

Reader's Guide
For
The Unnameables
by
Ellen Booraem
A Debut Middle Grade Novel

About the Book

On Island, people and things are named for their Use. But 13-year-old foundling Medford Runyuin has no idea what his name means. Worse, he secretly carves Unnameable objects and hides them under the bed. If anyone finds out, he'll be banished forever from a place he loves.

Enter the Goatman, a nameless, smelly wanderer who calls the wind but can't control it. When the Goatman spills the beans about Medford's carvings, he sets events in motion that will change Medford's life—and Island—forever.

This is a whimsical fantasy about belonging, the dangers of forgetting history, the Usefulness of art, and the importance of wind control.

About the Author

After two decades as a reporter and editor for small-town weeklies, Ellen Booraem quit her day job to write *The Unnameables*. She lives in Downeast Maine with a cat, a dog, and an artist, in a house they (meaning the humans) built with their own hands.

Discussion Questions

1. Islanders wear knee-breeches but they also have motorboats. Why do you think they have such a mixture of old-fashioned and modern possessions and ways of doing things?
2. What is "Book Talk"? Who uses it and when? Can you think of real-life examples of people changing their style of talking to match the situation?
3. How have Medford and the Goatman changed by the end of the book? What have they taught each other?
4. Why does Old Prudy turn into New Prudy? And how has she changed at the end of the book?
5. How have the events in the book changed Island as a whole? Do you think Island will continue to change after the book ends?

Activity

Do plaster-of-Paris carvings like Medford's Prudy carving. You'll need: sawdust or cornflakes or similar cereal or grain, plaster of Paris, water, a mixing container (plastic or glass), a stick for stirring, several small paper milk cartons with the tops cut off, and, for each participant, a simple kitchen tool such as a butter knife or spoon. 1. Cover the work area with paper. 2. Mix equal amounts of sawdust and plaster of Paris in the container.

(Do not breath in the dust from plaster.) 3. Stir enough water into the plaster and sawdust to make a mixture like a thick sauce. (Too little water will leave a mixture that is too stiff and dry. Too much water will make the mixture watery and thin.) 4. Pour the mixture into the milk cartons. You need to do this quickly as the plaster will begin to harden in just a few minutes. (Dispose of the mixing container and any scrapings of plaster in the trash. Do not pour them down the sink drain, as this could seriously clog the drain.) 5. After about an hour, the mixture will be solid and you can tear away the paper milk carton. You will find a lump of “wood” (actually more like stone) which will feel damp and warm. 6. Participants will use a kitchen knife or spoon to scrape away the surface of the plaster to make a sculpture. (If you want, tell them that Michelangelo always said a sculpture already existed inside a block of marble, and all he had to do was chip away the excess marble to get at it. Medford would agree.) Tell them to get the general shape first, then go for the details. It is easiest to carve the plaster when it is still damp and soft, but you can carve it after the plaster has hardened. Note: plaster of Paris does affect the metal so use old utensils.