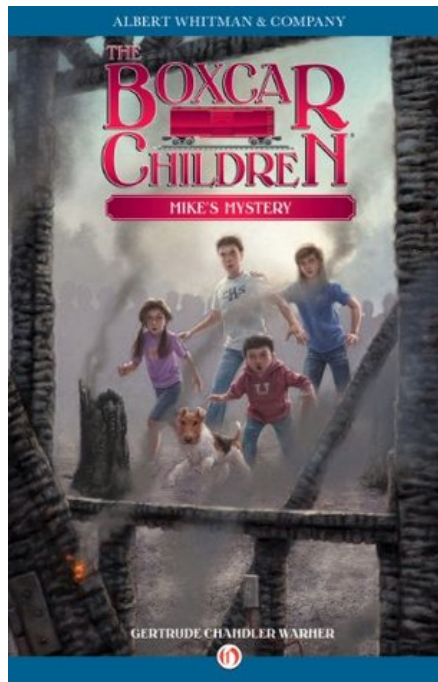




Mike's Mystery

Gertrude Chandler Warner , Dirk Gringhuis (Illustrator)

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Benny and his friend Mike are in trouble when they are curious about a uranium mine.

Mike's Mystery Details

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From Reader Review Mike's Mystery for online ebook

Meredith Buchanan says

We're up to book five of Gertrude's opus, which is Mike's Mystery. Come with me on this magical journey.

I'm surprised to find that the Boxcar children haven't abandoned Aunt Jane at her farmhouse and then immediately forgotten about her. Disappointingly, they are going to visit her again. Probably because now they own her home and all her land, which is bringing them in billions (hundreds) of dollars, and they need to keep an eye on their investment and make sure the old biddy isn't spending all their money on late night QVC binges.

The moment that Sam and Maggie pick up the children in their BRAND NEW STATION WAGON, I know this is going to be a good book.

"Where's the ancient horse that we were forcing to pull a wagon full of a dozen people even though he could barely walk?" the kids demand.

"Who cares?" Sam the ranch hand asks. "We have a sweet new station wagon!" then he revs the engine and they Tokyo Drift into town.

A new town that the children own. And imagine who lives in said town? Mike Wood! The brat that appeared in Surprise Island for about two pages, probably solely to set the stage for this book. He takes Benny and Co. to his house, where we learn that they're so poor everyone has to work, even the dog probably. Mrs. Wood sure does like making pies but she never has time, due to her job as a washerwoman. I'm going to be generous and assume that today's her day off, and that's why she is just pulling 4 pies out of the oven. I think that's kinder than calling her a LIAR.

Mike shows the children the daily newspaper—yes the mine town has it's own newspaper—because his brother's picture is on the front page, standing in front of the mine. He also mentions (hilariously, to my thinking), that a picture of the mine is "almost always" on the front page. Boy! I bet that's an exciting newspaper! Let's take a look in at the newsroom:

"Hey, Roger, any big news today?"

"Well George, I heard they found some more uranium down at the ole uranium mine."

"That sounds like front-page news to me!"

"Let's drink at lunch."

There is some heavy foreshadowing here when Mike becomes all quiet and thinky looking at the picture.

"Ehh. That short man in the picture sure looks familiar. I've definitely seen him somewhere before, but he doesn't live here."

Hey Mike. Maybe you saw him the day the picture was taken, seeing as how you were there and everything.

Luckily for us, Mike can only concentrate on one topic for five seconds or less due to the chip implanted in his brain at infancy, and controlled remotely by the Puppetmaster Grandfather, so it's no surprise that he

loses interest immediately.

The children all go out to explore the town, where they're surprised to learn that everyone knows who they are, mainly due to the pictures Aunt Jane has distributed everywhere. The book says in the newspaper, but how could they possibly fit in photos of the Aldens AND the mine?! Something had to end up on the cutting room floor. I prefer to think there are life-size posters of the Alden quartet plastered all over the town, emblazoned with threatening, vaguely 'big-brother' type messages, like "We own you," or "You do not exist."

