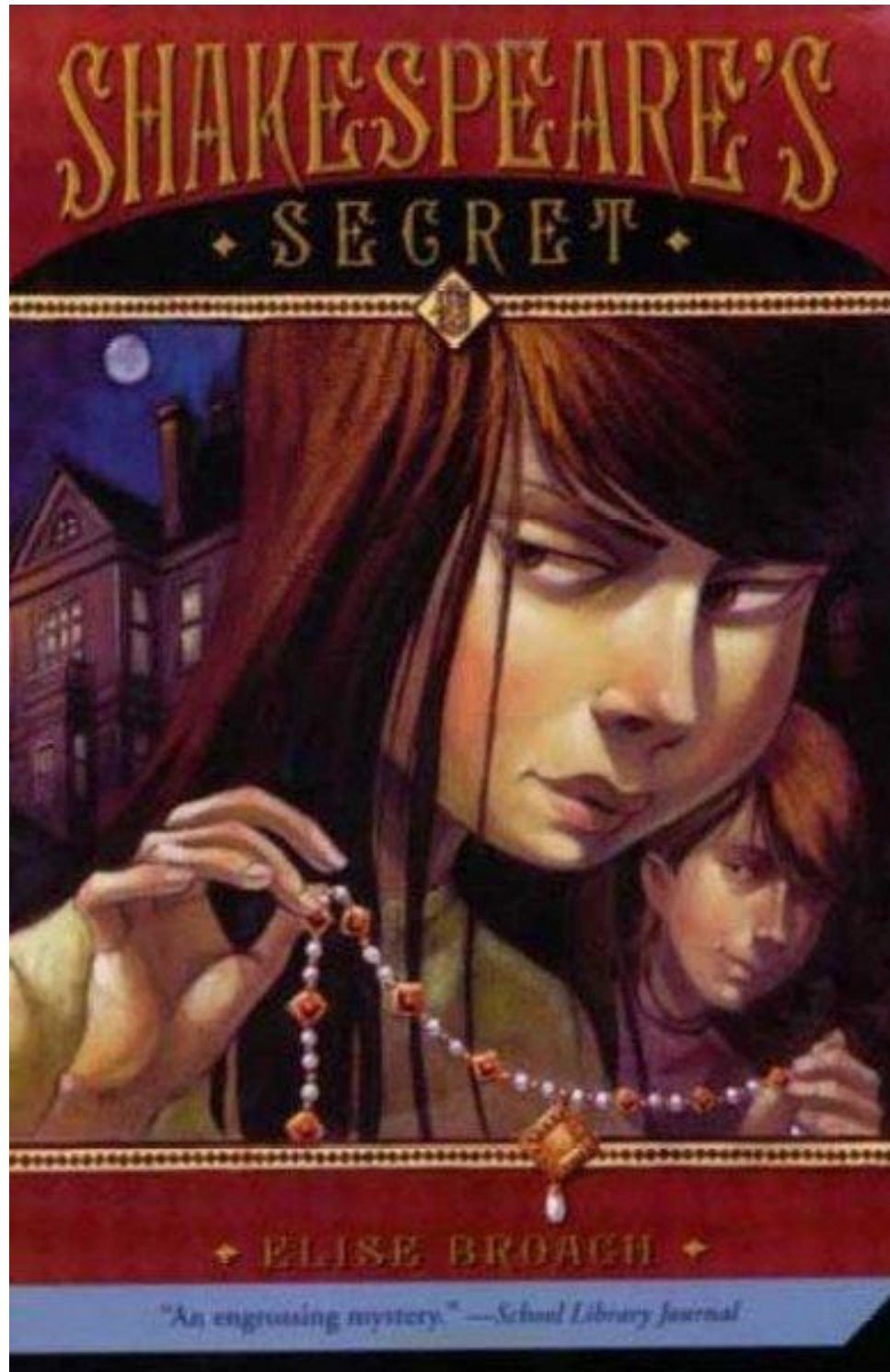


About the book...



Hero's parents named her after a character in one of William Shakespeare's plays, but no one in the sixth grade class at her new school knows about that or cares: they are too busy teasing her that her name sounds like a dog's name. Hero shies away from her new classmates and instead forges a friendship with her elderly neighbor, Mrs. Roth. Mrs. Roth regales Hero with tales of the Murphy Diamond, a priceless jewel allegedly stolen from the house where Hero currently resides. Mrs. Roth has a necklace that once held the prized diamond, and she's sure that the jewel must still be somewhere nearby. With the help of her new neighbor and a cute boy named Danny, Hero sets forth to discover the mystery of the Murphy Diamond, uncovering clues that indicate the diamond's original owner may have a connection to Edward de Vere, a man who many believe may be the true author of Shakespeare's plays.

-Books & Authors

About the Author...



