



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Katarina Bishop was three, her parents took her on a trip to the Louvre . . . to case it. For her seventh birthday, Katarina and her uncle Eddie traveled to Austria . . . to steal the crown jewels. When Kat turns fifteen, she plans a con of her own—scamming her way into the best boarding school in the country, determined to leave the family business behind. Unfortunately, leaving “the life” for a normal existence proves harder than she’d expected. Soon, Kat’s friend and former coconspirator, Hale, appears out of nowhere to bring Kat back into the world she has tried so hard to escape. But he has a good reason: a powerful mobster has been robbed of his priceless art collection and wants to get it back. Only a master thief could have pulled this job, and Kat’s father isn’t just *on* the suspect list, he *is* the list. Caught between Interpol and a far more deadly enemy, Kat’s dad needs her help. For Kat, there is only one solution: track down the paintings and steal them back. So what if it’s a spectacularly impossible job? She’s got two weeks, a teenage crew, and hopefully just enough talent to pull off the biggest heist in her family’s history—and, with luck, to steal her life back along the way.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 At the beginning of *Heist Society*, Kat longs for a “normal” life; what does she hope attending the Colgan School will offer her? Do you believe she would ultimately have been happy there? Why or why not?
- 2 When Kat asks Hale why he had her kicked out of the Colgan School, he responds by telling her, “You don’t belong in that place,” (p. 15). Why is he so opposed to her having this traditional school experience, and what can you infer about his actions?
- 3 Describe Kat. What are three things you find most (or least) appealing about her?
- 4 What role does Uncle Eddie play in the story? What does his home symbolize for Kat? After the discovery that the Taccone job was masterminded by the Chelovek Pseudonima, Visily Romani, Uncle Eddie tells Kat, “Any job done in the name of Visily Romani will not be undone by children!” (p. 101). Why is he so adamant that Kat and her crew abandon the mission? Does Kat make the right choice in moving forward without his blessing?
- 5 Describe Hale. Though he has great personal wealth, he is drawn to Kat’s life; what elements of her lifestyle intrigue him?
- 6 How does learning from Mr. Stein about the historical significance of the missing art strengthen Kat’s conviction to complete the job no matter the price? In your opinion, does she make the right decision?
- 7 Beyond successfully completing the heist, what are the biggest challenges Kat has to overcome?
- 8 Trusting each member of the heist society is crucial. Why does Hale struggle to have faith in Nick? What other factors might cause Hale to be critical of Nick?
- 9 Using the phrase “This is a story about . . .”, supply five nouns to describe *Heist Society*. Explain your choices.
- 10 Considering Kat’s perspective, in what ways is *Heist Society* a story about things that have been lost? What does she find along the way?

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Reading, Writing, and Researching

1 In the novel, Kat's father is investigated and eventually arrested by Interpol officials. Interpol is the world's largest international police organization. Have students research the role of Interpol in investigating the theft of cultural objects, and create a digital report about their findings. Have them consider the following questions:

- How many countries are members of Interpol?
- What types of investigative campaigns does this organization undertake?
- According to the Interpol database, what are some of the most recent thefts of art?
- What are the criteria for working as an Interpol agent?
- What other types of crime does the organization investigate?
- What other agencies have departments dedicated to the investigation of art crime?

2 Throughout World War II, the Nazis plundered art from homes and museums throughout Europe. To teach students more about this dark time in history, have them watch the award-winning documentary *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*. Then have students discuss the following:

- Were the efforts of the Louvre to protect its art insufficient, sufficient, or excessive, in the light of the impending fall of France?
- Why does art have such a great hold on us? What does it say about mankind that we make this kind of effort to preserve and protect art, and continue its production?

3 Have students read the *Time* magazine article "The Spoils of War: Looted Art" (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1719935,00.html>), and have them consider the role of art as a national treasure.

- Have student participate in a Socratic seminar to debate the respective claims of art institutions and countries of origin for the art holdings.

4 Throughout history, a number of notable art heists have been planned and executed. Have students select one of the following museums or cultural centers and research the history of stolen art or looting that has occurred at the institution:

- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston, Massachusetts)
- The Louvre (Paris, France)
- Munch Museum (Oslo, Norway)
- National Gallery (Washington D.C., United States)
- Buehrle Collection (Zurich, Switzerland)
- Van Gogh Museum (Amsterdam, the Netherlands)
- National Museum of Anthropology (Mexico City, Mexico)
- National Museum (Stockholm, Sweden)
- National Museum of Iraq (Baghdad, Iraq)

After they gather information, have students create a presentation to be shared with their classmates that includes specific information about the particular heist, images of items taken and their value, and whether or not the items were recovered.

