



Chasing Vermeer

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When a book of unexplainable occurrences brings Petra Andalee and Calder Pillay together, strange things start to happen: seemingly unrelated events connect, an eccentric old woman seeks their company, and an invaluable Vermeer painting disappears. Before they know it, the two find themselves at the center of an international art scandal, where no one — neighbors, parents, teachers — is spared from suspicion. As Petra and Calder are drawn clue by clue into a mysterious labyrinth, they must draw on their powers of intuition, their problem-solving skills, and their knowledge of Vermeer. Can they decipher a crime that has left even the FBI baffled?

Chasing Vermeer Details

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Author : Blue Balliett , Brett Helquist (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review Chasing Vermeer for online ebook

Samantha Sheeran says

Chasing Vermeer by Blue Balliett is a story about two sixth graders who go on a magical adventure! The book starts out by 3 anonymous people receiving a letter asking for help to uncover the truth about an artist named Vermeer. You find out at the end of the book that these three people in fact live in the same area and are related in many ways. Petra and Calder seem to be your typical sixth grade students, until you realize that they think very differently than other sixth graders. They are mesmerized by puzzles, asking questions, and trying to think about and explain the inexplicable. When a famous painting done by Vermeer called A Lady Writing is stolen on the way to a Chicago art museum, Petra and Calder believe they are destined to help discover where the stolen painting is being kept. They each have things happen to them that they can't explain but that help them become closer and closer to solving the mystery of A Lady Writing. I don't want to give the whole book away, but eventually they do find A Lady Writing and realize that every single person and event that happened to them is connected.

Chasing Vermeer was an excellent book. In fact, I didn't put it down once until I was finished. One thing that I especially loved is that I got a very clear visualization of what the actual lady in A Lady Writing looked like. She is described in great detail as a lady with a yellow jacket with fur on the edges and she looked old-fashioned. Her hair was pulled back tightly with shiny ribbons and her dangly, pearl earrings were very shiny from catching the light just right. Anyone can visualize this image perfectly. Another aspect that I loved about the book were Petra and Calder's way of thinking. They didn't think like typical sixth graders, or even typical adults for that matter. They were much more concerned about looking, rather than seeing. They are mesmerized by all of the "coincidences" happening around them. I love the way they are always thinking things are bigger than what they seem and how they are constantly asking questions. For example in one scene Petra sees a random vision of the lady in A Lady Writing. At the time she doesn't know who she is and dresses up as her for Halloween. When Calder sees her he knows who she is dressed up as and Petra explains that the lady came to her in a vision and she had no idea she really existed. "So how did you dream about something you didn't know existed?" Calder asks her. Petra replies with, "I wonder if paintings that float in your mind on their own are kind of like flying frogs or disappearing people." Calder says, "Mmm...you mean your dream might be part of something bigger." This is a perfect example of just how these two sixth graders think. They are mature thinkers for their age thinking out of the box and connecting events to a bigger picture. And there are many more examples of this way of thinking throughout the book. I'm not saying that students who read this book will start thinking like this, just that it would be good for students to realize there are different ways of thinking and looking at things. I also enjoyed the illustrations. I especially like the illustration after Petra and Calder find A Lady Writing in a secret storage space. The illustration shows Petra and Calder sitting down in what looks like a tight space. They have their flashlight shining on the half-unwrapped painting. The looks on their face really show how they must be feeling. Calder looks shocked, and very frightened. Petra looked worried, but doesn't look as scared as Calder. They both look like they don't really know what to do next, and they also looked shocked that they were right about the coincidences that happened to them. Overall I think Chasing Vermeer is an excellent book for fifth to maybe eighth graders. Personally, I really really enjoyed it myself. It opens up the opportunity for different kinds of thinking and the opportunity to think of the different events, people, and feelings in the world to somehow all be connected.

