ he asked.

“This was not the Mal I knew. I was tempted to respond with another question: *Who are you, and what have you done with my brother?* Instead, I said, ‘You never know until you try.’” (p. 37)

What happens when they try to get into apartment 1701?

Chapter 6

Describe the Princess and her apartment.

“Mal and Colm McShane,’ she said, ‘You must not come at lunchtime again. I don’t eat lunch. Een fact, you should stay at home during this hour. Eet ees far healthier.’” (p. 46)

Suggest a possible reason why the Princess wouldn’t want them to visit around lunchtime.

Chapter 7

Why do Colm and Mal think Tamika is strange?

Why is their mom crying as she makes dinner?

“There had to be something else. Some other place dead people went. Something that explained those creepy feelings I had that we weren’t alone.” (p. 56)

Chapter 8

When Colm and Mal get back in the elevator after exploring Brunhild Tower, what do they see?

Describe what Colm and Mal see when the elevator opens.

“The thing that makes Mal different from most kids is that, with most kids, if you told them Santa Claus was real, they’d be psyched. But Mal would be terrified because it wasn’t something he could explain with facts. I was scared, too, but I was also excited. Maybe ghosts *were* real.” (p. 63)

Chapter 9

Is Tamika actually following Colm and Mal, or is she just at the park to read her book?

“After Dad died, things were pretty messed up—I guess you could say I was pretty messed up. I did a lot of stuff without knowing why I was doing it, and one of the biggest things I did was tell lies So you can see why I couldn’t tell Mom that our building had a floor that magically appeared and disappeared.” (pp. 66–67)

Explain why their mom says she is “fine” if she really isn’t.

What is Colm afraid will happen if they move again?

Chapter 10

What does Colm notice about the elevator just before he leaves Brunhild Tower to go outside?

Why does Colm decide to hide behind the big vase? What is he waiting to see?

“I was starting to wonder if somehow I was related to Tamika because she was better at twin telepathy than Mal.” (p. 76)

Chapter 11

What does Tamika find out when she goes through the old box from Colm’s closet?

“Maybe the thirteenth floor was some kind of portal to the afterlife, and everyone who lived there was . . . dead.

“And if that was true, maybe you could visit dead people and come back.” (p. 81)

Why does it bother Colm to see Mal and Tamika becoming friends?

“Having a twin brother is like having a pebble in your shoe. Sometimes it’s just annoying and you can kind of ignore it. But then all of a sudden it stings your foot so hard your eyes water, and the only thing you can do is take your shoe off and shake out the pebble. (p. 83)

Chapter 12

Explain why Colm is angry with Mal.

“I only wanted to scare Mal as payback for making me look stupid in front of Tamika. I never meant to trap him in another dimension—or wherever he was now.” (p. 87)

Why doesn’t Tamika believe Colm when he tells her what happened to Mal?

“‘This is for real?’ she asked quietly.

“‘With the world as my witness,’ I said. ‘You can look everywhere for Mal, but you’re not going to find him until tomorrow at one p.m.—and only hopefully then.’” (p. 90)

What is Tamika’s plan to help Colm hide the fact that Mal is missing?

Chapter 14

“. . . I went back home, where the apartment felt huge and empty without Mal. He may have been a jerk, but he belonged in the real world, not another dimension.” (p. 92)

What does Colm see when he takes a peek at Malandia? How does he feel about it?

Describe how Colm manages to leave the apartment without having their mom realize Mal is missing.

“Even though I still felt bad about the reason Mal was missing, it was kind of nice being on my own at the Jacksons’. They didn’t ask any questions about what it was like to be a twin, and I didn’t have to compete with Mal. People who didn’t know both of us couldn’t think of me as the ‘other’ McShane twin.” (p. 98)

Chapter 15

“We walked back to Brunhild tower. It looked so solid and ordinary—just brick and stone. But, as I had learned, extraordinary things could be hiding in plain sight.” (p. 100)

Describe what Tamika and Colm see when they go to the lobby in the other Brunhild Tower.

Why does Teddy seem familiar to Colm?

Discuss why the Professor seems to be chasing Tamika and Colm.

Chapter 16

“My biggest fear in life is dying. My next biggest fear is something even worse: dancing. When I try to move my arms and legs to music, I feel like I’m going to punch myself in the face and fall over. And now I had a bunch of phantoms telling me to dance.” (p. 111)

Why do you think there were so many people in the phantom Brunhild Tower?

Where do Tamika and Colm finally find Mal?

“‘So the thirteenth floor is the only one that connects to the real world?’ asked Tamika as we finally got out of the elevator.