Jessie buys hats and generally a fun time is had by all, but Gertrude cheerily ends the chapter by letting us know that Mike "didn't know then that tomorrow would be so exciting."

Turn the page.

EXCITING BECAUSE MIKE'S HOUSE BURNS DOWN.

Wow Gertrude. You're a sick, sick woman. This is your idea of excitement? Destroying an already destitute family's home and all their possessions. You're dead inside Gertie. Cold and dead.

Predictably, all the kids (including Mike, because he's dumb) are thrilled about the house burning down. What an adventure! And the fun just doesn't stop! Mr. Carter, Grandfather's lackey (and Jessie's future husband I suspect--well, until she becomes frozen at fifteen forever) is there as well. Henry makes a joke about Mr. Carter always showing up at times of trouble and he smiles with a 'twinkle in his eye' and ominously agrees.

Chills.

The group of happy, homeless people head off to have breakfast at the Uranium Mine Diner, where Mike overhears a man telling his compatriots how the 'little boy that lives in the house set the fire, just for fun.' Everyone gets up in arms about that, defending Mike's honor, and we learn a valuable clue: the man who started this rumor was wearing a blue hat.

The children go with Mr. Carter up to see the mine, and supposedly inform everyone to be on the lookout for a man wearing a blue hat, because that's pretty concrete evidence. While waiting on Mr. Carter, they explore a large empty building. For some reason, inexplicable except to further the plot, the building has absolutely no purpose. I guess we are to assume that someone erroneously built an enormous building right by the mine with no plan for it all. It's pretty fortuitous however, since the children decide it would be the perfect place for Mrs. Wood to live and make pies. Luckily she agrees, because I don't think these kids are above forcing someone into pie-making slavery. Benny, surprise surprise, is the one to name it: Mike's Mother's Place. I only mention this boring detail to point out that Benny NAMES EVERYTHING. Let's review:

- 1) Benny names Watch
- 2) Benny names Surprise Island
- 3) Benny names Potato Camp
- 4) Benny names Snowball the horse
- 5) Benny names Mystery Ranch
- 6) Benny names Yellow Sands

7) Benny names Mike's Mother's Place

I'm sure there are more that I'm missing. I think we will need to revisit this theme periodically.

There's some more boring talk about pies and empty buildings, and I'm pretty sure that Mrs. Wood wipes a tear or two. Then the night watchman (he wandered in earlier, sorry I forgot to mention it, I think I fell asleep) explains that he missed the fire because he saw a man running towards the mine and he went to check it out. That being his job and all. This obvious clue sets Mike off into a frenzy, but he insists on telling Benny alone of his suspicions. Now prepare yourself for a shock.

Mike thinks that the man in the blue hat set the fire! I know, I hardly saw it coming myself. And their daring plan of action? Look for a short man, perhaps wearing a blue hat.

They're going to crack this case wide open.

In what I thought was days later, but apparently is just a few hours (I'm pretty sure the whole book so far has only covered about 28 hours), the crew goes to turn the empty room into the iconic pie factory it's destined to be. I'm very disappointed to find out that Mrs. Wood's legendary pie making skills are based on her dumping cans of fruit filling into pre-made crusts. I guess in the 40's (50's? 60's?) this qualified as high-level baking skills, right up there with jello molds and pigs in a blanket.

Mike, Benny, and Mr. Carter have a boring, pointless conversation about the man in the blue hat, where Mike hypothesizes that he's the same short stranger that was in the photo with Pat in front of the mine (see 'foreshadowing number one'). They line up the clues thusly:

- 1) The man is short
- 2) He's a stranger
- 3) He owns a blue hat
- 4) Spotty growled at him
- 5) He (along with the entire town) was present at the fire
- 6) He looks quote unquote 'rough'

Well, if those clues don't add up to 'guilty' I don't know what does. BUT THEN THE PLOT THICKENS. Mike thinks really, really hard, probably causing an aneurism in his tiny, prehensile brain, and remembers saying something A YEAR AGO about not liking the three men that tried to buy Aunt Jane's ranch. Now we have MOTIVE.