Richard says

Chasing Vermeer by Blue Balliett was given to me by a friend because it was similar to From the Mixed-Up

Files of Mrs Basil E. Frankweiler. As I'd read that and liked it, I was eager to read this. I've recently become more interested in Vermeer, so that added to my motivation.

There are some things I liked about the book. There are two protagonists who are both perceived as "nerds," but they are initially interesting and rather likeable. (Their names, by the way, were carefully chosen by Balliett as references to art and architecture.) There's an art theft and a crusty but eventually sympathetic old lady.

The author also tells us quite a lot about the life and work of a famous maker of "old pictures," and if, as a result, young readers become interested in a kind of art that they might not otherwise have considered worth their notice, well, that's a good thing. If it shows them that teachers and other adults are real people with weaknesses and foibles, rather than mere authority figures to be feared and avoided, that's a good thing too.

The book, especially at first, has a lot of promise. But, sadly for me, it does not deliver on that promise.

Why? Well, there were some things that just irritated me to no end. One of the morals of the story is that even though things may seem unimportant or unrelated, there is no such thing as coincidence, and we should be open-minded enough to see unexpected relationships between things. On paper this sounds fine. But in the story it leads to the overuse of intuition and the merely random as a means to provide clues.

We are not in Hogwarts here, and yet Calder constantly consults a set of pentominoes as if they are runes or tarot cards; his method is to look at the letter he pulls out of his pocket, think of a word that starts with that letter, and then try to use that word as a guide to conduct. Petra, on the other hand, has a psychic connection with a woman in a Vermeer painting who encourages and guides her. At one point they try to derive clues from a series of random words uttered by the crusty but sympathetic old lady. More hints are seen everywhere, to the point where they seem to crawl almost literally out of the woodwork.

Again, I really wanted to like this book. And if this were a Harry Potter novel, it might fly. But in this fictional universe, "Blue's Clues" are just silly.

Christopher Alvarado says

I loved the book because shows a new level of mystery for me because I liked how a painting was stolen. And too characters named Petra and Calder want to find it they use pentominos to help them find the painting and they find the painting but while they were doing that strange things are happening.

Ioanna ms says

να απ? τα 6 παιδικ? βιβλ?α που κατ? τη γν?μη μου διαβ?ζεται κι απ? ενηλ?κους!Μπορε?τε να δε?τε ποια ε?ναι τα ?λλα στο μπλογκ μας, σε αυτ? το λινκ: <https://wp.me/pa25z8-79>♥

Το «Στα ?χνη του Βερμ?ερ» ε?ναι ταμ?μ για ?σους αγαπο?ν το μυστ?ριο και τους γρ?φους. Η ιστορ?α περιστρ?φεται γ?ρω απ? ?ναν κλεμμ?νο π?νακα του Ολλανδο? ζωγρ?φου Γιαν Βερμ?ερ και τις προσπ?θειες δ?ο ?φηβων ερασιτεχν?ν ντετ?κτιβ να λ?σουν την υπ?θεση ακολουθ?ντας στοιχε?α που ανακαλ?πτουν. Κ?τι σαν «Κ?δικας Ντα Βιντσι» για εφ?βους και παιδι? χωρ?ς ?μως να ναι απλο?κ?, ?χει πολ? ιδια?τερη γραφ? (σχεδ?ν λυρικ? σε κ?ποια σημει?α), περιλαμβ?νει

ιστορ?α της τ?χνης και η εικονογρ?φηση του Μπρετ Χ?λκουιστ ε?ναι αριστοτεχνικ?. BONUS: Εχει και χ?ρτη!?

Natalie says

this book rocks, and so do blue m&ms!!!!!!!!!!!! a really good story!

Victor Guerrero says

****SPOILER ALERT**** Have you ever tried to solve a mystery ? Well Petra and Calder have. The genre of this book is mystery.Its mystery because Calder and Petra are trying to find the famous Vermeer painting that has been stolen. My overall opinion of this book is i loved it because it's so fun and loved the creativity.