“Mal nodded. ‘Pretty sure. I tried a bunch of the other floors—I think it all comes down to the number thirteen.’” (p. 119)

Chapter 17

Why does Mal shake his head at Colm when Colm asks Mom if he can do the climbing wall?

Tamika, Colm, and Mal all want to go back to visit the Phantom Tower, but each of them have different reasons. Why do each of them want to return?

Where does Teddy go to get away from the crowds of people who live in the Phantom Tower?

“In here, we don’t look the way we did the moment we died. I think we look the way we remember ourselves—or maybe it’s the way we want to be remembered.” (p. 130)

Chapter 18

“‘So you made a thirteenth floor in *Minecraft*, big deal,’ I said.

“‘I didn’t build it,’ Mal said. ‘I’ve never even seen this before.’

“Tamika and I glanced at each other as what he said sank in.

“*The Phantom Tower even appears in Minecraft.*” (p. 135)

Who appears in their basement clubhouse in the Phantom Tower?

What will happen to Tamika, Colm, and Mal if the Professor traps them in the Phantom Tower after 2 o’clock?

Chapter 19

“‘Don’t you get it?’ asked Teddy. ‘People who move into this building stay here forever.’” (p. 141)

What does Teddy tell Tamika, Colm, and Mal about what the Professor does when he visits the Phantom Tower?

“Twin buildings, twin brothers—one in each to cast my spell,’ he said, holding both canes in one hand and clamping a powerful hand on my shoulder.” (p. 145)

Who suddenly appears just as the Professor catches Colm?

“Hello?”

“Hi, Dad. It’s Colm.”

“It’s good to hear your voice, son.”

“Dad? Where are you?”

“I’m with you.”

“But where where. Is there someplace we can be together?”

“We’ll always be together.”

“Answer the question, Dad!”

“Colm, I can’t hear you very well. I’m losing the connection.”

“Dad, are you there?” (p. 148)

Chapter 20

What do Tamika, Colm, and Mal learn about the Professor after questioning Virgilio? What do they learn after questioning Dante?

What do Tamika, Colm, and Mal decide to do in order to learn more about the Professor?

Chapter 21

Describe the Professor's office.

What kinds of books do Tamika, Colm, and Mal find in the Professor's office that excite Tamika and Colm?

“‘Fools!’ he shouted. ‘The crone cannot help you. Only I can fill the emptiness we face.’” (p. 162)

What happens that gives Tamika, Colm, and Mal the chance to escape the Professor?

“‘Professor Parker wanted Mom to live in Brunhild Tower, but he doesn't want her to know about the Phantom Tower,’ said Mal, thinking out loud. ‘But he wanted to keep Colm inside for that so-called spell. If you ask me, it sounds more like he's conducting some creepy experiment.’

“*And we're the guinea pigs*, I thought.” (p. 165)

Which items do Tamika and Colm take from the Professor's office?

What does Colm guess is written in the notebook that Tamika took?

Chapter 22

What do Tamika, Colm, and Mal immediately notice is different when they try to visit the Phantom Tower after their visit to the Professor's office?

What happens to Colm when he tries to step out of the elevator onto the 13th floor?

Who do Colm and Mal think they recognize in the old newspaper photo?

“Mal looked at me, and I knew what he was thinking: We had something in common with the Professor. If you never even knew your dad, would you miss him less or more? Maybe more, because he would be such a mystery.” (p. 173)

Chapter 23

What does the Princess tell Tamika, Colm, and Mal about Vincent Krayfish?

Who is Bricklayer John?

Why did Bricklayer John's grandmother place a curse on Brunhild Tower?

“Trapped between thees world und the next, thees industrious man vas faced vith the horror of having nothink to do for all eternity. So, vorkink from memory, he busied himself by constructink the north tower een the spirit world.” (p. 181)

Why is the number thirteen so important?

What has the Professor dreamed about his whole life?

“I think eet should be quite obvious, even to someone so young as you: Eef he lifts the curse, he von’t be able to visit the Phantom Tower anymore. Und he vill never see his father again.” (p. 183)

Chapter 24

What does the Professor tell the Princess will happen when the last descendant of the Phantom Tower curse-maker dies?

Why does the Princess agree to help Tamika, Colm, and Mal try to talk to the Professor?

“If you could choose between being an old lady who watches too much TV and reads too many gossip magazines or a mysterious princess from a foreign land, which one would you rather be?” (p. 189)

Why did the Professor really hire Colm and Mal’s mother?

