



# The Mysterious Benedict Society

*Trenton Lee Stewart , Carson Ellis (Illustrator)*

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"Are you a gifted child looking for special opportunities?" ad attracts dozens for mind-bending tests readers may try. Only two boys and two girls succeed for a secret mission, undercover and underground into hidden tunnels. At the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened, the only rule is - there are no rules.

## The Mysterious Benedict Society Details

Date : Published April 1st 2008 by Little, Brown (first published 2007)

ISBN : 9780316003957

Author : Trenton Lee Stewart , Carson Ellis (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 485 pages

Genre : Mystery, Young Adult, Fiction, Fantasy, Childrens, Middle Grade, Adventure

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# From Reader Review The Mysterious Benedict Society for online ebook

## Nancy says

What a treat this book was to read! I thoroughly enjoyed it -- the kids were great, the villain and his heinous plot were quite terrifying, and the plot clipped right along. My one small reservation is that somehow I find I am in no rush to read the sequel -- yet this might have simply to do with the fact that the story did clearly end (unlike, say, THE HUNGER GAMES). But basically, I'd recommend MYSTERIOUS BENEDICT SOCIETY to anyone. I plan to give my copy to a bright 11-year old girl I know.

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## Marya says

In the Mysterious Benedict Society, four children with four different problem solving skill sets come together to solve a mystery. Those four children consist of the reader, who has the amazing ability to memorize things; the engineer, who has the amazing ability to create anything to solve the task at hand from materials she carries with her; the baby, whose chief attribute is to be unpredictable and not listen to the rules much less follow them; and the professional puzzle solver, who looks at everything as a riddle needing a solution. The dangerous mystery they must solve can only be done by children because adults are far too complicit in the evil.

Take away the fourth child character, and you're pretty much left with an ungothic Lemony Snicket. There are no great tragedies, the children learn that some adults can very much be trusted (in fact, are necessary to their health and safety), and of course, there is a happy ending. The world has no difficult choices or impossible complexity, and along with that, there is no subtle humor. The book also doesn't have any of the textual play that made Lemony Snicket like a modern day Tristram Shandy. In short, it stripped the Lemony Snicket books of everything I read them for. That's why I couldn't completely finish this book.

On the other hand, I still think younger children (6th grade and under) would find this book charming. They don't read Lemony Snicket for the gothic bits, they read them for the puzzle bits, and in this respect alone, the Mysterious Benedict Society is superior. Not only does it give the reader several fun puzzles, it shows how each child solves that puzzle. As one reviewer pointed out, this can get tiring for the adult readers, but I still think children would find it all good fun.

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## [Shai] The Bibliophage says

It's almost a month since I've started reading this book. Usually, I could finish a thick book like this within a week or just several days. But I got bored in the first part because of the slow pacing of the story. I only got hooked on the story from the half part till the end.

There are at least 4 other books in this series but I'm not sure I will spare time to read them. This first book is like a preview for me if the book a series is good or not and I'm a little disappointed with what I've read here.

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## **Rick Riordan says**

I feel like I'm coming late to the party, since a lot of readers have already discovered this series, but I enjoyed it very much -- great cast of characters, lots of cool puzzles and mysteries. The book made me feel nostalgic, because it reminded me of some of the better children's books I grew up with, like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Phantom Tollbooth*. Stewart's storytelling has an old-fashioned elegance to it, and yes, I mean that in the best possible way! The second book in the series is now out, and I will definitely be picking it up.

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## **emma says**

Please read the following sentence as if I am singing it, joyfully:

IT'S THE BEST BOOK IN THE WORLDDDDDD.

Also, I hope you mentally gave me a beautiful singing voice. I'm not saying I have one but I am saying that's the polite thing to do.

Anyway: THIS BOOK IS SO GOOD. I love it so much oh my god. Unless you are new here (in which case, welcome and you have made a grave mistake), you know how I feel about middle grade. How I feel about middle grade is this: I LOVE IT.

Middle grade is like young adult if young adult wasn't so dramatic, and didn't have a million boring/dramatic/unnecessary subplots, and wasn't legally required under the jurisdiction of the United Nations to contain a romance.

In other words, if everything that sucked so hard about YA didn't exist.

A utopia!

Middle grade adventure is especially good, and this book is the most especially good example of the most especially good of the most especially good.

Even just writing about it makes me so happy I can barely type out rational thoughts!!! (Don't say what else is new. Just because it's true doesn't mean it's nice. See: the beginning of this review.)