In the beginning of the book Petra and Calder receive a letter from an unknown person asking them for help fixing a crime involving art. This letter threatens them, telling them that if they go to the authorities, their lives will be in danger. Calder and Petra,they are eleven year old students at the University School, located near Chicago. Calder knows Pentominoes .In the middle of the book the famous Vermeer painting goes missing. They go on the run searching for the painting. There are so many possible clues and connections.At the end of the book *spoiler alert* the painting is found hidden in a wall in a stairwell, Calder and Petra run for their lives as alarms scream behind them. Soon they realize they are being followed by a man. Calder gets left behind. Petra is able to escape from the chasing man but soon loses the painting as she and a police officer search for Calder. Again Petra finds the painting and finds an injured, but alive, Calder. The conflict of the book is person vs person because Calder and Petra are tying to find the theft and the painting. The theme teamwork because they work together to find the painting and theft.

The title relates to the book "chasing Vermeer" because they looking for the famous Vermeer painting. A major event in the story is when they found the painting and solved the mystery. The theme can be seen when they are figuring out the clues. The setting adds to the conflict because in Delia Dell Hall thats where the painting was found. I think this book will make a good movie because it would be bring attention to others and it'll be funny . The narrator is reliable because it give good information and isn't untruthful.

I was surprised when they found the painting is found hidden in a wall in a stairwell. I was angry when Calder got injured. My favorite was when the painting was found and put back. An interesting thing i learned was to never give up on what your looking for because at the end you always get what you want. I thought the ending of the book was pretty good because at the end of the story, the author explains and gives many clues and coincidences found in this book. I was moved when they got letters from a random person. "chasing Vermeer" is a good title for the book because it goes with the book and genre.

I would rate the book 4 out 5 stars because it was well written and interesting. I would recommend this book to people who like mystery and cool books. What would you do if were looking for a stolen paintings?

Kata Bel Air says

This book may very well be the worst book I have ever read in my entire life. Why? Let me break it down

for you.

There's a painting. It gets stolen. Lucky for the art museum of Chicago, three fifth graders have a plan to get it back. So if you'd ever read the last three chapters of flat stanely, you have read this entire book.

First of all, I generally hate mystery books anyway, which is most likely a prime factor of my hatred for this book. Secondly, I hate mysteries that involve children, just adding on to my hatred. This entire book includes about five separate mini mysteries within one large mystery, so it's like six mysteries which like sextuples my hatred for this book. Lastly, there was a whole secret language that you need to decode in order to understand parts of he book, which was irritating and took me about an hour to decode each paragraph.

Overall, I may just hate this book because of my opinions about mysteries and needing to stop for an hour to understand what just happened mid-read. Amazingly, I forcefed myself this book, thinking it would grow on me lime some mysteries have. It didn't. Oh well. I blame the economy.

Tracy says

The star rating may be a little unfair. For me, as an adult, it's two stars. Any kid age 8 to 12 probably would give this 5 stars. This is a code within a story, and I had a hard time deciding which to pay attention to. Because there's also an identical code in the pictures which is easily deciphered, I chose story. I'm pretty sure the code is easily deciphered within the story, I just didn't write down each time the author mentioned a specific pentomino.

The storyline really is pretty good with a reasonable premise, good suspense, and excellent resolution. Ms. Balliett writes well, and targets her intended audience well. I thought the ending was pretty clever.

Ms. Balliett explores some ideas that really weren't interesting to me, and they took up a large part of the narrative. I'm not that interested in connecting random events randomly. So what if two different events in completely different locations both contain the number 12. Twelve is a fairly common number. I am somewhat interested in trying to find patterns in everyday occurances, but I lean more towards fractals than any other theory.

