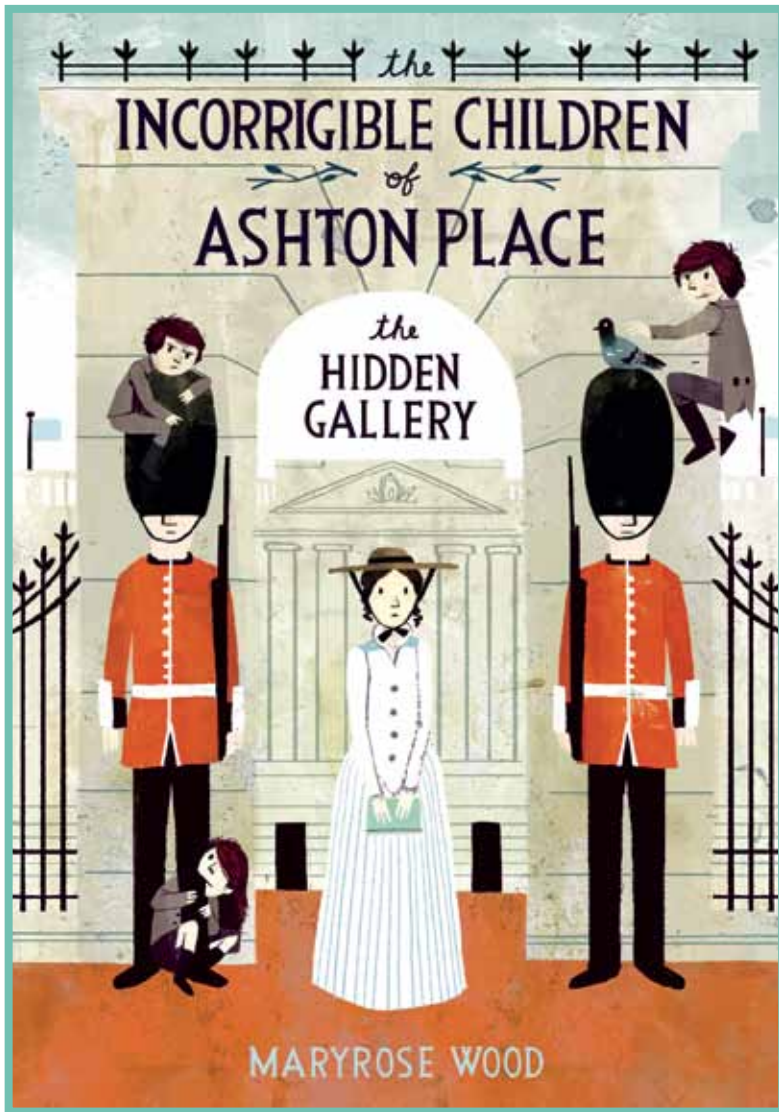


DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Mysteries abound in the second story about the Incurable children of Ashton Place. In *The Hidden Gallery*, plucky governess Penelope Lumley and her three wild charges navigate the less-trafficked corners of London and stumble across some eerie coincidences. With the help of a rather unusual guidebook and a new friend named Simon Harley-Dickinson, Penelope steers the children through a maze of spooky soothsayers, pretend pirates, and Ominous Landscapes. Readers will profit from Agatha Swanburne’s sage advice and the optimistic outlook of our heroine, and they, like Penelope, will learn that the most important thing in life is you—your own character, and the kind of person you choose to be.

★ “The undercurrent of ‘something wicked this way comes’ and the signs of impending trouble for both governess and charges make the air here thick with (dreadful!) possibilities. . . . **A most excellent adventure.**”

—ALA *Booklist* (starred review)