The Mysterious Benedict Society is action-packed. It is also riddles-packed, and mystery-packed, and excitement-packed, and friendship-packed, and character development-packed, and knowledge-packed, and everything that is wonderful in this world-packed.

I loved it when I was ten. I loved it when I reread it in early high school. And I love it now, when my opinions are actually trustworthy. (Ten year old me liked every book she read and early high school me wore like 18 layers of mascara every day so don't go around listening to either of them.)

Rereading this was a pleasure even while I was in the midst of a reading slump for the ages, which is proof that it's good all the time no matter who you are!!

It's also pretty shockingly diverse, for 2007. Like, could give most YA fantasy published in 2018 a run for its money.

The friendships and family in this are so wonderful, and the characters themselves are lil sweethearts you just want to hug, and the whole thing is such a tension-filled action-packed mind-blowing event that you'll never want it to end.

Now I want to reread the sequels.

Bottom line: THIS BOOK IS THE BEST BOOK AND I RECOMMEND IT UNIVERSALLY. Also, by "recommend," I mean "will foist it upon you by force if necessary."

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IS THERE A BOOK IN THE WORLD I LOVE MORE THAN THIS BOOK?

the answer: probably no.

buddy (re)read with 1/3 of my kik inbox, even tho i'm not 100% sure if she's started yet

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### **Alan says**

This is by far the best YA novel that I have read since the Harry Potter books. Characters are great, thoughtful and like nothing I have read before. Even though this book is almost 500 pages long, I have been reading it aloud to my class and they are loving it! Every day I come into class they are asking if we get to read it for the day. I can't wait to get the second one.

Enjoy!

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### **Eshusdaughter says**

Reynie, Kate, Sticky, and Constance are four very gifted children with a mission. They call themselves The Mysterious Benedict Society and together they have to infiltrate the nefarious Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened - a psuedo-school run by the evil Mr. Curtain. It's up to these four dissimilar and intrepid kids to save the world and of course they are completely up to the task.

I think this book will have broad appeal to under-12s. The length of the book threw me off - it was so long I assumed it was a YA novel but instead it is definitely a kid's book. Along the lines of Lemony Snicket it has the same sort of irreverent feel and tone. Plausibility has no place in this book.

I don't dislike the book but I don't like it either. I think the plot was too simplistic. The book is too long, with

little point, the plot is at times circuitous and the characters show little to no character growth, they are the same in the end as when you met them. The bad-guys are cookie cutter baddies with cardboard personalities and evil or thuggish for the sake of being evil or thuggish. There's no great lesson in these pages. I find little of substance in it at all to be honest. There were a couple good lines, some good description and, at least at first, I found the characters quirky and appealing.

In a book this size I expect to see some character growth and I think that more than anything is what irks me. There is no real change. It's all surface for the characters. They beat the bad guy, win the day and \*poof\* everything is happy and wonderful. It feels trite and simplistic.

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### **Ann says**

What a delightful story! It was very difficult to choose a shelf for this book - it's not truly fantasy, but its not just adventure or mystery either. Perhaps a little Sci-Fi more than fantasy? Well, anyway, it was a wonderful book about four children who agree to help save the world. It sounds a little over-done, I know, but it's really quite sweet and charming. Well-written and with loveable characters and a kindness throughout the book I was enthralled from the first page.

The book isn't incredibly in-depth – it isn't Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings – but it is just one book. The characters and plot, while both intriguing and well rounded, do not have quite as many layers as some other works.

However, that said, I still loved the book! The friendships were wonderful and it was so much fun solving the puzzles along with the characters. And, yes, I was still surprised at – not entirely the ending itself – but how the ending came about.

The letters Reynie writes are delightful, and the “morals” of the story are apparent without being annoying. If you're at all curious as to what the Mysterious Benedict Society is, then don't hesitate to find out!:)

(5 stars to the beginning 4 stars to the later half)

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We started reading this last night (Katie and I) and I'm so looking forward to the journey! So far the style is intelligent and charming, and the characters 3-diminsional and yet somehow sweetly simplistic.

However, I am only about 10 pages into the book...;>

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### **Sarah Grace says**

4.5 stars!

JUST WOW! What on earth did I just read!?

This was a crazy fun wild ride from beginning to end! I wish I had known about these books growing up, and will now definitely hand them off to my younger siblings.

I'm rather sick of the trite, cliché, dumbed-down, and weak junior fiction novels that line the shelves these days. I have very few favorites in that genre because there is just so little good in it. But this is one that I've added to my list of favorites! Unique, deep, fascinating, and "brainy", this breaks all the molds of J-fic!

