

[The Invention of Hugo Cabret](#) by Brian Selznick
(Scholastic, 2007)

An orphan and thief, Hugo lives in the walls of a Paris train station with a secret he must protect, but a bookish girl and a bitter old man threaten to jeopardize his cover. Winner, The 2008 Caldecott Medal

Discussion Questions

In a publicity letter Brian Selznick describes *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* as a “531 page novel in words and pictures. Unlike most novels though, the images inside don’t just illustrate the story, they help tell it. ... this is not exactly a novel, and it’s not quite a picture book, and it’s not really a graphic novel, or a flip book, or a movie, but a combination of all these things.” (There are 158 pictures and 26,159 words)



1. This book has many thematic links to early movies. In the beginning Selznick invites the reader/viewer to imagine they are at the movies. How does he achieve this?
 - Mr. Selznick says that he illustrated mini silent movies to move the story forward
 - Text and art are always separated as in early silent films
 - Pencil drawings all rendered in crosshatched black
 - Uses film techniques – zoom in for close-ups
 - Uses illustration when they better describe the action – chase scenes
 - Pages are bordered/framed in black like a silent movie
2. When Hugo first meets the Papa Georges, the old man is very angry, he accuses Hugo of stealing from the toy shop, and then he steals Hugo’s notebook. But then he begins to give Hugo jobs –

Why do you think Melies (Papa George) keeps Hugo on to help him?

Is there something about the boy that Melies is attracted to – what do you think this is?

Why did Melies hide the blue mechanical mouse that Hugo crushes and then fixes? (p. 374)

3. In a video accompanying the audio version of the book, Brian Selznick says that he “wanted everything in the book to connect just like the perfect mechanical parts of a clock.” There are many connections in the novel; for example, the train coming through the station in Melies’ famous film, Hugo’s own near miss with a train.

What other connections can you remember?

- Time/clocks 12 chapters, in part one 12 in part two. 24 hours in a day
- Etienne loses an eye by a fire cracker, the man in the moon loses an eye in the movie
- Keys, to wind the clocks, to work the automaton
- Magicians started as clock makers – connection between mechanical objects and magic

4. Isabelle reads the myth of Prometheus to Hugo. Prometheus stole fire because he wanted to help people he had created yet he was punished. (p.371) Hugo also stole parts to fix the automaton– was he justified?

What other characters steal, or “bend the truth” to achieve a certain end?
Do you think this is right?

5. Hugo says that “all machines are made for some reason... and a broken machine always makes me a little sad.... All machines have a purpose; a broken machine has lost its purpose.” (p. 374) What do you think he means by this?

Why did Papa George go into seclusion? How does Papa Georges react to broken machines?

6. Georges Melies tells the young boy who grows up to be a filmmaker, “If you have ever wondered where your dreams come from when you go to sleep, just look around. This is where they are made.” (p. 387) What do you think he meant by this?
7. At the end of the evening honoring him, George Melies gives a toast –saying, “You are all wizards, mermaids, dreamers, you are the true dreamer” (P.506) What do you think he meant by this?
8. How does the book’s overall design including the cover art contribute to the mood created by the words and pictures inside?

See also: [The Invention of Hug Cabret](#)

Booktalk for The Invention of Hugo Cabret

Imagine this – you are an orphan, you are all alone, your father is dead. You secretly live behind the walls of a Paris train station - the year is 1931.

You wind clocks – it was your uncle’s job before he disappeared, and he taught you how to wind all 27 clocks in the train station. You can only reach the clocks through a network of hidden passageways.

You live in fear that someone will discover you and kick you out of the tiny room you live in. You must stay hidden – you have an important task to complete.

You have two things saved from happier days, one is your father's notebook, full of sketches of a mechanical man, and the second thing is the 3 foot tall mechanical man itself.

But in order to repair the mechanical man you need parts, and so you become a thief, you have stolen parts from an old toymaker who has a booth in the train station, but one day he catches you.....

(Read underlined words p. 50-51, 60-61)

Why is the old man so desperate for your notebook? Why does his granddaughter, Isabella steal it from him so she can return it to you? What will the mechanical man do if you can fix it? Become Hugo Cabret and find the answers in this sweeping 531 page story that is told in both words, and many, many pictures.