“A madcap sequel. Great fun, and it wouldn’t be optoomuchistic to expect more to come.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Penelope and the Incurrables have many new, exciting experiences on their trip to London: a ride on a train pulled by a shiny red steam locomotive, meeting the Queen's Guard, and attending the opening night of *Pirates on Holiday*, to name a few. Is London anything like Penelope had imagined it would be? Have you ever gone on a trip where you got to experience new, exciting things? Have you ever experienced "travel fatigue"?
2. Penelope has a great deal of "pluck." What are the characteristics of someone with pluck? Who else in the book has these characteristics? Who do you know who has pluck?
3. Penelope has trouble explaining certain figures of speech to the Incurrables. How would you explain to them the meaning of staying "within reason," "getting carried away," "taking things too far," or "going overboard" (page 26)? Why are these expressions so difficult to explain? Can you think of other figures of speech that might be difficult to explain to someone who isn't familiar with them?
4. Agatha Swanburne was known for her wisdom and her words of advice, and Penelope follows in her footsteps. What do you think is the most useful piece of Agatha's or Penelope's advice in the book? Which other characters in the book are wise? Who in your life is wise, and what is the best piece of advice they've ever given you?
5. Do you think the Incurrables are good students? What sorts of things do they learn in this book?
6. Lady Constance tells Penelope that being optimistic "is a most unfortunate habit" (page 12). Do you think optimism is a positive or negative trait? Why? Do you agree that too much optimism is a bad thing? Do you consider yourself an optimistic person? What is the opposite of optimism?
7. Reread the paragraph describing epiphanies (pages 209–12). What epiphany does Lady Constance think she has? What epiphany does Mrs. Clarke really have? Have you ever had an epiphany?
8. What misperceptions does Lady Constance have about the poor people she visits? Where do you think her unrealistic notions come from? What are the major differences between her life and theirs? Many of the different characters in the story come from different social and financial backgrounds. What are some examples of class differences in the world of the Incurrables?
9. What does Mr. Robert Burns mean in his poem when he writes that the best-laid plans of mice and men "gang aft agley"? Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Did you ever make a plan that turned out quite differently than you expected? Can you write a short poem about it, like Mr. Burns did?
10. What does Penelope mean when she remarks that "new things become familiar with time, and familiar things become strange" (page 34)? What unusual things does Penelope grow accustomed to throughout the course of the story? What unusual things in the book came to seem normal to you by the end?
11. Where does Simon get ideas for his writing? When we first meet him, he seems to have a touch of writer's block. What happens in the story to inspire him?
12. What about the story makes you laugh? Would you call this book a comedy? Can a comedy include serious subjects (like poverty, orphans, danger, etc.)? Why, or why not? Pick an example of something in the book you find funny and explain why you do.
13. Do the illustrations of Alexander, Beowulf, Cassiopeia, and Penelope look similar to the way you picture the characters? Can you imagine the story with different kinds of illustrations? Choose an illustrator whose work you really like, and try to picture how that person would represent the characters and scenes.
14. The story of the Incurrables is full of questions and clues (but few answers!). What do we learn about Lord Fredrick in this book? Hint: There are clues in his almanac and in his strange behavior before he and his wife leave for the theater. What do you think these clues might mean? Is Old Timothy helpful to the Incurrables, or is he a threat to them? What clues from the book make you think that?
15. Many mysteries about Penelope and the Incurrables remain unsolved. Make a list of questions you'd like to have answered, and then discuss with your friends: What do *you* think will happen in Book 3?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



1. **Ominous Landscapes.** Penelope and the Incorrigeables encounter several examples of the Ominous Landscape school of painting. What is a school of painting? Research the term, and find three examples of schools of painting throughout art history. Which one do you like the best? Why? The Ominous Landscape school is not a real school of painting (the author made it up!), but that shouldn't stop you from making a first-rate piece of Ominous Landscape art (described on page 15). Don't forget to write a caption to accompany your painting in a museum.

2. **Postcards for Nutsawoo.** The Incorrigeables are excited to write to Nutsawoo and tell him (or her) about all the things they see and do in London. Write a postcard to Nutsawoo from the perspective of one of the children, telling her (or him) about one of the adventures in the book. You can also write that furry scamp a postcard from yourself and describe a trip you've taken!
3. **The Guards of Buckingham Palace.** Research the Queen's Guard. What do their uniforms look like? What rules must they follow? Reread the Fifth Chapter, in which Penelope and the Incorrigeables visit the palace and the guards. Write an addition to the chapter, a conversation in which Penelope explains to her three pupils what you now know about the Queen's Guard.
4. **Hixby's Guide to Anywhere.** Write and illustrate several pages describing your hometown or city in the style of the *Hixby's Guide*. Is it easy or hard to give meaningful descriptions in rhyming couplets?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tess Steinkolk

Maryrose Wood has acted on Broadway, performed improvisational comedy in New York City clubs, and written screenplays, plays, and musicals for the stage (note that she has never written a musical about pirates—at least, not yet). The author of several books for teens, she made her debut as a children's author with *The Mysterious Howling*, the first book in the Incorrigeable Children of Ashton Place series. She lives in New York with her two children, two cats, and small, feisty, redheaded dog. You can visit her online at www.maryrosewood.com.



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