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Discussion Guide

Montgomery and the Case of the Golden Key

written by Tracy Oocomy Crowder

About the Book

Genre: Fiction/Mystery

ISBN: 9781643795171

Themes: Childhood Experiences and Memories, Diversity, Families, Fiction, Friendship, Middle Grade, Mystery, Overcoming Obstacles, Paranormal, United States History

Resources on the web:

[leeandlow.com/books/montgomery-and-the-case-of-the-golden-key](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/montgomery-and-the-case-of-the-golden-key)

Print, audio, and ebook formats are available.

SYNOPSIS

It's 2008, and ten-year-old Montgomery "Monty" Carver is out to find the origin of a golden key found in his Southside Chicago community—which may or may not host the next Olympic games, or supply the next President of the United States, or . . . have a potential ghost hanging around.

Awards

- Junior Library Guild Selection 2023
- Chicago Public Library Best of the Books 2023
- Black Caucus of the American Library Association Best of the Best 2023
- Black-Eyed Susan Award Nominee 2024-2025 (Maryland Association of School Librarian)
- Delaware Diamonds Award Nominee 2024-2025 (Diamond State Literacy Association)
- Sequoyah Book Awards Masterlist 2025 (Oklahoma Library Association)

Prereading Focus Questions

- Have you ever tried to solve a mystery? What skills do you need to solve mysteries?
- Why is Barack Obama an important figure? What do you know about Barack Obama's life?
- Do you believe in ghosts? Why or why not?
- Think about the people you live with and those who take care of you. How is each person important to you?
- What is something positive about your neighborhood? Who are the people in your neighborhood and what do you know about them?
- What does community mean to you?
- As a hook for readers, consider showing them a trailer for *Antiques Roadshow*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GL1ALnJcB8>

Exploring the Book

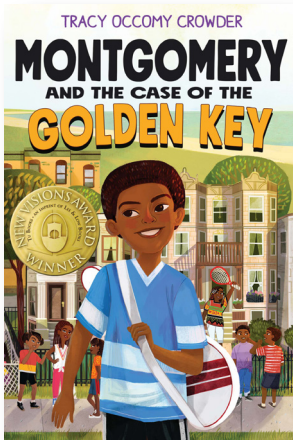
- Talk about the title of the book. Ask readers what they think this book will most likely be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- Take readers on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, author's note, etc.
- Point out the epigraphs throughout the story. Ask readers why the book might use these quotes. How does it enhance the story?

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- What problems does the main character, Montgomery, encounter?
- Why community is important?
- What you can learn from elders?
- How does Montgomery solve the mystery and what he does he discover?
- How does Montgomery changes from the beginning of the book to the end?

Discussion Questions

1. Describe Monty's relationship to his apartment building's yard. What is your favorite part of where you live and why?
2. How does Monty's perception of Ms. Jenkins change over the course of the story?
3. Throughout the story, Monty learns a lot from the elders in his community. Why are elders so important?
4. What is the main problem in the story? Is there more than one? Does the problem get resolved by the end of the story? How do you feel about the way the story ends? Why?
5. Describe how Monty's relationship with Jaron changes during the book. How is their relationship at the end of the story?
6. The scientific method is the process of observing, asking questions, and seeking answers through tests and experiments. How does Monty use the scientific method throughout the story? What does the scientific method teach Monty? What does the scientific method teach about research and asking questions?
7. Why do you think the author Tracy O'Conomy Crowder chose to use the scientific method in the story? How does the skills used in the scientific method apply to the obstacles in Monty's life?
8. What character traits would you use to describe Monty? Why?
9. What role does history play in the story? How does the history that Monty learns about throughout the summer shape how Monty feels about his community?
10. Why is it significant that Ms. Jenkins is an activist? Why is activism important? What other Black activists do you know?
11. Why is Barack Obama important to the story? What does he represent for Monty?
12. *Montgomery and the Case of the Golden Key* emphasizes Chicago's rich history. What did you learn about Chicago from reading?
13. What evidence in the book demonstrates Monty's persistence and passion?
14. What is the role of community, family, and friendship in helping Monty become who he is?
15. Would you describe Monty as an activist by the end of the book? How do you define activism? Why is Monty an activist, or why is he not an activist? Support your reasons in a persuasive essay.
16. Assign students different characters from *Montgomery and the Case of the Golden Key* and have them brainstorm about a guiding question: what and how can this character teach us? Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have made mistakes and have done good things in the book, and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share out their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How are their actions crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tracy Occomy Crowder is an avid mystery lover and community organizer. She has worked to address issues of racial equity across Illinois for the past thirty years, particularly in education, economic security, and housing. In this work, she supported parents to bring recess back to Chicago Public Schools. As an author, she enjoys creating work steeped in Black history, culture, and struggles—blending unknown historical facts with humor and everyday experiences. This is Tracy's first middle grade novel. She can be found at blackteacupmysteries.com.

Reviews

"Tu Books' New Visions Award winner Crowder's debut depicts a vibrant community, showcasing the importance of civic responsibility and the power of grassroots organization. The narrative's first-person perspective captures Monty's infinite curiosity and endearing sense of wonder. . . An engaging novel drawing strength from its rich narrative voice and celebrating Black historical luminaries."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Crowder employs Monty's inquisitive and irrepressible first-person narration to rousing effect, making for a spirited novel that encourages curiosity while highlighting a protagonist alongside the neighborhood and history fueling his personal growth." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Including heartfelt journal entries and vibrant illustrations from Sorra, this voice-y novel is an unforgettable adventure through a nostalgic decade, showcasing the times right before they were about to change." —*Booklist*

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LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](https://www.leeandlow.com).

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