“‘Your father took my father away from me once,’ he said. ‘If I lose him again, it will not be for you or anyone else. My answer is no.’” (p. 194)

Chapter 25

Why is it taking Tamika so long to read the Professor’s notebook?

If you were the Professor, would YOU choose to live forever in the Phantom Tower, or would you choose to live in the real world?

How do the ghosts living in the Phantom Tower know something is changing in their world?

“I guess the ghosts had just as many questions as the living—but even less power to change their fates.” (p. 199)

How did the Professor find the curse-breaking spell?

List the things Tamika, Colm, and Mal need to get in order to break the curse.

Chapter 26

How does the Princess feel about giving Tamika, Colm, and Mal some of her blood?

Why do Tamika, Colm, and Mal decide to go back into the Phantom Tower?

What does Colm and Mal’s mom do that makes Colm and Mal think that they are doomed?

Chapter 27

What does Colm suggest to his mom that might give them a chance to be able to go to the Phantom Tower?

“‘This better work,’ said Mal, ‘because I have a feeling we’re going to be grounded for the rest of our lives.’” (p. 210)

Describe what Tamika, Colm, and Mal see in the Phantom Tower when they finally return.

Why do you think Teddy is fading?

“. . . to tell the truth, I am getting tired of living here. If you lift the curse, at least I get to look forward to something different, even if I don't know what it is.'

“We don't know what's next, do we?’ asked Tamika. ‘It might be nothing, or it might be something else. After all, we never knew this place existed.’

“Teddy smiled. ‘I'll find out, I guess.’” (pp. 213-214)

Chapter 28

Who does Teddy take them to see first?

Teddy tells Bricklayer John, “Mal may be rude, but he's right.” (p. 218). Do you agree with Teddy? Why or why not?

“Teddy's words made me realize the dead and the living both had a hard time letting go. If it was my dad in the Phantom Tower, I might have been as bad as the Professor.” (p. 219)

“. . . a son should never die before his father.” (p. 219)

What item does Bricklayer John give Mal?

Chapter 29

Why does Colm think Princess Vivian regrets marrying Vincent Krayfish?

How does Teddy get a piece of Krayfish's tie?

“Teddy shrugged and smiled. Then he took out his bubble gum and stuck it behind his ear.

“I've been saving my second stick of gum for eighty-four years,' he said, reaching in his pocket. 'I might as well have it now!’” (pp. 226–227)

What happens that causes Tamika, Colm, and Mal to get trapped in the Phantom Tower?

Chapter 30

Why do Tamika, Colm, and Mal need to get into Vincent Krayfish's apartment again?

Who ends up helping them break through Krayfish's wall?

“You really need to learn to let things go,' he said.

“But that's exactly the point,' answered Bricklayer John. 'I have.’” (p. 233)

“It is hard to see the building go, but nothing lasts forever, whether it's us or the things we build.” (p. 234)

Describe what Tamika, Colm, and Mal see when Bricklayer John takes them outside?

Imagine and describe what a building from 100 years in OUR future might look like.

Chapter 31

“Even if the memories fade, our souls will always remain connected.” (p. 239)

What does Tamika think she might do so that Teddy and everyone in the Phantom Tower won't be forgotten?

How does Colm and Mal's mom feel when she sees them step out of the elevator?

What do Tamika, Colm, and Mal decide to tell their parents to explain why they disappeared?

Who do they take their parents (and the Princess) to see to prove they're telling the truth?

“Eet ees the arrogance of adults to believe only those thinks they haff experienced themselves, as eef young people haff not seen thinks beyond our imagininks.” (pp. 248–249)

Describe what happens as Tamika reads the spell from the Professor's notebook.

Chapter 32

Why does their mom suddenly stop the car in the middle of the street when they return to Brunhild Tower?

Which word appears suddenly in Colm's mind?

Why does Tamika have everyone go to the northeast corner of the tower?

Describe the simple spell that Tamika remembers from the Professor's notebook.

*“But since it falls unto my lot
That I should rise and you should not,
I'll gently rise and I'll softly call.
Good night and joy be with you all.
Good night and joy be with you all.”* (p. 260)

“As I now knew myself, the real curse wasn't being trapped—it was being unable to let go.” (p. 261)

Chapter 13

How does the relationship between Colm and Mal change once the curse is broken?

How does Colm's experience with Professor John and the Phantom Tower change how he feels about his own dad?

What is Colm and Mal's dad's final gift?



Activity Trio

My City: Past, Present, and Future

Activity

Pick a well-known building or place that is in or near your city. Find or take a picture of it as it looks now. Next, use local history books or the internet to find pictures of your chosen building or place as it looked 100 years ago.