5 Previews of coming attractions in the movie industry are known as trailers. After putting students in groups, have them design a “book trailer” for *Heist Society*. Begin by having them create a storyboard, detailing which scenes they intend to incorporate in their trailers. Before filming, have students create scripts and select costumes and props. Next, have them create the book trailers using a royalty-free music library. Post the finished trailers to youtube.com or teachertube.com, or organize a “Night at the Movies” in your school library, and invite students to bring their families to watch their trailers.

6 One of the strengths of *Heist Society* is the number of well-developed characters. In groups, or singly, have students select one of the following activities for analyzing the character development throughout the novel:

- Character Trait Silhouette: In groups, have students trace an appropriately sized member of the group onto butcher paper. The silhouette must be life size. The traced silhouette should reflect physical traits of the character, so students will need to modify as they draw. Next, the groups will cut out

their silhouettes and include ten values from your list. These need to be the *most important* traits of your character. For each trait, a quote that supports the description needs to be included. Also, students should include correct parenthetical documentation. Inside the silhouette, they should include symbols that represent the character's interests, personality, beliefs, skills, and profession. There should be at least five symbols.

- **Character Karaoke (Character Theme Songs):** In small groups, have students select any significant character from the novel. Based on what they know about the character from the chapters they've read, they should write original song lyrics expressing the character's individual personality, actions, goals, etc. Choose one of the well-known tunes from the list ("Jingle Bells", the *Brady Bunch* theme, the *Addams Family* theme, for example), or have them speak to you if they want to select a different tune. They must be sure to compose the song carefully, following the rhythm of the original song. Once the songs have been completed, have students create a word-processed document for the lyrics, and add an appealing layout (borders and visuals) before printing. Have students distribute copies of their original character theme songs (alternatively, use a data projector or overhead to project image), and then, it's performance time!
- 7 **Making Thematic Connections:** Have students consider the following themes—loyalty, courage, ingenuity, and perseverance. Place students in small groups and assign each group a theme to consider. Next, have them find examples from the book that helps support this theme. Create a sample Life Lesson Chart using the model at http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson826/chart.pdf. After modeling this lesson, have each group create a Life Lesson Chart about their featured themes.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALLY CARTER is a writer living and working in the Midwest. She loved school so much she kept going . . . and going . . . and going . . . until finally she had to graduate. Now she has degrees from Oklahoma State University and Cornell University and a house and a job and other very grown-up things. Her life is either very ordinary or the best deep-cover legend ever. She'd tell you more, but . . . well . . . you know. . . . Visit her at: www.allycarter.com

AUTHOR Q & A

- 1 Like your Gallagher Girls series, *Heist Society* shows savvy teens who must learn to navigate the world independently, without much help from adults. Was this a conscious decision on your part, or did it happen organically as the story unfolded?

I think young-adult fiction is to some extent always about teens making their way on their own, because that's just part of being a teenager—carving out your own path with your own friends and figuring out where you fit in the world. So, as a result, that's something that I *do* consciously think about when structuring a new novel. Who will the parents be? What kind of relationship will the main characters have with the adults in their lives? And, of course, how can I tell a story about teenagers so that the teens get to be the heroes and heroines and aren't always being saved by Mom or Dad?

For *Heist Society*, this was a major part of the story very early on. I knew that Kat had been raised in that world and that she has had as much experience as some thieves twice her age, but to her family she's still a little girl. And by the end of the story, hopefully, everyone agrees that Kat is still very much a girl . . . but she's the girl who has earned her place at Uncle Eddie's kitchen table.

- 2 As you became immersed in researching criminal families (and art heists), did you encounter any particularly unusual or surprising revelations that you chose to include in the book?

From the research I did, two major things struck me about real-life art thieves and con men. The first was that family can be incredibly important in that world, but it is a family you choose—not a family you're born into. That became a major theme in the book, because that's something that I think most people—especially teens—can really understand. In fact, I think we're all going through life trying to surround ourselves with the people who know and love us best.

The second thing that really struck me is that very few real art crimes are as high-tech and flashy as they make them out to be in the movies (and this book). The painting *The Scream*, for instance, was stolen using a hammer and a tall ladder. That was something I tried to work into the background of Kat's world, but I knew the job her crew would have to undertake would need to be as exceptional as the kids trying to pull it off.