Elise Broach was born in Atlanta, Georgia. She came from a large extended family, with 22 cousins on one side and 15 cousins on the others and enjoyed large family gatherings, playing tag and hide-and-seek, staging impromptu plays and playing card games. As a child, her greatest loves were dogs and books. The dogs included a Dalmatian/pointer mix named Spotty, a Brittany spaniel/terrier mix named Georgie Girl and a wire-haired fox terrier named Bibby. Broach loved to read as a child and began writing stories at the age of six or seven, which were, in the author's own words, "mostly overwrought tales about heroic dogs rescuing people."

When Broach was twelve, her family moved to Brighton, England where she also read Shakespeare's plays for the first time. Broach attended college at Yale University in Connecticut where she received undergraduate and graduate degrees in history. After writing several picture books, her love of history and Shakespeare eventually inspired her to write her first novel, [*Shakespeare's Secret*](#).

Broach is married with three children. She currently lives in rural Connecticut, walking distance from three farms, a library, a post office and two country stores.

For more information, visit the author's website at <http://www.elisebroach.com/>

Selected Writings

- [*Masterpiece*](#), Henry Holt and Company (NY), 2008.
- *Superstition Mountain Series*
 - [*Missing on Superstition Mountain*](#), Henry Holt and Company (NY), 2011.
 - [*Treasure on Superstition Mountain*](#), Henry Holt and Company (NY), 2012.

Reviews

Booklist

As usual, sixth-grader Hero's Shakespearean name prompts teasing in her new school, and her loving parents are clueless about her difficulties. Then intriguing, elderly neighbor Mrs. Roth tells her about the enormous diamond rumored to be hidden in Hero's new house. Helped by Mrs. Roth and cute eighth-grader Danny, Hero launches into a stealthy search that unearths links between the diamond's original owner and Edward de Vere, a

nobleman believed by some to be the original author of Shakespeare's plays. Broach is an Elizabethan scholar, and she follows the story's detailed historical references with an endnote that further explains the true, fascinating debate about de Vere. The frequent Shakespearean quotes often feel purposeful, and the connections between clues seem too far reaching. But Broach writes with an assured sense of family dynamics and middle-school anxieties, and sophisticated readers, particularly fans of Blue Balliett's *Chasing Vermeer*, will appreciate the true emotions, the rich language, and the revelations of many-layered mysteries that tie the past to the present. Gr. 6-9.

VOYA

In this well-crafted and engaging literary mystery, twelve-year-old Hero, the new kid in school again, discovers from her elderly neighbor and the police chief's son that a seventeen-carat diamond is hidden in her family's new house. The trio's search, guided by a Dylan Thomas quotation and fueled by Hero's research of the owner's maiden name, leads them to Anne Boleyn, who probably passed the diamond to Elizabeth I, who gave it to Edward de Vere, possibly the real Shakespeare. A modern mystery also is solved-the elderly neighbor

and the police chief's son, both deserted by the same woman, are grandmother and grandson. Filled with coincidences, the plot still works. The clearly explained *Much Ado About Nothing* connections encourage young readers to explore Shakespeare. The historical references, provided by Hero's Shakespearean scholar father, reinforce one of the book's major themes: Reaction to an event is more important than the event. Middle school girls will love the suspense and identify with the characters' personal decisions, reflecting Shakespeare's universal themes such as loyalty, the public versus the private self, integrity, true love, and humor's dark side. An author's note and time line clarify the historical context. Ages 11 to 14.

School Library Journal

Hero has always hated her Shakespearean-based name, for, as her new sixth-grade classmates are quick to tell her, it's better suited to a dog than to a girl. Resigned to their constant teasing, she concentrates instead on her newfound friendship with her kindly, if somewhat eccentric, elderly next-door neighbor. Mrs. Roth tells Hero about the

missing "Murphy Diamond," a precious jewel that supposedly disappeared from the house where Hero now lives. Mrs. Roth has the necklace that once held the diamond, an heirloom that possibly once belonged to Anne Boleyn, and she is convinced that it is still hidden in the vicinity. She and Hero set out to find what the police could not, and, with help from Danny, a popular, self-assured eighth grader who befriends them both, they succeed. Only then do the real connections among the three of them come to the surface and change their lives forever. The mystery alone will engage readers, but Broach adds a number of other interesting details to entice her audience. Readers will also find numerous facts about Elizabethan history, theories about Shakespeare's writings, and, perhaps most importantly, a moral but not preachy tale. The main characters are all well developed, and the dialogue is both realistic and well planned. Girls will relate to Hero and the defenses that she uses to protect herself from being hurt by the cruel comments and behaviors of difficult classmates. This is a good choice for recreational reading but also useful as an intro to

either the complexities of Shakespeare or the tenets of good mystery writing. Gr 4-7

Discussion Questions

(<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/shakespeares-secret-discussion-guide>)

1. Hero is named after a character in a play. What is the name of this play? Who wrote this play?
2. What expression does Mrs. Roth use that makes Danny think of his mother?
3. Whose initials do Hero and Mrs. Roth believe they have found on the back of the Pembroke pendant?
4. Why is Hero late to class on the first day of school? Whom has she taken the time to help?
5. What is the connection between the Murphy diamond and Arthur Murphy? Briefly explain how it came to be in his possession.
6. What advice does Beatrice give Hero about fitting in at a new school? Do you agree with this advice? If you were Beatrice, what advice would you give Hero about making friends?