Either print, cut out, and glue the pictures onto your worksheet or use them to help you draw the building or place by hand in the spaces marked “past” and “present.”

Lastly, in the space marked “future,” imagine what the same building/place might look like 100 years from now. What might be the same? What might be different?

Side by Side: Parallel Dimensions

Activity

Just like the twins Colm and Mal, Brunhild Tower and the Phantom Tower seem to be the same—until you look at the details! Draw a picture of a place you like to be (your bedroom, a favorite park, a sunny spot by a window) but DON'T ADD DETAILS. Just draw the basic parts of the place—furniture, walls, trees, etc.

Once your drawing is done, make a copy of it (use a printer or place a piece of paper on top of your drawing and trace it).

Then lay your pictures side by side and add at least 10 details to each picture—10 details from the real place and 10 different details to the “phantom” place. See if you can make some of the differences hard to find!

New Starts: What Would YOU Do?

Activity

Pick a place far from where you live now. It can be a place you’ve already visited, a place you’d like to visit, or just a place that seems interesting. What if you found out tomorrow that you and your family were going to MOVE there?

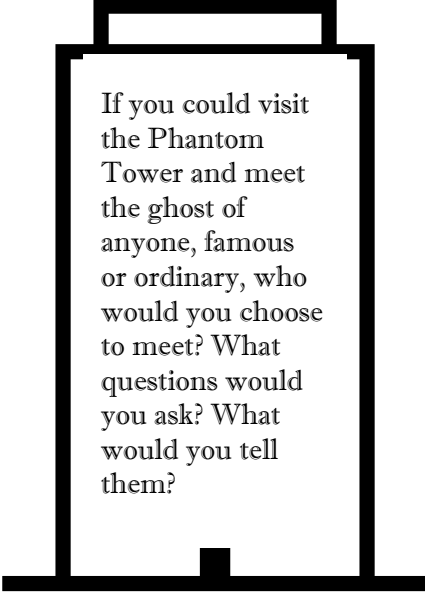
Create a list of “pros” and “cons” for the move. What would be good or exciting about the move (the “pros”)? What would be challenging or hard about the move (the “cons”)?

Name _____

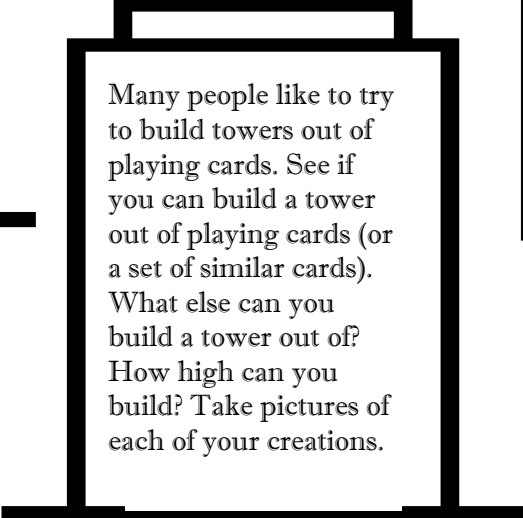
Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow



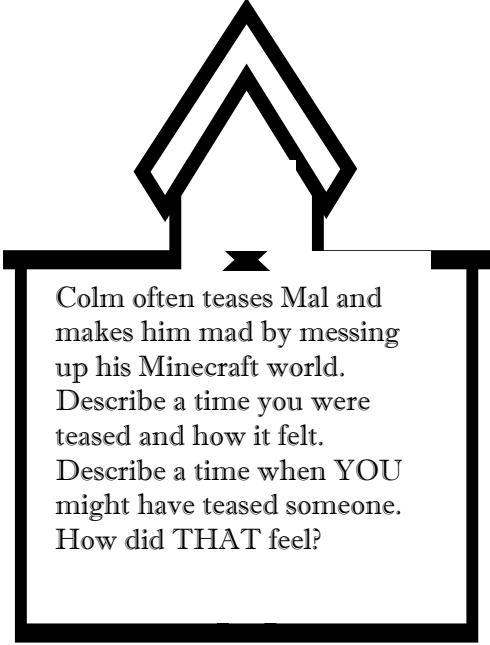
Writing Prompts



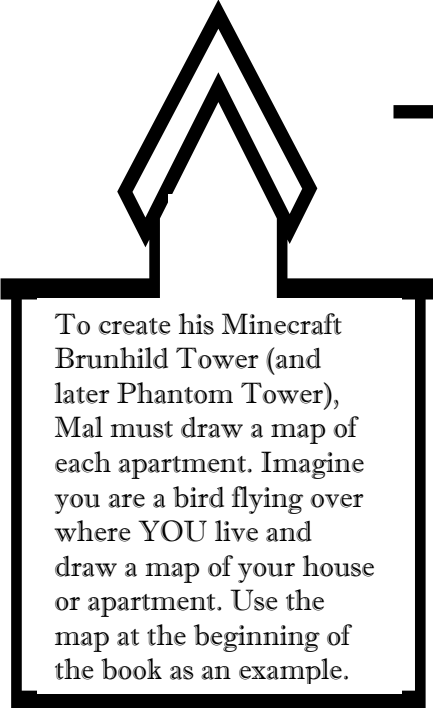
If you could visit the Phantom Tower and meet the ghost of anyone, famous or ordinary, who would you choose to meet? What questions would you ask? What would you tell them?



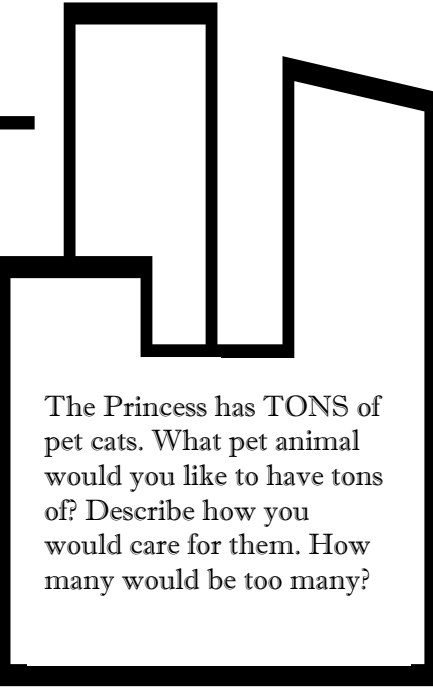
Many people like to try to build towers out of playing cards. See if you can build a tower out of playing cards (or a set of similar cards). What else can you build a tower out of? How high can you build? Take pictures of each of your creations.



Colm often teases Mal and makes him mad by messing up his Minecraft world. Describe a time you were teased and how it felt. Describe a time when YOU might have teased someone. How did THAT feel?



To create his Minecraft Brunhild Tower (and later Phantom Tower), Mal must draw a map of each apartment. Imagine you are a bird flying over where YOU live and draw a map of your house or apartment. Use the map at the beginning of the book as an example.



The Princess has TONS of pet cats. What pet animal would you like to have tons of? Describe how you would care for them. How many would be too many?

Online Resources

Ghosts, Haunted Places, and being SCARED

Ghost Facts for Kids

<https://facts.kiddle.co/Ghost>

Why Is It Fun to Be Scared?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oetVvR5RQUs>

Are Ghost Ships Real? (TED-Ed)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cURn__xIWk

The Fascinating History of Cemeteries (TED-Ed)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HegwRtbDSU>

Twins

Twin Facts for Kids

<https://facts.kiddle.co/Twin>

Twin Telepathy Cake Challenge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AaAjR-YKB7g>

Towers

Tower Facts for Kids

<https://facts.kiddle.co/Tower>

Petronas Towers Facts for Kids

https://facts.kiddle.co/Petronas_Towers

Skyscrapers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXRsmRRh3po>



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 smushed 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?

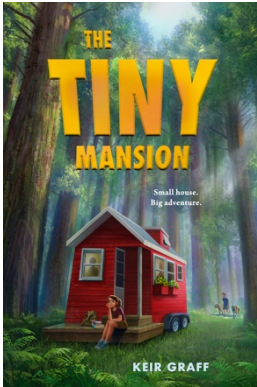
I live in the creepy old apartment building that inspired me to write *The Phantom Tower* . . . the floor plan of my apartment is the same as Colm and Mal's!

Where are you from?

I grew up in Montana, where I played on the mountain behind my house. Now I live in Chicago, where the buildings are as tall as mountains!

Find answers to more questions at 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.



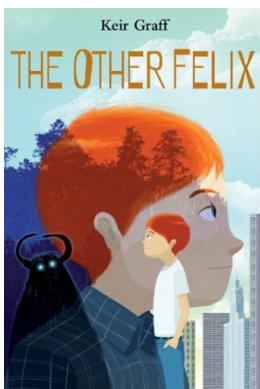
The Phantom Tower

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

The Phantom Tower

Curriculum Guide

2021



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