The characters were all so fantastic, and I quickly became attached to all of them and their journeys. Each of

them were distinctive and one-of-a-kind.

The ending was beyond fabulous. (view spoiler) It made me cry. And if a J-fic novel can make me cry . . . well, then it's pretty good!

I did dock a half star off my rating because it was SUPER long, and I found myself losing interest in some places. Also, it's pretty . . . outlandish, I guess? Speculative isn't really my thing, so there was some aspects I didn't love. But overall, still 4.5 stars!

Highly recommended!

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### Gregory Baird says

"The Mysterious Benedict Society" owes a large debt to Lemony Snicket's Series of Unfortunate Events. It is written in the same Dickens-meets-Roald-Dahl style (although it does emphasize Dahl's whimsy over Dickens' occasional bleakness). It features an oddball cast with a broad spectrum of eccentricities and unique physical features. The plot even centers around a group of kids from orphanages attempting to foil the dastardly plans of a villain who seeks to exploit them in his mad quest for domination.

There are good qualities to be found. The first hundred pages or so are very charming, managing to capture the better aspects of its inspirations with ease. Stewart is certainly a capable writer with a great imagination and sense of wit.

But once the titular group has been established and sets off on its first mission things begin to go downhill at an alarming rate. First, things start to get a little too quirky (The villain's dastardly plot for world domination is *what* now? Wait, *another* bizarre character/situation/setting for our intrepid heroes to contend with?). Second, said quirks become limiting and mildly irritating (could Constance *please* stop grumbling for just a second? And while the use of narcolepsy is only slightly amusing at first it gets tiring when both the group's benefactor *and* the villain keep passing out at key moments. Stewart really should have re-thought that as a character trait). Third, you realize that the book is overly long and overly complex. Yet somehow, despite the myriad twists, turns, and complications, the M.B.S. is remarkably capable of making incredible logical leaps to figure out what is going on. For crying out loud, how long is this charade going to get dragged out, anyway? Then comes the hot mess of an ending. I don't want to spoil anything for those who intend to read this book, so let's just say that the realizations come a little too easily, the escapes are a touch too clean, and the happy endings aren't tacked on so much as beaten in with a sledgehammer. Yet Stewart must also have realized that if he intends this book to become a series he can't tie everything up *too* neatly, so naturally things are open-ended enough to allow for a sequel. Which is now available in bookstores everywhere ...

I, for one, won't be picking it up.

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### George Jankovic says

What a wonderful book!

I loved the puzzles and the mysteries. I loved the friendship. I loved the suspense. And I adored the three of

the four main characters. I expected more from Costance until she stunned me.

Most of the time, I found myself worried that something bad would happen to these wonderful characters: Reynie, Sticky, Kate and Constance. And I felt so sad for the guys like Milligain.

I couldn't stop reading it. I kept reading as fast as ever to see what would happen next.

Five stars. Enjoy!

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## Stephen says

I appreciated this book at 500 pages, but would've been REALLY fond of it at only 250. Remove some **plod-along-ploddy** sections and tighten up a few narrative side tracks and I think you have yourself a big winner for both **YA's** and those **YA at heart**.

Ignoring the size for a moment (yes, yes, it matters and we will return to it)...this is charming, smart, well-written story that had me thinking *Dickens for Kids* based on its engaging yet restrained prose style. It has that cozy feel of well-mannered prim and properness.

Four children, each with a unique ability or attribute, are recruited by the narcoleptic (that's right, narcoleptic) Mr. Benedict to infiltrate an elite academy called *LIVE* (the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened). Mr. Benedict has become aware that the head of LIVE, a Mr. ~~behind the~~ Curtain has developed an evil plan to...wait for it:

Now, these four talented misfits are the only hope to stop the dastardly diabolical doings. You have Reynie Muldoon, puzzle-solver and pattern spotter extraordinaire, Kate Wetherall, think female MacGyver with acrobat skills, "Sticky" Washington, photographic memory sans common sense, and Constance Contraire, stubborn as a mule and much less friendly. Together, they must gather clues, piece together puzzles and solve the mystery of Mr. Curtain's scheme before he is able to implement and...wait for it....

