

BEX FALCON

AND THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING GECKO

by Derrick Barnes • illustrated by Darnell Johnson

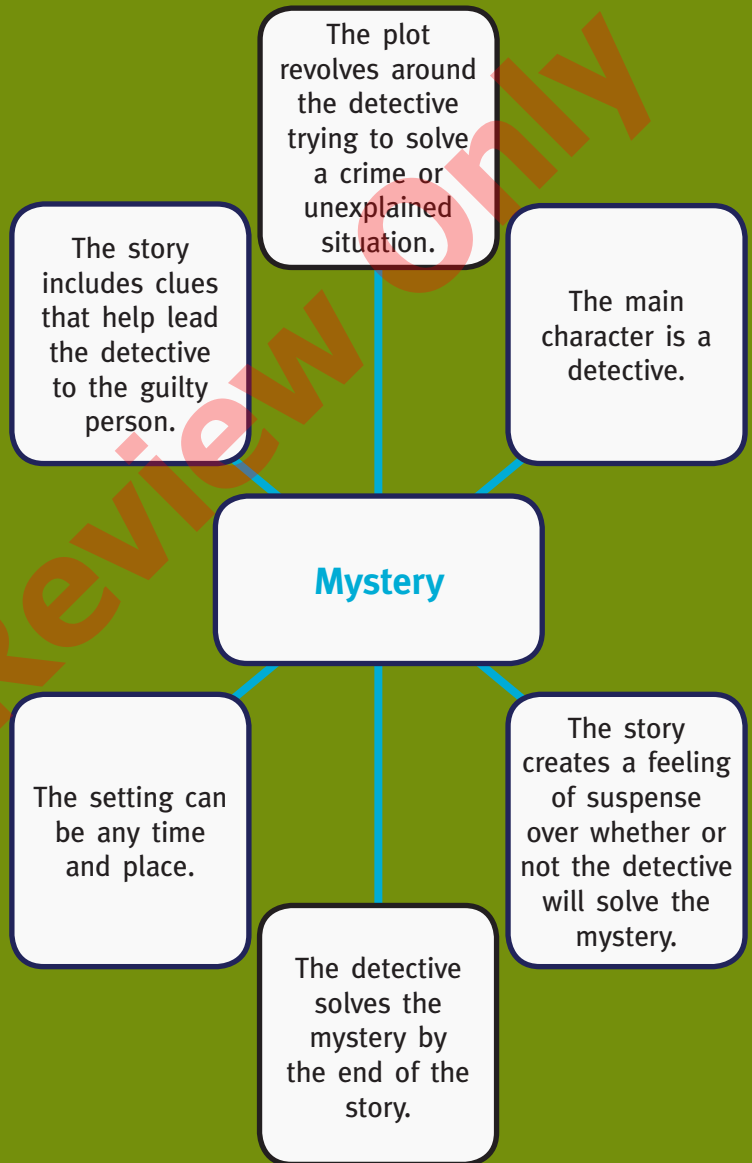


**MYSTERY
LITERATURE**

Level **0/34**
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Mystery

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Gus, Where Are You?

“Should I paint a watercolor or do a charcoal sketch?” Bex Falcon muttered to herself. She was deciding which one would make the best picture of her dog, Luther.

Bex and the rest of Mr. Cortez’s class scurried around to collect sketchbooks, colored pencils, erasers, and paintbrushes from boxes of art supplies in the classroom.

They were going to Mr. Romare’s art class next. Today they would learn to make portraits—drawings that showed a face, head, and shoulders. Art was the last class of the day, and Bex couldn’t wait.



But as Bex and her classmates gathered their supplies, they heard a scream.

“Gus is gone, Gus is gone! I searched his terrarium and he isn’t here,” said Marissa, pointing to the large glass box where Gus, their class pet, lived. Gus was a leopard gecko.

“Look again, Marissa,” said Mr. Cortez. “You all know he hides out sometimes. I’m sure he’s asleep under some leaves.”

Marissa took the lid off the tank to get a better look, but Gus was nowhere to be found. The class searched everywhere.



Three weeks ago, Rockwood Elementary School had decided to allow the classes to have pets. Mr. Cortez's class had voted for one unlike any other—a lizard.

The class watched a video on the different kinds of lizards and chose the leopard gecko. With its yellow skin and dark brown spots, the animal stood out from other lizards.

“So, class, tell me something about what you saw on the video that would make it awesome to have a leopard gecko?” Mr. Cortez had said.

Champ had raised his hand. “I think it's kind of cool that he's nocturnal. I think that means that he'll probably be snoring during the day and wide awake at night. Right?”

“You're correct, Champ,” Mr. Cortez had said, laughing. Later, Mr. Cortez let Champ name their leopard gecko because Champ had the highest grade on the big math test.

“That funny look on his face, that silly smile, it reminds me of my uncle Gus,” Champ had said. Everyone had laughed.



But now, Gus's cute, silly little face was nowhere to be found.

While the class and Mr. Cortez searched for their pet, Bex thought, *How could Gus get out of his terrarium? And where would he go?* Immediately, she ran back to her desk to grab her detective backpack kit.

Bex had always loved solving puzzles. And now, as the founder of Golden Wings, her very own detective agency, she never left home without her kit. It had her favorite tools for solving any mystery: a notebook, a magnifying glass, plastic bags, and a pen.

"I don't think he's ever gotten out of his terrarium before," said Mr. Cortez. "Maybe he climbed up the glass and went over the top." Everyone sighed.

Bex pulled out her notebook and then grabbed a book from the classroom library that described the care and feeding of pet geckos.

Then she stood tall before the class and cleared her throat. "Everyone, listen up—we WILL find Gus. Trust me."



Looking for Clues

Bex asked Mr. Cortez if she could interview her classmates. She wanted to question Gwendolyn, Champ, and Marissa—the three kids who were responsible for taking care of Gus that week.

Their job was to feed the gecko, give him water, and make sure his tank was clean. They were her first suspects.

“Sure, if it doesn’t take too long. You don’t want to miss art class,” said Mr. Cortez as he headed out the door.

A few seconds later, he poked his head back into the room. “I almost forgot, Bex,” he said. “I saw Gus’s tail sticking out of the hollow log, right before class went to lunch. That had to be around 12:17 p.m. when I dropped in a few crickets.”

Bex wrote in her notebook: “Gus MIA (missing in action) after lunch and recess.”

Then she surveyed Gus’s tank. There was his water dish, food dish, three artificial plants, a white dome light over the tank to keep it at the right temperature, and the log where Gus liked to hide out. Everything was in its place.

“Marissa, can you grab some wax worms from the fridge?” Bex asked. Every week, Mr. Cortez bought Gus’s food from the pet store—wax worms and crickets.

The crickets were stored in a plastic container on a shelf above the terrarium. But the wax worms were kept in a tightly sealed container in the classroom refrigerator.

“These are Gus’s favorite snacks,” Bex said. “Let’s put two on the floor in every corner of the classroom. This might help him come out of hiding.” So Bex, Gwendolyn, Champ, and Marissa set out wax worms as bait.