I'm really not interested at all in unusual acts of nature, especially not cats raining from the sky throughout history. There are too many other explanations than a crazy one (crazy being they actually fell from the sky). Between the space this theme of the story took up and the overall juvenile content, this book wasn't for me. However, I can't fault Ms. Balliett for writing for her intended audience. These are just the kind of themes and thoughts that young readers would enjoy ruminating over. Some literature transcends age and some doesn't.

There are some good things in this book that I will definitely take more time to think about. "What is art?" You don't have to study paintings for a lifetime to know what is beautiful to you. I think it was an excellent idea to invite Brett Helquist to illustrate this book. He did an excellent job of inviting art into the book. His section in the "After Words" is especially informative. The "After Words" section itself was a stroke of genius. What a great idea!! I wish all books came with similar sections.

There is just one final question that was not adequately resolved. I went through the illustrations, decoded the hidden message, and now I'm not sure exactly what it means. There is the most basic explanation given in the final pages of the book, but if there is something more, please let me know.

Last but not least, I want my own pentominoes.

Julie says

I finished reading this to my 9-year-old last night, then poked around here on Goodreads, assessing what reader response had been when the book was originally published.

I was surprised by how many reviewers didn't like this book, or couldn't finish it. Believe me, I understand the issues readers had with "plot points." Yes, the plot does unravel somewhat at the end. Yes, the "bad guy" here was a stretch of the imagination, and too many sloppy bits were thrown in at the end. I'm never a fan of not getting your story straight before you commit it to print.

However. . . when it comes to criticizing this book as a "DaVinci Code for kids." Hmmmm.

Whether you liked The DaVinci Code or hated it, you must admit. . . it was a success. It was incredibly readable (I practically ate my copy), and it made people think about things for a long time after they closed the cover.

So, in regard to that, I say. . . so what if it's like a DaVinci Code for kids? Is that a bad thing, or an incredibly good thing?

This book had my daughter scouring through art books all over our house. She has been 9 for less than a week, and she had copies of Vermeer paintings lined up on the floor before her, "hunting" for clues. She also broke out a little notebook and started making "connections" all around her. She wondered at "coincidences" and even asked for her own set of pentominoes.

Weak plot points or not, the characters were quirky and cute and it's hard to criticize a book that inspired our child to want a return trip to the Art Institute of Chicago!

Oda Renate says

fave book from when I was younger

Jenny says

Through a string of seemingly unrelated events, Calder and Petra find themselves in the center of an art heist that has the world buzzing and the Police and museum officials puzzled. Can Calder and Petra find the priceless Vermeer before it's too late? And what exactly do their teacher Ms. Hussey and Mrs. Sharpe, the old lady down the street, have to do with it? The University of Chicago campus and Calder and Petra's neighborhood of Hyde Park are the backdrop for this fast moving tale of art and intrigue.

Balliett seamlessly weaves together many disparate elements to craft a tale that is rich in art history and adventure. Helquist's (the illustrator of A Series of Unfortunate Events) stylized, detailed and somehow spooky illustrations help bring the characters and the setting to life, and contain a secret code. Readers can get clues and solve the puzzle on the publisher's website. Though on the long side at 254 pages, the story,

packed with clues, moves quickly and the codes both in the illustrations and in the text give the story an interactive element that is sure to keep readers engaged. Though the characters explain their ethnic heritage in detail in the beginning with no obvious point other than to lend an air of multiculturalism to the story, Calder and Petra are otherwise engaging and well written, quirky characters. Their struggles with family, school and self are easy to identify with though the situation they find themselves in is far fetched. This winner of the 2004 Agatha Award for Best Children's of Young Adult Mystery is sure to become a favorite among fans of A Series of Unfortunate Events and Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, among others.