Mr. Carter sadly shakes his head. "Those are bad men," he mutters. "They tried to buy that land for a low price knowing that it had valuable uranium on it. Making savvy business deals is what is ruining this country. Except when Grandfather does it. Then it's just called capitalism."

Later, when the children are pitting the dogs against each other in a ruthless dog fight/race, Spotty stops and begins digging. And he digs up a blue hat and A CAN OF GASOLINE.

Now we know it was the man in the blue hat. Because after you commit arson you usually bury all the clues

together, about a foot down under loose sand.

The boys inform Mr. Carter of this new, important break-through, and also warn him that the man in blue is probably going to blow up the mine too. They know because they've seen all the Austin Powers movies. And guess what? Mr. Carter looks behind the mine and there's a bunch of wires. Now, the wires aren't connected to anything, and may in fact have already been there, and might actually be currently in use doing mine-type things, but we don't want to spoil this case asking sensible questions. Lets just assume—like Mr. Carter—that this means that everyone's in danger. And to flush out the criminal we will have to be extra devious.

Devious like throwing a party. A party that involves pies and movies. And by movies I mean documentaries about monkeys. I wish I was kidding.

Surprisingly (or unsurprisingly I suppose), the movie party draws the degenerate out like a moth to a flame, and Spotty chases him down and catches him. Probably handcuffs him and reads him his rights too. If you think about it, Spotty really solved this mystery.

FACTS

- 1) Spotty growled at the man in the blue hat
- 2) Spotty found the blue hat and the gas can
- 3) Spotty caught the man in the blue hat
- 4) Spotty has an IQ double that of Mike and Benny combined

Mr. Carter hints at the Boxcar Children's next adventure by telling them that they will all be together again next summer. But sadly, he will not be there, he tells Jessie with a "funny little smile." Keep your pants on dude! Is this even legal?!

And then Benny names their adventure Mike's Mystery (Benny Names Things Item #8).

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Lauren says

Good for young readers.

hedgehog says

I found some of these books when cleaning out the basement and couldn't help setting them aside to re-read. Boy oh boy, a trip down nostalgia lane! This one is one of the OG set written by the actual author, before the ghostwriters took over and a time machine send the kids to a Benjamin Button situation so that poor college age Henry regresses back to high school... forever....

But before the science fiction horror of the ghostwritten franchise, there was this book, featuring Mike Wood, the little brat from Surprise Island. I don't know why only Benny gets a recurring friend character who pops up throughout the series; don't you get the vibe that Violet/Jessie/Henry's friends would be less punchable? (HE'S SIX YEARS OLD, HEDGEHOG! you say, appalled. NO! THESE KIDS ARE ACTUALLY FORTY THANKS TO THE TIME PARADOX. HE'S FAIR GAME. ALSO HE'S ANNOYING.) In a stone cold brutal move typical of Gertrude Chandler Warner's Dickensian mind, Mike's father is dead—Mike mentions this once and then immediately changes the topic, and no one talks about it ever again—and Mrs. Wood is a single mom trying to make it as a washerwoman.

I never noticed the awkward class difference here before, the Woods have fucking NOTHING, especially once Mike's house burns the fuck down, but ho shit do the Aldens waste no time in benevolently running this lady's life, by way of giving her a pie shop. In the uranium mining town that has sprung up overnight and that the kids basically own, because they own the ranch. These kids own a fucking ranch!! The mining company owns everything in this town in the ass-end of nowhere! Is she buying the materials for her pies with company scrip? She's just trying to make a living, but I bet like everyone else in town, she and Pat and Mike are doomed to be locked into a cycle of debt from the mining company. I OPENED THIS BOOK FOR TWENTY MINUTES OF NOSTALGIA READING, I DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE HIT IN THE FACE WITH HORRIFIC ECONOMIC REALITY

I like to think that the remaining miners who haven't died of uranium exposure band together forty years later and file a class-action lawsuit against the remaining Aldens. But then maybe Mr. Carter, Grandfather Alden's employee and part-time FBI agent, would take them out?

