

NATHAN AND THE SECRET PROJECT



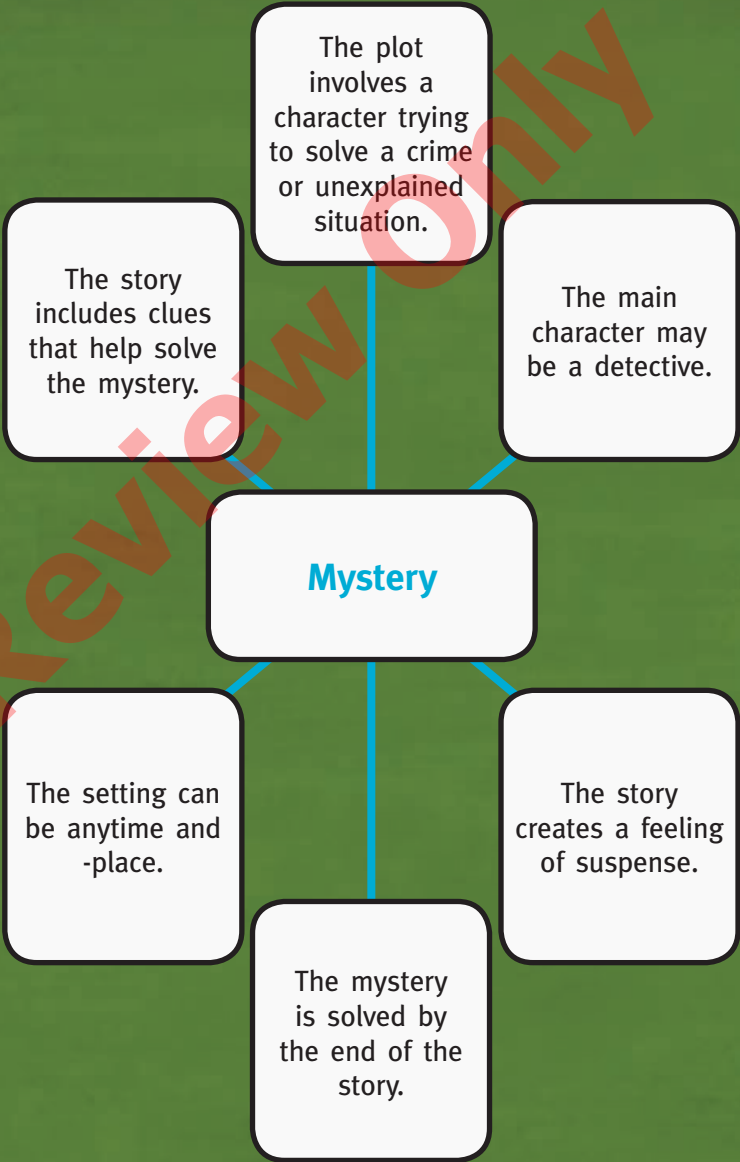
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illustrated by Alleanna Harris

MYSTERY
LITERATURE

Level	O/34
Lexile®	600L

Mystery

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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The New Kid

Nathan wheeled himself into the kitchen. “Just in time,” his mom said. “I’m making pancakes.”

Pancakes were Nathan’s favorite breakfast, but he hardly had an appetite. It was his first day at his new school, but it was also the last day before spring break. Mom had enrolled Nathan in the new school, in their new city, the day before.

“You’ll make friends at school,” Mom told him. “And maybe you can hang out with them during spring break.”

He wanted to say, *No one will want to hang out with a boy in a wheelchair.* But he didn’t. Instead he said, “Dad would have let me stay home. Dad would have let me take online classes.”

His mom put a stack of pancakes in front of him. “You need to get out and meet other kids,” his mom told him. “And I think you’ll love your new teacher.”

Nathan wished his dad were here. He knew Dad would be on his side. But he was gone on one of his wildlife photography assignments.