7. Imagine you are going to hide one valuable item in your house. What item would you hide? Where would you hide it? What hint would you leave behind to help the right people find the hidden item?

8. Reread the quotation by Dylan Thomas on page 75. Then, reread the conversation on page 183 in which Danny and Hero discuss the meaning of the line "rage against the dying of the light." Do you believe the "dying of the light" refers to darkness, to death, or to something else?

9. Why do you think Danny chose to send the Murphy diamond to his mother in California? Do you support his decision to send the diamond away without asking Mrs. Roth and Hero? What would you have done if you were Danny?

10. On page 5, the narrator explains that Hero's walls are bare. What is the author trying to tell the reader about Hero by describing her walls this way? Name one item you have hanging on your wall, and explain what this item says about you.

11. Reread the author's note on pages 244 and 245. List one piece of evidence that suggests Edward de Vere was the real author of Shakespeare's plays and one piece of evidence that suggests he was not. Do you think Edward de

Vere could have been the real author of Shakespeare's plays?

12. On page 156, Mr. Netherfield tells Hero, "Sometimes the best way to defend one's honor is to simply behave honorably." Using evidence from the text, describe an event in the story in which you think a character behaves honorably.

13. Now that you have finished the story, think about the title of the book and about William Shakespeare. Do you think the author chose an appropriate title for her book? In your opinion, what was Shakespeare's secret? Hint: Remember that the word "secret" does not always mean something you keep or hide from other people.

Activities

Learn more about historical figures like Queen Elizabeth I, Anne Boleyn, William Shakespeare and Edward de Vere.

Visit the Folger Shakespeare Library's

SHAKESPEARE FOR KIDS website:

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=588>

Find out if there are any local mysteries in your hometown.

Read-Alikes

Blue Baillett, [*Chasing Vermeer*](#) (2004)

When a priceless painting by Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer goes missing, police and private investigators alike are baffled by its disappearance, even when the thief begins to leave clues in the local newspaper. But the local cops don't have the same passion for Vermeer's artwork that 11-year-old Petra Andalee and her new friend Calder Pillay have--and the young sleuths are sure that they will be able to solve the mystery that no one else can solve. Soon the thief is threatening to destroy the painting, and Petra and Calder must use every clue available to them to solve this mystery. This book is a mystery novel and puzzle rolled into one; containing secret messages within its illustrations to let readers follow along with the solution to the mystery.

Peter Abrahams, [*Down the Rabbit Hole*](#) (2005)

Late for soccer practice because neither parent picks her up from her orthodontist appointment,

Ingrid decides to run to the soccer fields. Becoming lost in an unfamiliar section of town, she is helped by an eccentric alcoholic named "Cracked-Up" Katie who calls a taxi for her. To Ingrid's horror, she learns the next day that Katie was murdered not long after Ingrid had been in her home. Worse, Ingrid forgot her distinctive, red soccer cleats at Katie's house and she needs to get them. Ingrid didn't tell her parents about getting lost and meeting Katie, so she can't tell them now which makes it hard to retrieve her cleats. Sneaking out one night, she finds something in Katie's house that links her to the Prescott Players, where Ingrid now has the starring role in *Alice in Wonderland*. Unsure what to do, Ingrid thinks about how Sherlock Holmes would solve the problem, concentrates on learning her lines, and avoids the police in this adult author's first young adult novel.

Ellen Raskin, [*The Westing Game*](#)

Sixteen heirs who are mysteriously chosen to live in the Sunset Towers apartment building on the shore of Lake Michigan, somewhere in Wisconsin, come together to hear the will of the self-made millionaire, Samuel W. Westing. The will takes the form of a puzzle, dividing the sixteen heirs into

eight pairs, giving each pair a different set of clues which consist of almost all of the lyrics from "America the Beautiful", and challenging them to solve the mystery of who murdered Sam Westing. As an incentive, each heir is given \$10,000 to play the game. Whoever solves the mystery will inherit Sam Westing's \$200 million fortune, and his company, Westing Paper Products.

E. L. Konigsburg, [*From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*](#)

When suburban Claudia Kincaid decides to run away, she knows she doesn't just want to run *from* somewhere, she wants to run *to* somewhere-to a place that is comfortable, beautiful, and, preferably, elegant. She chooses the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Knowing that her younger brother Jamie has money and thus can help her with a serious cash-flow problem, she invites him along. Once settled into the museum, Claudia and Jamie find themselves caught up in the mystery of an angel statue that the museum purchased at auction for a bargain price of \$225. The statue is possibly an early work of the Renaissance master, Michelangelo, and therefore worth millions. Is it? Or isn't it? Claudia is determined to find out. Her quest leads her to Mrs.

Basil E. Frankweiler, the remarkable old woman who sold the statue, and to some equally remarkable discoveries about herself.



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