To give a sense of the tone and the prose, here is a brief excerpt from the book that I found amusing. The children are being told by their guide that, unlike other schools, LIVE doesn't have any rules and explains how the children here can do whatever they want:

*You can wear whatever you want, just so long as you have on trousers, shoes, and a shirt. You can bathe as often as you like or not at all, provided you're clean every day in class. You can eat whatever and whenever you want, so long as it's during meal hours in the cafeteria. You're allowed to keep the lights on in your rooms as late as you wish until ten o'clock each night. And you can go wherever you want around the Institute, so long as you keep to the paths and the yellow-tiled corridors.*

Okay, onto the whole size thing now. I thought the beginning of the book dealing with the recruitment of the four children and the introduction of Mr. Benedict was superb and I thought I might have found a new winner to add to my YA favorites. I also thought the plot set up and the central mystery/dilemma was interesting and very clever. All good so far.



However, once the children arrive at LIVE, the narrative finds itself bogged down with too many tangents and “plot pauses” to keep the story flowing. These slow downs aren’t horrible because the writing is engaging and the characters are enjoyable, but Mr. Boredom did poke his head in at me a number of times and I could feel him staring at me during stretches of the story. If you chop a chunk of this portion off, I think you have a much better story without losing any of the good stuff.

Overall, I liked it but with the above reservations.

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## Ginger says

DNF at 37%. This book wasn't terrible but it wasn't good either for someone older than 12. The book seemed too long for a kids book. I never got back to this book and I didn't really care to over the last few months. Maybe I'll pick it up again one day.

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## may 🦋 says

I don't think I will ever be able to properly rate or review this series because of all the sweet nostalgia surrounding it, but there's something so beautiful and relieving about reading a childhood favorite and loving it just as much as you did back then

// **buddy read** with the one who can't blush

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## Betsy says

How do librarians decide what children's book they want to read next? Well, there are professional reviews, online reviews, and good old-fashioned word of mouth. And when it came to "The Mysterious Benedict Society", I picked up this 486-page tome, turned it about, and then needed a quickie confirmation from somebody as to whether or not I should shell out a significant portion of time to read this puppy. As it happened, a librarian I knew and trusted assured me that it wasn't all that good and that I shouldn't waste my days. Fair enough. I gave away my copy and decided to forget all about it. But then the book's name kept cropping up left and right. Oh, I should really read it! Oh, it's really good! Oh, you haven't read it? What's wrong with you? Eventually, the pressure got to be too much. I couldn't take it any more. As far as I could ascertain I was the only children's librarian in the WORLD who hadn't read "The Mysterious Benedict Society", and that was going to have to change. So I borrowed a library copy, took it home, and fell in love. Once in a while you just want to read a book that's fun. This book is precisely that. Smart and thoroughly a good good read.

Reynie Muldoon doesn't think of himself as extraordinary. He thinks of himself as weird and out of place. An orphan, Reynie and his tutor one day spot an advertisement that reads, "ARE YOU A GIFTED CHILD LOOKING FOR SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES?" He is, as it happens, and that means taking a series of tests.

Odd tests. Odd, increasingly peculiar tests that go beyond the classroom, or even the realm of the normal. By the end of the puzzles Reynie has passed, as have three other rather remarkable children. Sticky Washington is a bit of a bookworm, but the kind of kid who never forgets a single fact that he reads. Kate Wetherall is an athletic type who carries a handy bucket with her wherever it is that she goes. And Constance Contraire is very small, very rude, and very stubborn. Together, these kids have been recruited by a Mr. Benedict to infiltrate the very prestigious Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened and discover what it is that the school's devious head is planning. They know that it's evil and dangerous, but beyond that they are out of information. So it is that our four heroes become spies and set out to save the world using their very individual abilities.

I've heard this book referred to as two different stories smooshed together into a single tale. That's not exactly how I'd chose to describe it, but it's a fair assessment. This actually isn't a problem either. If you like the first portion then you are bound to like the second. I was fond of the writing too. Never twee or coy, it comes right to the point of things without sacrificing emotion or character. It can get away with sentences like, "She announced her age right away, for children consider their ages every bit as important as their names." because they are straightforward and true. Stewart can get stuff across without a bunch of overwrought flowery language. "Their mouths went dry as bones," needs no further explanation.

In terms of the sequel, one person I discussed the book with said of it, "I don't feel I need to go back to that world." I agree, in a way. Stewart wraps up his loose ends nicely. Unlike some series for kids, you aren't left with many holes or gaps in the plot. There is certainly room for a follow-up, but if you don't read it you won't feel you've missed something. The important thing to remember is that clever kids like clever tales. For children who like everything from *The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin to *The Puzzling World of Winston Breen*, by Eric Berlin, this is the book for them. Consistently fun and fine, the book whizzes through its 400+ pages so fast that you'll be shocked at how quickly you find yourself at the end.

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