Nathan pushed his pancakes around his plate silently, wishing he were back in his old city with his buddies on the wheelchair racing team. *I bet this place doesn't even have a wheelchair racing team*, he thought.

Just then, Mom jangled her car keys. "Eat, brush, and let's go," she said.



Nathan stared out the car window as his mom inched toward the front of the school. She helped Nathan get out and then went to park the car.

Nathan looked at the front door. The door didn't seem to have wheelchair accessibility. He had no choice but to wait for his mom.

"Ready, Nathan?" Mom asked, grabbing the back of his wheelchair.

"I can do it," Nathan snapped. "It's electric, remember?"

Suddenly, a girl popped out of the crowd of kids and walked toward him. She had red hair like the girl in the old movie he and his mom watched together last week.

"Are you Nathan? The new kid in Mrs. Spencer's class? She told me to show you around. I'm Gabby," the girl said.

Nathan watched as she pushed a button to open the front door. The button was hidden on the wall beside the door.



“Can you go **any** faster in that thing?” she asked. “We need to get on the elevator before the bell rings. We don’t want to be in the middle of everybody trying to get to lockers and classes.”

Nathan zipped along, trying to keep up with Gabby.

Nathan managed to get through the day. Most of the kids were friendly, but he could tell they wanted to know about the wheelchair. He mostly kept to himself. He wasn’t ready to share yet.

Gabby seemed to pop up everywhere. She even beat him to Mom's car at the end of the day.

"Let's tell your mom that we will walk home together. I live a block away from you."

"How do you know where I live?" Nathan asked.

Gabby grinned. "I saw you move in."

Nathan wanted only to sit in his room—remembering his old life, remembering K.D.

Mom told Gabby, "That's a great idea. And why don't you come over later? It's pizza night. There's plenty for three."



Something Creepy

After pizza, Mom suggested they go to the Dog Video Festival at the park.

“I’d rather finish my book,” Nathan said.

Mom gave him the look that said, *Get ready. You’re going.*

A dog festival? His mom should have known that he wasn’t ready. There would never be another dog like K.D. But Gabby was already calling her mother for permission to go.

As they made their way through the park, Nathan wished he could get away from Gabby. She seemed to know everyone in the park.

“Hi, Mr. Trams,” she said, waving to a man who reminded Nathan of his grandpa. But Grandpa had a big toothy smile. This guy didn’t smile back at them. He had a sour-pickle look on his face. He stopped and blinked at them. Then kept walking.

His legs were as skinny as #2 pencils. He wore wide shoes that left footsteps in the grass, even though it had not rained.

Then Mr. Trams sat next to a lady in a red dress sharing a blanket with an energized chocolate poodle. Mr. Trams held the poodle's head and stared into its eyes. *Is he trying to hypnotize it?* Nathan wondered. The poodle grew quiet and laid his head on the man's lap. *Creepy!*

As Nathan looked around the park it made him think about family picnics with K.D. He blinked and looked at the videos of dogs, filling the big screen. But he couldn't focus.



Nathan watched as the lady got up. She walked toward the food trucks. Mr. Trams still held the poodle. He looked into its eyes again. Then he walked away, leading the poodle on a leash as if they were at a dog show.

“Did you see that?” Nathan asked.

“See what?” Gabby looked around.

“Mr. Trams!” Nathan whirled his wheelchair in a circle. He couldn’t see Mr. Trams in the crowd. “He just walked off with that woman’s dog.”

“Shhh!” Gabby said. “You’re going to miss the videos.”

Music continued to blare along with the videos of dogs that filled the screen. The owner of the poodle returned, packed up her blanket, and left the park in another direction from Mr. Trams and her dog.

That’s strange, Nathan thought. Why would Mr. Trams walk off with her dog? Why wasn’t she upset? Maybe she was dog sitting for Mr. Trams?

“Does Mr. Trams have a dog?” Nathan asked.

“No,” Gabby replied. “Why do you ask?”