This book brings up a lot of questions, like a.) I don't think the FBI works like that, b.) who is Grandfather Alden, that he has an FBI agent on retainer?? Where does his fortune come from again? Why are these books not out of copyright so I could pay someone to write the Gritty Reboot where these children are all future mob bosses?!?!?! Jessie is a future Ramsay Bolton. She's so good with dogs....

Jg says

Mike didn't do it

Rachel G says

This was my least favorite so far, as I've been reading them out loud to my kids. My oldest still loves reading The Boxcar Children series, so I'm sure this will not be the last for us!

Nicola Mansfield says

Reason for Reading: Next in the series. I am collecting the first original 19 books of this series.

Mike's Mystery could probably be said to have the first full blown mystery for the children to solve. All the previous books "mystery" was simply finding out the identity of mysterious strangers but this time we have a crime: arson, a witness: Mike's dog, and a couple of clues: a blue hat and a picture in a newspaper. We get a sense of real detecting going on for the children now. Mike's Mystery is also the first time that a book in this

series is dependant on another in the series. This one is a direct sequel to book #4, Mystery Ranch, and will be enjoyed much better having read them in order. Also, one of the main characters returns from book #2, Surprise Island, and again this benefits readers who have read the books in order, otherwise many references to previous exploits will be lost upon them. The series is shaping up at this point into an ongoing adhesive collection, rather than just individual stories.

This story is typical fare for the series, much better than the last book and fun to see a proper mystery unravelling for the children this time. Exactly one year has passed since the last events happened and the Aldens return to the Mystery Ranch to find many changes have been made over the school year. A large cast of characters this time, though the majority of them have already been met in the past books so nobody new to really get to know. Benny and his friend Mike shine as the major characters in this book, even though everything is still much a group effort for the Alden children, focus is allowed to drift more often towards the littlest brother. A satisfying entry in the series.

BefuddledPanda says

Reading Boxcar Children mysteries as an adult and still loving it! :D

Ashle Oaks says

The Alden children encounter a true mystery in this book. There are references to the previous books so it helps to have read them.

Benedict Randhawa says

Boxcar Children are visiting Aunt Jane when their friend Mike's house is burned. But Mike is blamed for starting the fire.

Sarah Nessler says

This is the 5th installment in The Boxcar Children series and the story of the Alden children continues. In this book there truly is a unique mystery that they have to solve, but do the Alden children solve this or does someone else? That is for you to find out. This series is very simplistic and easy to follow so for a young person that is starting out on their reading expedition it is definitely one to keep in your wheelhouse.

Misbah says

The Alden children go visit their Aunt Jane at her ranch and they are reunited with Mike and old friend. Mike and Ben are the same age. When Mike's house suspiciously burns down, the children invite Mike and his family to live at their ranch. Mike's mom loves to bake pies so the children decide to buy her a stove and all the supplies needed to bake so that she can open a bakery and make money. Mike and Ben figure out that

fire that burned Mike's house was probably an arson and suspect a man in a blue hat. They learn that some men had tried to buy the ranches near a uranium mine and maybe that had something to do with the fire because Mike's family had refused to sell. The bakery is a success. Mike recognizes the man in the blue hat as he is sneaking around the ranch and so does Mike's dog. The dog chases and catches the man and he is arrested.

Nobi Nobes says

It was great!

Bri Munsen says

lol so cheesy but so wonderful.

Melissa says

We listened to this on Audible on a long car ride with my young children. They were mesmerized! Hicieron muy bien la traducción y todo estuvo excelente según mis niños.

Matthew says

Seemingly more mysterious than the previous books. The first Boxcar Children book really trying to be a mystery. But it is about the children and their resourcefulness and independence more than about solving the mystery, like all the books in the series.