Wendy says

I loved parts of this book and disliked other parts, so there you are; the epilogue ending is particularly bad (in that "I don't know how to work all this into the plot, so here, this is what happened" kind of way). The "there's no such thing as coincidence" stuff would have been way overdone in any other book, but I understand that that was one of the author's main points here; still, I wasn't convinced. And the art history reads as coming straight from the author's Brown BA at least twenty years ago--very old-fashioned, to the book's detriment. This just isn't the way people think about art history now, and the book would have been enriched by going into the paintings at a deeper level. (I kept waiting for the big "it doesn't matter whether Vermeer painted it" payoff, and the idea that Vermeer would want to be redeemed by people agreeing that he didn't paint those "lesser" paintings really annoyed me.)

On the other hand, there are moments of actual suspense, the codes are enjoyable, and it's definitely an intelligent book.

Carrie says

Another YA purchase from Green Apple books, and to be honest, a disappointment. This is a new-ish book, published in 2004, and while I had never read it before, I had high hopes. I had read reviews that said it was clever, it has expert illustrations by Brett Helquist (Lemony Snicket's illustrator), and the inside flap lead me to believe it was a puzzle tale in the same vein as *The Westing Game*, by Ellen Raskin.* *Chasing Vermeer* is not a terrible book, but it didn't live up to my expectations.

It tells the story of two outcast sixth graders, Petra and Calder, who come together and ultimately solve a mystery about a missing Vermeer painting. I loved the characters – the leads seemed like real, nerdy, slightly unpopular students, and the supporting characters were ok, if a bit clichéd from earlier books. Also, the writing had some beautifully lyrical passages that I really enjoyed. The fault I had was with the mystery. Half of the book seemed like a solvable puzzle, with clues for the reader (even clues built into the illustrations). The other half turned on mystical coincidences and psychic connections. In short – the book seemed to want to have it both ways, and thus, left me unsatisfied. The psychic mystical parts were actually quite nice – dreamy and philosophical, but they didn't mesh with the everyday realness of the characters. The mystery, once solved was not an "Aha!", but rather a "huh?" – a cobbled together explanation that was unsatisfying. Too many red herrings, not enough clues, and unsolvable, I think, if one wasn't getting secret psychic messages. I would read another book by Ms. Balliett – she has a real gift for characterization and a way with words, but I would hope that next time she is more sharp in her thematics and plotting.

Tyler Jones says

There is much to admire in this book, but unfortunately quite a bit to dislike as well.

The story of two kids who solve a mystery will encourage young readers to question authority, think outside the box and look for interesting connections in the world around them. All good things, right?

Unfortunately, there is a whole lot of potential problems with the kind of philosophy this book advocates. A belief in parapsychology is a dangerous thing to instill in children because it easily leads them to believe that their instincts are as valid as accepted science. I am quite unsettled by the idea of teaching kids to look for patterns in everything because this the thought process paranoids use. While questioning authority is on the face of it a healthy idea, once you start believing that people in paintings are talking to you and that the random drawing of geometrical shapes is conveying messages to you - well that is very dangerous thinking indeed.

Quite frankly this book scares me. We have too many nuts running around already who are convinced that the Jews knew about 911 beforehand and that Nostrodamus picked the next Stanley Cup winner. Do we really need to convince our kids that their instincts are just as valid as accepted truth? Can't we find a more balanced approach? One that relies on a scientific method rather than voices from 300 year old dead Dutch women?

Rachel says

Usually when I read finish reading a childrens book I didn't enjoy, I ask myself whether or not I would have enjoyed it 13 years ago. Sometimes my answer to me is "yes" and sometimes it is "no", but even with the nos, I can imagine *some* hypothetical audience of child enjoying a book.

With this one, I can't imagine any demographic. Even gifted kids will probably need to have a savant-like interest in art (specifically Dutch Baroque art), or in the mathematical approach to coincidence, or in American university architecture -- or, ideally, in all three -- in order to power through the more ungodly boring pages of this book. Which there are a lot of.

Please know that I am saying this as a person who dorked out and received a 106% A+ final grade in Baroque Art class in college by doing unnecessary extra credit activities for fun. OK? So I'm going to safely say that with this book, it's not me...it's the book.