- 3 The issue of trust manifests itself throughout *Heist Society*. What inspired you to use this as a major theme throughout the novel?

When I'm writing I rarely think about themes. I start with characters and conflict, and somewhere along the way themes just seem to appear in the story. And when you're writing a story about people who tell lies for a living, then trust is bound to come seeping in. Also, I think it's bound to be a major theme when writing about teenagers, because, let's face it, figuring out who you can trust is a big lesson we all have to learn—especially for a character like Kat who has been telling lies and running cons for so long that she no longer even trusts herself.

- 4 Aspiring writers are often told to write what they know; have you followed that sage advice?

Well, I'm neither a spy nor a thief, but in a way I think, yes, I have. One of the things I realized when working on this book is that I keep writing about girls who have grown up in family businesses and are struggling to follow in their parents' footsteps. I grew up on a family farm and was always very involved in the operation, knowing that it was important for me to learn as much as possible from my parents.

Another thing that all farm girls know is what it's like to grow up in a male-dominated industry, so that's another thing that I share with Kat—we both know what it feels like to be the only girl in the room, and all of the advantages and disadvantages that can come with it.

- 5 **In *Heist Society*, Kat's family's business is crime. Did your personal experience of contributing to your family's business influence the way you developed Kat's family in the novel?**

The crime part, no. The pros and cons of working with people you're related to and have known your entire life, absolutely! Family businesses are just . . . different than regular businesses, because it's one thing to have a bad fight with your boss, but it's another when your boss is someone you're going to have to sit beside at Thanksgiving dinner.

People who go to work with strangers have the luxury of leaving work at the office a lot more easily than people who conduct their businesses around the kitchen table. In fact, that was why Uncle Eddie's kitchen played such a pivotal role in the book. I've been in that kitchen. It's where you eat, where you work—all within reach of baking bread and simmering soups. That, in particular, is a place I know well.



6 What's the best part of writing for teens?

In my (probably biased) opinion, teens are the smartest people in the world. They're savvy and funny and willing to lose themselves in their imaginations, and I don't want to write for anyone who isn't able to do exactly that. Plus, teens are so incredibly loyal to the people and things that they love. I can think of no better ambassadors to help a book find its place.

7 What advice can you give to aspiring writers?

There are two very simple pieces of advice that I think all aspiring writers can and should follow: read a lot; write a lot. Learning to write is really as simple as that. Unfortunately, a lot of aspiring writers spend far more time thinking and talking about "being a writer" than they spend actually writing.

Write the book first. Write *a lot* of books. And then read and study and learn all you can about the industry. But until you've really perfected the craft, there's no need to waste time worrying about the business.

8 What influences your writing?

I was a reluctant reader growing up, so my first influences were probably movies—especially classic movies with stars like Audrey Hepburn. I'm also a huge television junkie, and I think that's one of the reasons I'm far more drawn to writing series than stand-alone books. It just feels unnatural to leave a character or a world after one episode. I want stories that unfold and grow, and characters that are in search of goals on a variety of levels. Some can be obtained within a month or an hour or a day. Some they may have to work toward for years.

Another thing that influences me is my readers themselves. It's been so interesting to watch the thirteen-year-old girls who read *I'd Tell You I Love You But Then I'd Have to Kill You* when it was released three years ago turn sixteen this year. They're growing up. And that was certainly one of the reasons why I think, in many ways, Kat is far older than fifteen.

BOOKS BY ALLY CARTER



Heist Society

Hardcover

978-1-4231-1639-4

\$16.99

GALLAGHER GIRLS SERIES



**I'd Tell You I Love You, But
Then I'd Have to Kill You**

Hardcover

978-1-4231-0003-4

\$15.99

Paperback

978-1-4231-0004-1

\$8.99



**Cross My Heart
and Hope to Spy**

Hardcover

978-1-4231-0005-8

\$16.99

Paperback

978-1-4231-0006-5

\$8.99



**Don't Judge a Girl
by Her Cover**

Hardcover

978-1-4231-3084-0

\$16.99

This guide was created by Rose Brock, a school librarian and doctoral candidate at Texas Woman's University, specializing in children's and young adult literature.

Many more Discussion Guides can be found on the Disney • Hyperion Web site at:
www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com



HEIST SOCIETY

Hardcover

978-1-4231-1639-4

\$16.99

Disney • HYPERION BOOKS

114 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011

www.hyperionteens.com