While I had mild to moderate interest in finding out who stole the Vermeer painting and why, and what role the kid detectives' teacher Ms. Hussey had in the whole plot, I had more than a few moments that set me off on a mental rant. Here is a list of those rants:

- 1.) So it turns out that in order to be able to learn details that are instrumental in solving the mystery, the reader NEEDS to get out a pen or pencil and paper and decode the three coded letters between Tommy and Calder. I decoded exactly none of these while reading, because when I'm reading I don't want to freaking stop! It annoyed me so much to learn that the information Tommy gives Calder in these letters was actually really important. Put a solution in the index, please! It's OK to make a reader work for a mystery's solution, but "work" usually means "think," not "physically get up off the couch to grab a writing utensil." I'm sorry, 99% of the time I'm not going to do that.

2.) I **hate** *hate* hate when mysteries get heavy on exposition at the end. There's nothing that sucks more than to invest in a narrative and then have the author kill that narrative with cut and dry "here are the details of the entire crime plot" sentences, followed by a glossed over "all shall be well now that the mystery is solved" epilogue. Those few-sentence character epilogues are only tolerable in comedy films parodying character epilogues.

3.) All of the exploration of the coincidence of 12 and the prediction of pentominoes and the appearance of the Vermeer painting in Petra's dream -- what. I suppose my thinking that this fatalism is annoying in a straight mystery has a lot to do with me being more practical-minded than mystical/romantic; perhaps not a flaw of the book itself, but a conflict of interest with me as a reader. I am curious about what other Marble Fawns will think of this. I will say, though, that it is annoying to me that a lot of the "clues" Petra and Calder used to solve the mystery were not reality-based at all, but coincidences and intuitions.

4.) The best part of the book was learning about Petra's home life. Which is like, the only section of the book that contains any humanizing character traits for the kids at all. This is not an exaggeration. :(

I wanted to like this! Art, kid detectives, the author's name is Blue! Alas, not even being a raving fangirl of Artemisia Gentileschi and *The Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* was enough to surmount the massive uninteresting-ness of this book.

Jaemi says

This book was a lot of fun to read. It reminded me a little of a Da Vinci code for younger minds, only in some ways this book was a lot trickier. Throughout, there is a pentomino code, and another hidden code which I never tried to decipher, although I saw the clues. Codes aren't my thing. But I was still pulling out a notebook to decrypt the letters going between two friends in certain chapters.

I think this is a really original and unique book, that looks at things in all sorts of ways--ways we might usually not. The range of topics covered is somewhat broad, but they flow together, and while in some cases the thinking behind it all seems highly advanced, at the same time, younger people tend to be much more open to "crazy" and wild ideas than some of their more learned counterparts who "know better."

If you like mysteries, puzzles, or art, definitely give this book a read.

This is one of the books I've most enjoyed in the past few years. I've never read anything quite like it, and it has a bit of something for everyone. Mystery, puzzles, codes, excitement. The idea of an elementary class unraveling an injustice that far outlives them is just great.

The basic story revolves around Vermeer's paintings, how many he did in his life, and how many were correctly attributed. Something you'd think was above the heads of grade school kids, but their class is anything but usual.

Patrick says

This book is OK. It's not really trying to be the Da Vinci Code for kids, but the movement in recent years

with "smart" protagonists is definitely represented here.

The two protagonists are very likable and I was interested in the glowingly positive representation of the Chicago School constructivist education model. The problem here is a common one in YA, but magnified in this book I think. The kids are *too* curious and diligent. I can believe the overly brave, adventurous kids in most YA more than I can believe in all these kids reading thick books and articles by themselves about obscure topics their teacher leads them to. And then the two philosophize about the meaning of love, life, "What is art?" and coincidence. Maybe I'm too cynical about America's youth, but I just don't see it. And then the plot point where the general public rouses from their apathy and gets excited about Vermeer's art and the attribution of possible forgeries--I buy that even less.

But I liked the story and many of the characters and would give it an average 3 stars if it weren't for the random mysticalness thrown in too. The boy gets messages from his pentominoes and two characters literally talk with the missing painting in their minds so clearly that they can write down her words. Not to mention a looong, wordy conclusion. So an OK book that falls short of its potential in my opinion.

Oh yea, one more complaint. I think the code breaking is clever and enjoyed looking at the code in the pictures although I didn't bother solving it. (If I even could have =)) But putting those letters between Calder and his friend in code and then making them important plot points was really annoying. I just wasn't going to spend the time to write those out letter for letter and just gleaned what I could from the kids' comments after. I bet some kids would love it, but I bet most just skip it like I did.

Emily says

I had far too many problems with this book to even start to enumerate them. I'll just mention the one thing I really liked about sharing the experience of listening to this book (the first half) and then reading it aloud (the second) with my son. It so happened that when we reached the point in the story where Vermeer's painting "A Lady Writing" is introduced, we were visiting my mother's home in Northern Virginia. On the morning of the drive home, it turned out to be really easy to make our first stop of the day almost immediately. We parked the car in DC, and quickly popped into the National Gallery, saw the painting, and quickly popped out again. Although Tommy wasn't quite as impressed with the painting as one would hope, I still think it has to rank as one of my best parenting moments of the year. And, oh the wonderfulness of a world class art museum that is completely free, I love the Smithsonian so much, I wish I could give it a hug.

Megan Baxter says

Chasing Vermeer is a fun children's book, easy to read, with pictures that involve some thought, if you want to put that thought into it. (I am lazy, I did not.) I have some overall questions about the tack the book takes on Charles Fort and how it veers a little bit into magic without ever exploring that, but hey, a children's book that might introduce kids to Charles Fort? I'm pretty much in.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision here.

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Joe says

"A *Da Vinci Code* for tweens." - *Newsweek*

This is only one of the quoted praises lumped on *Chasing Vermeer* and proudly emblazoned on its back cover. It is probably the most apropos quote because it hinges almost entirely on the readers' familiarity with and reaction to Dan Brown's novel.

If you found *Da Vinci Code* boring, trite, melodramatic, sophomoric, and preposterous, you will probably have a similar reaction to Blue Balliett's debut young adult novel, *Chasing Vermeer*.

Balliett has stated that it took her five years to write *Vermeer*, but the central mystery is so lousy and ridiculous, it comes across as the product of a very drunken weekend in an art gallery. Similar to Brown's trainwreck of a novel, Balliett lumps absurd coincidences on top of sleuthing skills that are based less on clues and more on silly guesses:

"She wears all those earrings - there's a key, a pearl, a high-heeled shoe..."

Calder was muttering now. "Key-pearl-shoe... shoe-pearl-key... pearl-shoe-key... heel-key-pearl... key-pearl-heel..."

"Hey! That sounds like 'keep her here,' doesn't it?... maybe this means she's in Gracie Hall!" (p. 155)

Come *on* ! Really? Is that what being a detective is like? Making goofy connections between unrelated items? Sherlock Holmes must be rolling in his literary grave. All this would probably be tolerable if the characters were more than paper-thin sketches of precocious children and erudite villains, or if the public reactions to the stolen art weren't so far-fetched, or if the red herrings weren't so obvious, or if the transitions between character narration weren't so jarring. Unfortunately the believability is sacrificed at every turn.

Librarians sometimes recommend books they haven't read. After all, we can't read everything, but we want kids to read as much as possible. Perhaps I should have listened to the 8th grade girl who stomped up to me last May, *Chasing Vermeer* trapped in her fist. "This book," she sneered, "is beyond boring." Her buddy glared at me, too. "It was terrible, Mr. Prince. Terrible." Point taken, kids. Point taken.
